A Most Troublesome Text: 
Galatians 4:21–5:1 in the History of Interpretation

by

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Abstract

This is an investigation into the troublesome history of interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1. In this passage, Paul makes use of the Hagar/Sarah motif found in Genesis to try to persuade his Gentile followers in Galatia that they should not allow themselves to be circumcised. There are, however, significant differences between the story as it is told in Genesis and how Paul handles it in Galatians. (To give just one example, Paul presents Isaac as the “child of promise” but Ishmael also has promises made about him.) Yet these troublesome discrepancies are given little attention within the history of interpretation of this passage.

To track these discrepancies, in chapter two I provide a description of the story as it is narrated in Genesis (what I refer to as the Genesis account). In chapter three, I provide a description of how Paul treats the Genesis account in his letter to the Galatians. In chapter four, I examine how interpreters within the tradition pick up on Paul’s treatment of the Genesis account, but rarely notice the discrepancies, a pattern I describe as a blind spot in the history of interpretation. In chapter five, I examine how isolated discordant voices within the tradition sometimes do in fact occasionally notice the discrepancies, though not so as to disrupt the prevailing pattern. Finally I pull all this together in the sixth chapter and epilogue into what I describe as a “faithful” reading of Gal 4:21–5:1, one that not only attempts to bring the blind spot in the history of interpretation into focus, but also takes into account all that the history of interpretation can teach us.
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When I started to work with the Greek text of Galatians for the first time, it seemed to me that Paul does something rather extraordinary in Gal 4:21–5:1. In order to persuade his Gentile followers in Galatia that they should not allow themselves to be circumcised, Paul takes the Genesis story of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael as it appears in Gen 21 and turns it upside down. He presents the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem allegorically as descendants of Hagar, as children born “according to the flesh,” and “born into slavery,” while his Gentile followers are presented as descendants of Sarah, like Isaac “born through the promise,” born into freedom as children of the “Jerusalem above.” It struck me as particularly outrageous that he uses a quotation of Gen 21:10 to make his point. “What does the Scripture say?” he asks rhetorically in Gal 4:30, and then he provides the answer: “Cast out the slave woman and her son—for the son of the slave woman will not inherit along with the son of the free woman.” Not only is Paul disregarding here the context in which the words are spoken within the story, but he is also disregarding Sarah herself as the speaker of the words. By attributing Sarah’s speech simply to “the Scripture” without further explanation, Paul takes these harsh words within the narrative of Genesis and applies them directly to the Galatian situation.

I was troubled by this at several levels. I was already bothered by the victimization of Hagar and Ishmael by Abraham and Sarah in the Genesis account, but with this exegetical manoeuvre Paul makes a story that is already problematic on account of its harshness exponentially more problematic. In fact, it seemed to me that Paul’s rendering of the story even does what can be described as violence to the Genesis account. Sarah’s words, as harsh
as they are, make sense within the context of the story. Moreover, the narrative of Genesis itself (or so I was inclined to believe) invites the reader to regard the plight of Hagar and her son with some degree of sympathy, even while anticipating the fulfilment of the promise through Isaac. In any case, Sarah’s outburst is not Genesis’ final word on the matter: the dynamics of the confrontation play themselves out in the narrative in ways that do not reflect the expectations of anyone within the story, and Ishmael does receive a blessing in the end. Paul, however, seems to be oblivious to these nuances. Not only does he not seem to be at all bothered by the exclusion of Hagar and Ishmael, but by removing the words of Sarah from their context within the story and putting them on the lips of Scripture as it were, he gives them a finality and authority that they do not have in their original context, and makes them even harsher. In his zeal on behalf of the Galatians, Paul in effect turns the text of Genesis against itself and victimizes Hagar and Ishmael all over again.

The problem is compounded even further in the Christian tradition by the inclusion of Galatians as part of Scripture. While it is possible that Paul’s defence of the best interests of the Galatians—at least as he saw them—was justified, given the situation faced by the Galatian churches when he wrote the letter, the text of Galatians actually becomes something different when included within the canon of Christian Scripture along with Genesis. No longer is it merely an apostle’s impassioned letter to his followers interpreting for them the sacred word of God. Now it serves a different purpose and takes on a different authority as itself the sacred word of God within a religious tradition. This canonization of Paul’s exegetical manoeuvre sets dynamics in motion that go far beyond Paul’s original intentions. The pattern of exclusion and inclusion that appears first in the narrative of
Genesis, and is then intensified in Galatians, is now given scriptural blessing. As a result, the
violence that Paul does to the Scriptural account now gets incorporated into the canon of
Scripture itself as the Scriptural way of reading Scripture.

As troubling as I found this, what I found even more troubling is that so few interpreters in
the history of interpretation of this passage have even noticed it, let alone protested. In fact,
as we shall see, the tendency has been either to gloss over this point without comment, or to
blithely buy into it without examination. In the patristic period, for example, interpreters
were typically so comfortable with Paul’s allegory that they happily obliged by coming up
with allegorical interpretations of their own. The same could be said of interpreters from the
medieval period. But even those whom we normally think of as sensitive to the so-called
literal sense of the text—interpreters from the Reformation period, and the whole mass of
modern historical-critical interpreters who followed in their wake—fare little better. By not
noticing, or more specifically, by not taking seriously, Paul’s exegetical manoeuvre,
interpreters throughout the history of interpretation have continuously set themselves up to
participate in it. A particularly poignant example is the use of the passage by Pope Urban II
at the Council of Clermont when launching the first crusade in 1095.¹ At the same time, this
is not to say that all interpreters have been completely comfortable with this passage. At
various points in the long history of interpretation of this passage, there have been

¹ William, Archbishop of Tyre, writing around 1180, quotes Urban II as saying: “A people
far removed from God, the son of the Egyptian slave woman (ancillae filius Aegyptiae), is
violently possessing the birthplace of our salvation, the native land of the Lord, the mother
of piety, and he is imposing on the captive sons of the free woman (captivatis liberae filiis)
 extreme conditions which, if things were the other way around, he rightfully ought to serve.
But what has been written (sed quid scriptum est)? Cast out the slave woman and her son!”
(Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum 1.15 [PL 201:232C]).
discordant voices that have displayed discomfort in one way or another with what Paul does here. Nevertheless, despite these expressions of occasional discomfort, it is only within the last few years that the issue has even reached the radar screen as an item of discussion, and even then, not with any degree of precision. There has been an intensified interest in the passage since the late 1980’s, but no one has drawn the lines together so as to put their finger on it.

Such was my entrance to the topic. From my vantage point, looking back over the history of interpretation of this passage, it seems to me that this pattern of consistently not noticing what is going on within it constitutes what I will describe cautiously in chapter four as a kind of “blind spot.” The title of this thesis—*A Most Troublesome Text: Galatians 4:21–5:1 in the History of Interpretation*—is therefore a bit of a misnomer, because for most of the history of interpretation, this passage has not been seen as troublesome at all. Yet this is precisely what makes it troublesome. By not noticing the patterns of exclusion and inclusion, interpreters through the centuries have repeatedly fallen into the trap of perpetuating the pattern in their own time. This is one text where knowing what Paul intended to say barely scratches the surface of what needs to be said. In fact, one might almost be tempted to say that it is not what Paul meant to say that counts, but what people have taken Paul to mean that has been decisive. Or rather, put another way, there are things to be learned about a text by “reading the Bible with the dead,” as it is expressed succinctly by John L. Thompson in the title of his 1999 monograph: *Reading the Bible with the Dead: What You Can Learn from the History of Exegesis That You Can’t Learn from Exegesis*
One implication of this is that the meaning of a passage is not confined to what we imagine it to have meant to Paul (as the writer), or to the Galatians (as the original readers), but to the whole range of effects that have arisen in the passage’s interpretation over time.

The aim of this thesis is therefore modest—it is merely to draw attention to this pattern within the history of interpretation and bring it into theoretical focus. Just by its very nature, this passage inevitably brings to the fore some of the most difficult issues in biblical interpretation facing us today. Readers of biblical texts are often baffled by what they encounter. This seems to be especially true within my own particular strand of the Christian tradition, the United Church of Canada. At risk of overgeneralizing, I would say that in the United Church there is an emphasis on recognizing the importance of biblical authority combined with a desire to engage the world within a moral framework. Yet many times people do not know what to do with difficult biblical texts. More often than not, the effect of this is that people simply ignore them. This investigation exposes just how problematic such a response can be. By offering what I will describe as a “faithful” reading of this passage, I hope that this investigation assists people in their reading of difficult passages like this one and alerts them to its dangers. In the first instance, this requires being very clear about what Paul does in Galatians. It requires a close and attentive reading of the texts of both Galatians as well as Genesis. But secondly, it also requires giving an account of how interpreters have missed this point for so long within the history of interpretation. While it is nearly impossible to explain why interpreters choose one option and not another, it is possible to give an account of the choices that they have made and describe the patterns within the

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history of interpretation. In other words, the point is not to “get into the head” of interpreters and try to figure out what they were thinking, but to observe the patterns in what they repeatedly notice and what they consistently ignore—and to recognize the implications. My ultimate aim here is a reading of Gal 4:21–5:1 that is faithful to the original context, faithful to the canon of both testaments that Galatians is a part of, and faithful to the history of interpretation itself with all that it can teach us.

The use of the word “faithful” here deserves further comment. This is a “theological” investigation in that it tries to make sense of the biblical text as Scripture in the context of Western European/North American Christian religious tradition. In doing this I am not doing anything fundamentally different from others who have gone before me, since there can be no investigation of the history of interpretation from outside the history of interpretation. But this investigation attempts to take up the issue in a way that others do not. What should be clear from everything that I have said here is that a passage like this one does not exist in isolation: it has accumulated baggage along the way. The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that play themselves out in the passage—and play themselves out again in the history of interpretation of this passage—continue to play themselves out in the world that I am a part of. Neither the text itself nor any given interpretation of the text can get away with pretending to be innocent. The world has become too small now for this not to matter. I therefore use the word “faithful” here quite intentionally. It is not enough to try to know what Paul meant when he was writing to the churches of Galatia—Galatians has implications that go far beyond what it meant in its original context. Being faithful means being attentive to these implications, both in the immediate context of Paul’s writing, but
also in the broader context of the passage’s interpretation throughout history. The kind of faithful reading that I am aiming for, therefore, needs to pay careful attention, not only to the meaning of Paul’s words in their historical context, but also to the meaning of the words as part of the canon of Christian Scripture in the history of interpretation. And it also needs to pay careful attention to the unfolding of this history in my own day, where I stand within the unfolding of the passage’s history of interpretation, looking at it from a North American (specifically Canadian), post-holocaust, post-9/11 perspective.

In approaching the task in this way, I am going well beyond what inquiries into the reception history of a biblical text usually address. When scholars turn their hand to recounting the history of interpretation of a passage, typically they have in mind a description of the wide variety that the tradition offers. Individual interpreters do not all react to a text in the same way, and the history of interpretation offers an almost endless variety of examples illustrating how a text can be understood in different ways. Such an approach is on full display in John Riches’ *Galatians through the Centuries*, the Galatians volume of the Blackwell Bible Commentaries series devoted to the history of interpretation. ³ Starting with Marcion, and ending with Lightfoot, but sometimes also including more recent commentators, Riches works his way through the whole of Galatians, section by section. Sometimes he brings the various points of view into a thematic dialogue, and occasionally he even notes when an individual interpreter seems to venture far beyond what is warranted by the biblical text, but most of the time he is content to make comparisons among

³ John Riches, *Galatians through the Centuries* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2008), esp. 227–44.
interpreters, drawing attention to their similarities and differences, emphasizing their distinctiveness, and noting what aspects of the passage receive the greater weight in their treatments. With respect to Gal 4:21–31, for example, he starts with patristic interpretation, focusing specifically on Chrysostom and Augustine, but also mentioning Theodore, Ambrosiaster, Victorinus, and Jerome. He then passes on to Thomas Aquinas, before treating interpretation from the Reformation, specifically Luther and Calvin, but also Perkins and other interpreters in the Calvinist tradition. He concludes with the treatments of Hilgenfeld and Lightfoot, but along the way he also works in mention of Severianus, Erasmus, Grotius, Schleiermacher, Bousset, Lagrange, Bultmann, Betz, and E.P. Sanders. What is front and centre in Riches’ account is the variety of ways this passage has been understood through the centuries. This variety is on full-display in my account as well, and I make use of Riches’ work at several points, but unlike Riches I am also interested in exploring what makes for an illegitimate reading.

At the same time, I am not imagining that I can step outside the history of interpretation so as to render what might be described as an objective reading of the text that is somehow independent of my own context. Historical-critical scholarship sometimes seems to be making this claim. Such a claim is implicit in approaches that treat “precritical” approaches as hopelessly mired in dogmatic and theological concerns, and assume that we have now arrived at the correct methods for uncovering the true meaning of a text—or, at the very least, we are on the verge of arriving, if we could but refine our methods to be more
rigorous. In such an approach the history of interpretation becomes the history of misinterpretation, as we slowly uncover the true meaning of the text, and with it the ability to pass judgment on the errors of the past. This approach is implicit in most contemporary commentaries on Galatians, even those that attempt to take the history of interpretation seriously. The commentaries of both Richard N. Longenecker and J. Louis Martyn, for example, both include a section at the beginning that recounts the history of interpretation of the epistle as a preliminary step to its explication in the commentary proper. Implicit in this is a view that sees the past as important but not something that can be allowed to interfere with exegesis in the present: at most the past is useful for bringing our own conclusions into clarity. Again, I make use of both these commentaries at several points, but unlike Longenecker and Martyn, I do not want to leave the impression that contemporary approaches to the epistle are necessarily any better than what we have had in the past. Although I am interested in exploring what makes for an illegitimate reading, I am not interested in simply dismissing past interpretation, even when it seems to be clearly wrong by today’s standards. While I use the language of “blind spot,” I have no illusions that our own times do not have blind spots of their own, or that interpreters from the past do not have something to contribute to our own understanding.

In many ways, my own approach is much closer to what can be seen in John L. Thompson’s

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4 Such an approach can be seen, for example, in Werner Georg Kümmel’s history of New Testament scholarship, which categorically dismisses, on its very first page, all biblical scholarship from before the Enlightenment (Das Neue Testament: Geschichte der Erforschung seiner Probleme [Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1958], 3).

Writing the Wrongs. In his first chapter, Thompson investigates the treatment of the figure of Hagar in the history of western biblical interpretation of Genesis, from the early patristic period to the end of the Reformation, mostly in Christian interpretation, but also in Jewish interpretation as well. What he finds is that Hagar is not nearly as much of a neglected figure as many contemporary interpreters of that history (particularly feminist interpreters) are inclined to believe. Thompson does not restrict himself to merely recounting the great variety of interpretations that he finds in the tradition, nor does he simply assume that we have now arrived at the correct view and the past has it all wrong. He is quite conscious of how interpretation from the past can contribute to our understanding in the present, but he also casts a critical eye on the implications for our own time. Interestingly, Thompson takes for granted that Paul’s treatment of Hagar and Ishmael does an injustice to the Genesis account. This, however, is not his focus. He is primarily interested in how Hagar’s story is taken up by precritical interpreters, who draw upon the allegorical treatments of Paul and Philo, as well as more literal readings of Genesis, and then take it in their own directions. My focus, by contrast, is not on Hagar herself, and not merely on precritical interpretation, but on how Paul’s problematic treatment of the Genesis account in Gal 4:21–5:1 is taken up in the entire history of interpretation of the passage down to the present day. Nevertheless, as

7 What Thompson says precisely is that Paul’s allegory “would not seem to bode well for the personal destiny of Hagar and Ishmael, nor for their descendants. Consequently, for Christian writers to attend at all to the historical dimension of the story in Genesis would seem ever after to require resisting or ignoring two impulses, both arguably Pauline: one, to read the story solely in terms of its typological significance, as a parable of law and gospel, of old covenant and new; the other, to see Hagar and Ishmael as scapegoats, foils, or villains” (ibid., 94).
I do with Riches, Longenecker and Martyn, I draw on Thompson’s work at several points in my investigation when it is helpful.

Before proceeding, one point needs to be emphasized relating to method. At the various stages in this investigation, I employ different methodological approaches. This is necessary because each of them has its strengths and weaknesses. I have already touched upon some of the weaknesses of traditional critical historical methods, which seem to presuppose the possibility of interpreting texts “objectively” independent of any time and place. As useful as these methods are for bringing to light some aspects of the biblical text, they are not very useful with regard to other aspects. Similarly, in chapters 2 and 3, I employ literary approaches that are fruitful for dealing directly with texts, but because they treat texts as if they were self-generating and self-enclosed entities, they are largely useless for exploring the history of interpretation. Likewise in chapters 4 and 5, when I am exploring the reception-history of the passage, I employ approaches that seem to presuppose the pre-existence of a stable text “out there” that is prior to the history of interpretation and independent of it. This approach allows me to explore aspects of the history of interpretation that would otherwise remain obscure, but it has its limitations, because what we normally think of as “the text” is of course as much a function of the history of interpretation as the history of interpretation is a function of the text. 8 In this investigation, working as I am quite consciously within the traditions of biblical interpretation that are a part of my context, I am content with the messiness that this involves. To use a domestic image, it is a bit like dealing

8 This is a point especially emphasized by Timothy Beal, “Reception History and Beyond: Toward the Cultural History of Scriptures,” BibInt 19 (2001): 357–72.
with the “the lump in the carpet.” You can push it out of the immediate area so as to smooth things out, but you will never actually eliminate the lump itself—it will undoubtedly turn up somewhere else down the line. One really has no choice except to plunk the couch down on top of it for the time being and carry on.

One further point needs to be made regarding the structure of this investigation. It should therefore also be clear by now why I have structured the thesis in the way that I have. Typically the history of interpretation of a passage is treated as a preliminary step to its exegesis, but here it is my description of the passage in the third chapter that serves as a preliminary point of departure for my investigation of its history of interpretation in the fourth and fifth chapters. By inverting the usual order associated with the scholarly interpretation of a biblical text, I am intentionally putting the emphasis on the history of interpretation. I am not interested in the contents of Genesis and Galatians in their own right (this would be an entirely different investigation), but in describing these texts as the condition for the possibility of the history of interpretation. I am quite aware that the texts themselves are constructs of the times in which they have been received and passed on. Nevertheless, in order “to get the ball rolling” as it were, I start off by offering, in chapters two and three, a description of the two texts, as if what I find there is theoretically a priori. Accordingly, the task of the second chapter will be to describe the story of Hagar and Sarah, of Ishmael and Isaac, as it appears in Genesis in the Christian canon. Not only am I interested in the specific details of the story, but—even more importantly—also in the specific ways that Genesis tells the story, since how a story is told is often just as important (or even more important) than the story itself. Here the concepts and terms of contemporary
literary theory, as developed by the likes of Seymour Chatman, Wayne Booth, Meike Bal and Wolfgang Iser will prove useful.

In the third chapter I then turn to Paul’s treatment of the Genesis account that appears in Gal 4:21–5:1. Paul’s argument in this passage presupposes a version of the story that he does not explicitly narrate, but is expressed through the course of his argument, complicated by the allegorical connections he makes between the Genesis story and his own situation. Describing Paul’s treatment of the Genesis account therefore requires unravelling the argumentative, allegorical, and narrative aspects of the passage. Having done this, I will then be in a position to note the divergences between the Genesis account and Paul’s treatment of it in Galatians, and identify their significance.

I then shift gears in the fourth chapter to turn my attention to the subsequent history of interpretation of the passage, this time using the conceptual tools of Rezeptionsgeschichte as developed by Hans Robert Jauss. Structuring my analysis according to a rather conventional break-down of the history of interpretation into several distinct eras, I show that in each era there has been a dominant pattern of interpretation whereby interpreters consistently do not notice what Paul is doing with the Genesis account in Galatians, or if they do manage to notice, they do not seem to be able to appreciate the significance of what they are seeing.

In the fifth chapter I then go back over the history of interpretation, this time listening for some of the discordant voices within the tradition. In every era conditions seem to have made it possible for at least some interpreters to depart from at least some aspects of the dominant pattern at least some of the time. Comparing the perspectives offered by these
interpreters with the dominant lines of interpretation is particularly helpful for identifying the issues at stake in this passage. I conclude this chapter by examining a handful of recent interpretations of this passage to show how the insights of contemporary interpretation of the passage can be brought to bear.

Finally I pull all this together in the sixth chapter (and epilogue) into what I describe as a “faithful” reading of Gal 4:21–5:1. By this I mean one that not only pays careful attention to the words of the passage itself, but also takes into account the original historical context of the letter as best as it can be constructed in our own time, the canonical context within the tradition that both Galatians and Genesis are a part of, and, most importantly, the history of interpretation of the passage with all that it can teach us. Although this might appear at first glance to be stepping outside the history of interpretation so as to pass judgment on it, in fact it will merely be my response, from within the tradition, to what I have encountered in the passage and in the passage’s history of interpretation. By producing my own faithful reading of Gal 4:21–5:1, I will show myself to be engaging with the traditions of interpretation that I have been investigating, participating in them, and in fact contributing to them.
Chapter Two
The Genesis Account

I. Preliminary Comments

As I stated in the previous one, the first task is to provide a description of the story of Hagar and Sarah, of Ishmael and Isaac, as it appears in Genesis. This is not as simple as it might appear at first glance. The story is told in Genesis in a distinctively complex way, as we shall see. The wording of the text invites—even requires—readers to “read between the lines” and fill out the story. This is most obvious in Gen 21:9, when we are told that Sarah saw “the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing.”¹ The text does not tell us what Sarah thinks when she looks at Ishmael, but she immediately tells Abraham to “cast out this slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall surely not inherit along with my son Isaac,” and we are left to draw our own conclusions. Even the apparently simple word “playing” is filled with ambiguity. The verb in Hebrew has the same root as Isaac’s name, צחק (“to laugh”), here appearing as a participle in the piel conjugation (מצחק), with a meaning of “playing, jesting, or sporting.”² But is Ishmael innocently “playing” or is something more devious going on here? Genesis Rabbah 53:11, for example, offers several rabbinic interpretations of the passage that draw out some of the nuances of the word that are possible here: these include fornication, idolatry, and murder.³ This is not an isolated

¹ There is a difference here between the MT and LXX in that the MT reads “playing” (לועז), while the LXX reads, “playing with Isaac” (παιζοντα μετ’ Ισαακ).  
² BDB 850. The Greek word in the LXX (παιζει, LSJ 1288) also has the same kind of semantic range: play, dance, hunt, jest, sport.  
³ On the basis of Gen 39:17, Rabbi Aqiba infers that the word refers to fornication: “This teaches that our mother Sarah saw Ishmael violating ‘gardens’ (i.e., women), chasing the wives of men and afflicting them.” On the basis of Ex. 32:6, Rabbi Ishmael infers that it refers to idolatry: “This teaches that our mother Sarah saw Ishmael building altars, chasing locusts, and offering sacrifice upon them.” On the basis of 2 Sam 2:14 and Prov 22:18,
example: gaps of this kind open up in the text of Genesis at every turn. For this reason it should be observed that how the story is told in Genesis is as important as the story itself. An accurate description of the story therefore requires not only a description of the contents of the story, which is simple enough to do, but also a description of the narration of the story in all its complexity.

For this task the terms and concepts of contemporary literary theory come in handy. One such concept is the simple distinction that literary theorists often make between story and discourse. Literary theorist Seymour Chatman describes this distinction simply by saying, “The story is the what in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the how.” It is through the

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Rabbi Eleazar, Azariah, and Levi infer that it refers to murder: “Ishmael said to Isaac, ‘let us go and see our portions in the field,’ and he would take a bow and arrows and shoot them in the direction of Isaac, and act as if he was playing” (Midrash Rabbah [ed. Moshe Aryeh Mirkin; Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1956], 2:245). Although Genesis Rabbah is usually dated to about 400 C.E., some of these traditions probably go back much further.


5 Story and Discourse, 19.
discourse that the story is narrated. Indeed, there is no telling of a story except through discourse, but the story itself can be told in many different ways. This simple distinction opens up the narrative to an analysis of its structure. On the one hand, I am interested in the contents of the story (basically what happens in it), but in many ways it is the structure of how the story is narrated that I am even more interested in. I will therefore begin the chapter with a simplified summary of the plot of the story, followed by more extensive observations on how it is told. Although there are numerous aspects of the narration that I could focus on, there are five features that stand out as particularly significant for describing what is going on in the Genesis account of the story of Abraham and his family: narration and narrative levels, focalization, naming, narrative gaps, and above all, what can be described as the wandering viewpoint. As we shall see, this last one, the wandering viewpoint, is the most important, and the others lead into it.

All of this takes for granted what I mean by “the Genesis account.” We do not have direct access to the version of Genesis that Paul was referring to when he produced Galatians. For that matter, we do not even know for sure that he was referring to a text called “Genesis.” However, the historical question of Paul’s sources when he produced Galatians is not decisive here. As I stated in chapter one, what is at issue here are the discrepancies between the story as it appears in Genesis and the treatment that Paul gives it in Galatians. This is not an issue of historical sources, but of the Christian canon.6 The Christian tradition has granted

6 More precisely, I am referring to the Christian canon as it developed in the Greek-speaking and Latin-speaking churches in the early centuries of the common era, and continues to be used in European and North American Christian traditions. (This is not to be taken for granted: some Christian traditions hold Jubilees to be canonical, for example. That I have
to its text(s) of both Genesis and Galatians canonical status, but it has never established in
precise or complete detail the canonical wording of either. For the sake of convenience,
therefore, when I refer to the “text of Genesis,” I am referring simultaneously to both the
Masoretic Text (more specifically, the 1977 edition of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*) and
the Septuagint (more specifically the Gottingensis edition of 1974) as a translation of the
Hebrew. As it turns out, the differences between the two versions of Genesis in these
passages are relatively minor, and I will draw attention to them as they appear. Likewise, in
the next chapter, when I refer to the “text of Galatians,” I am referring to the Greek text that
appears in NA. I am fully aware that not all interpreters in the history of interpretation are
reading these texts of Genesis or Galatians (especially since so many interpreters are in fact
working with Latin translations). Nevertheless, they are close enough to make comparisons,
and again, I draw attention to the differences as they arise.

Therefore, to go back to my initial question about the Genesis account, when I refer to the
“Genesis account,” I am referring simultaneously to the narration of the story that appears in
Hebrew in the Masoretic Text (as witnessed by BHS) and in Greek in the LXX (as witnessed
by Gottingensis), which are nearly identical in any case. As it turns out (though as I said, this

7 At various points in the history of interpretation there have been debates as to whether the
LXX, Hebrew text, or the Vulgate constitutes the authoritative Christian Old Testament, but
even in these cases, there is no finally fixed text. In more modern times, there have been
efforts to reconstruct the more original texts of Genesis in Hebrew and Galatians in Greek,
but these efforts do not address the issue of the canonical status of these texts.

8 *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph; Stuttgart: Deutsche
Bibelgesellschaft, 1969/1977); *Genesis*, vol. 1 of *Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum
Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum* (ed. John William Wevers;
Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974).
does not really matter here), these are likely very close, if not identical, to the text or texts of Genesis that the historical Paul knew in his own time, whether in Greek, in Hebrew, or in Aramaic.⁹

2. The Story

In Genesis, the stories of Hagar, Sarah, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, are inseparably interconnected. Hagar herself appears only in Gen 16 and 21, but her story cannot be told without reference to the story of Abraham, which consists of several episodes, starting with his first mention in Gen 11:26, and continuing until his burial in Gen 25:10. The same is true of Sarah, who is first mentioned in conjunction with Abraham in Gen 11:29 and continues to be mentioned throughout the Abraham story until she dies in Gen 23, but is even mentioned again at Abraham’s death in chapter 25. Ishmael and Isaac can be described as having stories of their own: Ishmael’s story is related in a few lines in Gen 25:12–18, but Isaac’s story lasts several chapters (Gen 25:19–28:9). Yet even Isaac’s story makes little sense apart from the promises given to Abraham.

As I already emphasized, any rendition of the contents of the story is already just as much “discourse” as it is “story,” but for the sake of analysis, here is a summary of the important

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⁹ Most scholars who have examined this question conclude from the similarity between Paul’s quotations and the text of the LXX (as we know it) that he was working from a text that was in Greek rather than Hebrew. See the discussion in Christopher D. Stanley, Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4–28; R. Timothy McLay, The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 17–76. This does not, however, address whether Paul may also have known Hebrew or Aramaic texts that were closer in wording to the LXX than to the MT.
elements of the story as they appear in Gen 11–25. Abraham (at this point called Abram) is the son of Terah, and Sarah (at this point called Sarai) is his wife. At the outset, the text of Genesis specifically tells us that Sarai is barren (Gen 11:30). The story begins with Terah and his sons (including Abram), along with their wives (including Sarai), departing from their native land in the east, Ur of the Chaldeans, and settling in Haran. At Haran, Abram is told by the LORD to leave for a new land. The LORD promises to make a great nation of him and to bless him abundantly. Abram, now seventy-five, takes Sarai, his nephew Lot, the rest of his household, and all his possessions, and settles in Canaan. There the LORD promises to give this land to his descendants, a promise that is repeatedly reaffirmed at various points in the story. At one such point (related in Gen 15), the LORD appears to Abram in a vision, again promising him great rewards. This time, Abram points out to the LORD that he is childless, and, as a consequence, one of his servants will end up being his heir. The LORD nevertheless affirms in a covenant with Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars of the sky and they will possess the land, from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates.

In the next episode (Gen 16), however, it is related that Sarai continues childless. After a span of about ten years since they first arrived in Canaan, Sarai decides to offer her Egyptian slave Hagar to Abram as his wife in the hopes that she can be “built-up” through her. Abram agrees, and Hagar conceives. However, the immediate consequence of this is that Sarai is “lowered in Hagar’s esteem,” and Sarai complains to Abram. Abram then places Hagar under Sarai’s authority (or acknowledges that she continues to be under Sarai’s authority) and tells her to treat her as she sees fit. Sarai treats Hagar harshly, and as a result, Hagar runs
away. In the desert, by a spring on the road to Shur, Hagar encounters the messenger of the LORD, who announces that her descendants shall be numerous and that she will give birth to a son whom she is to call Ishmael. The messenger also tells her to return to her mistress and to submit to her harsh treatment, which Hagar does. Subsequently Ishmael is born. At this point in the story, as the text of Genesis makes a point of telling us, Abraham is now eighty-six years old.

In the episode that follows (related in Gen 17), when Abram is ninety-nine and Sarai eighty-nine, the LORD again appears to Abram and promises him a multitude of descendants who will possess the land. The LORD makes a covenant with Abram and gives him a new name: Abraham, “the father of many nations.” The sign of this covenant is the rite of circumcision, which is to be practiced by Abraham and all his descendants. Then, much to Abraham’s surprise, the LORD promises to bless Sarai (who is now to have the name Sarah) with a son, and affirms that it is through this son (whom he is to name Isaac) that the covenant will be kept. As for Ishmael, Abraham pleads on his behalf. The LORD promises that Ishmael too will have many descendants and become a great nation. Abraham and Ishmael, along with all the males in the household are then circumcised as a mark of the covenant. Several episodes follow, including one where the LORD appears to Abraham at Mamre in the form of three messengers (Gen 18:1–15). They announce that Sarah will have a son in the following year.

Finally, at last Sarah gives birth to a son as promised (Gen 21:2). He is named Isaac, and he is circumcised when he is eight days old. After the child has grown and is weaned, Abraham
holds a feast. It is at this point that Sarah sees Ishmael “playing” (MT; LXX: “playing with Isaac”) and she tells Abraham to cast out the slave woman and her son, “for the son of this slave woman shall surely not inherit along with my son Isaac!” (Gen 21:10). Abraham is upset with this turn of affairs, but the LORD tells Abraham to listen to Sarah. Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael out into the desert, having provided them with food and water. But Hagar and Ishmael wander, and the water gives out. Finally, Hagar lays Ishmael under a tree, expecting him to die. God’s messenger then calls out to Hagar, and tells her to lift up the lad, and to hold his hand, for he will become a great nation. Her eyes are then opened and she notices a well of water nearby. They survive, and settle in the desert of Paran. Hagar eventually chooses a wife for Ishmael from Egypt.

At this point, the narrator leaves the story of Hagar and Ishmael and returns to the story of Abraham. In the next episode, the LORD tells Abraham to go to Moriah, and there offer Isaac as a sacrifice (related in Gen 22). Abraham follows through, but at the last minute the LORD tells Abraham to offer up a ram instead. Eventually Sarah dies, and Abraham acquires a burial site for her in the cave of Machpelah (Gen 23:1–9). Abraham, now old—the narrator explicitly draws our attention to this—worries about finding a wife for Isaac. He sends a servant to Haran, who acquires a wife for Isaac from among Abraham’s kin (Gen 24). Abraham then himself also takes another wife, whose name is Keturah. She bears him several sons (in spite of Abraham’s great age, but the narrative does not say anything about this). When these sons grow up, Abraham gives them gifts and sends them away to the east (Gen 25:1–6). At last, at the great age of one hundred seventy-five, Abraham dies (Gen 25:7–10). Isaac and Ishmael come together to bury their father in the cave of the field.
Machpelah, where Sarah is also buried.

3. Narration and Narrative Levels

According to narrative theory, all narratives tell a story. This presupposes that somebody is narrating a story to someone else. Narrative theorists describe this narrating agency in the abstract as the *narrator*, and correspondingly, they describe the receiving agency as the *narratee*. Narrators may use any number of techniques to tell a story. Sometimes theorists distinguish between “showing” and “telling.”\(^{10}\) As Wayne Booth notes, a narrator can “tell” the listeners what to think about the story, or a narrator can leave it up to the listeners to figure it out for themselves by “showing” it to them. The distinction between the two can be illustrated by the difference between direct and indirect discourse: the narrator can *tell* us what the characters are saying by stating it to us in his or her own voice as indirect speech, or the narrator can *show* it to us as dialogue in the form of direct speech. A narrator who does more “telling” than “showing” is usually more noticeable: Chatman describes this kind of narrator as *overt*. But a narrator who does more “showing” than “telling” is inclined to disappear behind the story: Chatman describes this kind of narrator as *covert*.\(^ {11}\) The narrator of Genesis is of this latter sort. Although the narrative of Hagar and Sarah contains some explanatory commentary that reveals the presence of the narrator to a minimal degree, for the most part the narrator is hardly perceptible.\(^ {12}\) The narrator is content to give us a bird’s


\(^{11}\) *Story and Discourse*, 197.

\(^{12}\) For example, the statement, “Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him” (Gen 16:16) is being told to us by somebody but we are not inclined to think much
eye view of the action, with minimal description, explanation, and judgment. We overhear
the characters speaking to each other, and occasionally we are even shown what is going on
in their minds, but rarely are we made aware of the narrator’s presence at all.

Regardless of whether a story is primarily “told” or “shown” (or whether the narrator is
relatively overt or covert), literary theorists distinguish at least two levels in a narrative. I
have already mentioned Chatman’s distinction between story and discourse as the what of a
narrative compared to the how. Gérard Genette uses different terms: he distinguishes what
he refers to as l’instance narrative (the narrating instance, or the discourse that narrates the
story) from the diegesis (the story itself), by describing it as taking place at a different
“level” (niveau) of the narrative. He differentiates among levels by noting that, “every event
related by an account is situated at a diegetic level immediately above the one at which the
narrative act producing this account is situated.”¹³ This means that below the level of the
diegesis, there is an extradiegetic narrator narrating the events to an extradiegetic narratee
(even if only covertly). Again, this can be illustrated by the use of direct discourse: the direct
speech of characters itself takes place at the level of the diegesis, but the narration of that
speech (e.g. “Sarai said to Abram” Gen 16:2) takes place at the extradiegetic level. The
direct speech of characters within a story is thus always embedded in the narration. Of
course, it is also possible to imagine a character at the level of the diegesis narrating a

¹³ “_Tout événement raconté par un récit est à un niveau diégétique immédiatement supérieur
à celui où se situe l’acte narratif producteur de ce récit_” (Figures III, 238). See also O’Neill,
_Fictions of Discourse_, 60–61.
higher levels in the narrative, each one embedded in the level immediately below it.

Regardless of the number of levels, however, there is something of a paradox in narration: on the one hand the narrator steps aside to let the characters be heard in their own voices, but on the other, it is really still the narrator who is speaking, but now through the voices of the characters. This is what Patrick O’Neill describes as the “ventriloquism effect.” Even a covert narrator is continuously present at the extradiegetic level, covertly selecting what the narratee sees and hears.

This contrast between the level of the story and the level of the discourse (or between diegesis and narrating instance, to use Genette’s terms), can be seen most clearly with regard to the temporal ordering of events in the narrative. Events in the story itself take place according to the logic of temporal sequence that operates in that world, but the narrating of the story at the extradiegetic level need not follow this same order. For purposes of suspense or interest, a narrator may present the events in a different order. This can be done in various ways. Genette describes a “flashback” in a narrative with the technical term analepsis, and an anticipation of a future event as prolepsis. An example of a prolepsis appears when the messenger announces to Hagar that her son will be “a wild ass of a man” (MT: אדם פרא; LXX: ἄγροικος ἄνθρωπος, “a rustic man”), “his hand upon everyone, and everyone’s hand upon him, and he shall dwell alongside all of his kinsmen” (Gen 16:12). Here the narrator is not only informing the narratee of what was told to Hagar at this point in the story, but also

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14 O’Neill describes this ventriloquism effect as “the inherently constitutive characteristic of all narrative discourse—though certainly actualized to a greater or a lesser degree in different kinds of narrative—that it essentially operates by disguising the point of origin of its discursive voice” (Fictions of Discourse, 58).
narrating what will happen to Ishmael later in the story. In fact, when the narrative reaches this point in the story (Gen 25), it does not go into much detail: everything about Ishmael’s later life that the narrator deems worth telling has already been told in the prolepsis.¹⁵

A prolepses like this, where future events are narrated within the story, however, can be rather problematic. There is a danger that the two narrative levels will interfere with each other. In the case of Gen 16:12, this does not seem to be a problem: Hagar’s knowledge of the future does not seem to interfere with the unfolding of the story. But the promises made to Abraham are a different matter. Throughout the story, the LORD repeatedly promises Abraham that he will have many descendants. In Gen 15:3, Abraham argues back: “Look, you have granted me no offspring, a slave of my household will be my heir.” Not so, says the LORD: “One who comes forth from you shall be your heir.” It is not until Gen 17:17—after Ishmael has been born—that the LORD tells Abraham that this promise will be fulfilled through Sarah. We can imagine that the story might have unfolded quite differently if Abraham and Sarah had had this information earlier! Likewise, the narrator also withholds this information from the narratee at the extradiegetic level. This selective granting of information gives the narrative suspense at the level of the narrating instance, but at the level of the diegesis, the same selective granting of information is itself one of the central

¹⁵ All this presupposes that we are reading Genesis as a unified narrative. This is not the only way of reading Genesis of course. One could also read Genesis as a loose compilation of various traditions brought together from numerous sources. Until very recently this was the dominant approach to reading Genesis among modern biblical scholars, what Robert Alter describes rather polemically as “excavative” scholarship, to distinguish it from the literary approaches that he is interested in. See The Art of Biblical Narrative (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 13–14.
dynamics of the story.\textsuperscript{16}

4. Focalization

Analogous to narration is what narrative theorists refer to as focalization. As Genette observes, the agency that is observing the events may not be the same agency that is narrating them, and therefore it is important to ask not only “who speaks?” but also “who sees?”\textsuperscript{17} The term itself was coined by Genette, and the concept has been considerably developed by Meike Bal, but it is also used by others. In his later work, however, Chatman prefers to use the term slant to describe what the narrator sees (or rather “shows”), and filter to describe what characters within the story see.\textsuperscript{18} In Bal’s formulation, focalization is described as “the relationship between the ‘vision,’ the agent that sees, and that which is seen.”\textsuperscript{19} She points out that both sides in the relationship need to be analyzed: the subject and the object of focalization, what she refers to respectively as the focalizer and the focalized. An explicit instance of focalization appears in Gen 21:19 after God’s messenger has spoken to Hagar. The text tells us that “God opened her eyes and she saw (MT: ראה; LXX: εἶδε) a well of water.” Here Hagar is the focalizer and the well is the focalized object.

\textsuperscript{16} This raises the issue of the reliability of the narrator. Booth makes a distinction between the narrator and the implied author (Rhetoric of Fiction, 71–74), and Chatman makes an additional distinction between the narratee and the implied reader (Story and Discourse, 149–50). Such a distinction becomes meaningful when there is an “unreliable narrator” who is at odds with the overall thrust of the work. This does not seem to be the case here, however. Although there are gaps in the narration that the reader (i.e., the implied reader in the first instance, and then the real readers who are reading over the implied reader’s implied shoulder) needs to ponder, there does not seem to be any reason to distrust what the narrator is saying.

\textsuperscript{17} Figures III, 203.

\textsuperscript{18} Coming to Terms, 143–44.

\textsuperscript{19} Narratology, 104.
According to Bal, a focalized object may be either perceptible or imperceptible. What is seen when a character looks at something may not be what other characters see. Here it is not at all clear whether the well was even perceptible before God opened Hagar’s eyes. The narrator does not show it to us until Hagar is able to see it: it is made available to us only through the focalization of Hagar. Moreover, just as the direct speech of a character is embedded in the narration, so too there can be multiple levels of focalization. In this example, there is the explicit focalization of Hagar seeing the well of water (character focalization), but less obviously there is also the scene that the narrator is showing us (external focalization). Here the narrator is the focalizer and Hagar seeing the well of water is the focalized object. To use Chatman’s terms, we see the well through the filter of Hagar’s eyes, but this is embedded in the slant of the narrator, who is showing it to us from outside the story.

Focalization in a narrative tends to be subtle, complex, and often ambiguous. To return to the example of Gen 21:9, the narrator tells us that Sarah sees “the son whom Hagar the Egyptian bore to Abraham playing.” Here again we have explicit focalization by a character (with Sarah now as the focalizer and Ishmael as the focalized object) embedded within the external focalization of what the narrator is showing us (Sarah as the focalized object seeing Ishmael). The narrator does not tell us directly what Sarah is looking at, we are told only what she is perceiving, and as Bal notes, there is a difference between looking and perceiving. What Sarah perceives is the son of Hagar playing, but we do not know what exactly she is looking at. Or rather, we are left to infer that she is looking at Ishmael, but we cannot be sure of what he is doing such that she perceives him to be “playing,” or what this
means to her. The narrator gives us no external access to it. It is not even clear whether it is (in Bal’s terms) perceptible or imperceptible—is this something that only Sarah can see? The narrator thus offers us a very selective account of what Sarah is perceiving: we are not given external confirmation of what Sarah is looking at, nor are we taken into Sarah’s mind to show us what she is thinking about what she is perceiving.

Genette draws attention to the subtle significance of alterations in the point of view that can sometimes appear in narrative. Specifically he observes that a change in focalization, particularly if it is isolated in a coherent context, can be analysed as a momentary infraction of the code, “without which the existence of this code would be, for all that, called into question.”

This can be of two types: either the narrator gives less information than is necessary in principle (Genette calls this paralipsis), or we are given more information than is authorized in principle according to the pattern of the whole (what he calls paralepsis). In Genesis the general pattern of narration is that the narrator lets us see through the eyes of various characters, and hear what they are saying, but does not usually take us into their minds. But this pattern is momentarily suspended in Gen 21:10–11 when the narrator tells us what Abraham is feeling after Sarah tells him to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Sarah speaks to Abraham in Gen 21:10, telling him to cast out this slave woman and her son, and in the next verse we should expect to hear his response. Instead we are taken into Abraham’s mind: “The matter was very bad in Abraham’s eyes, on account of his son.”

The paralipsis in the narration here is that we are denied access to what Abraham says to Sarah (if anything); the

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20 Figures III, 211.
21 Technically, this is still the language of perception, but here it expresses an internal response, a matter of the mind.
paralepsis is that we are suddenly given access to Abraham’s inner emotional response. We hear Sarah speak, but we do not know exactly what she is thinking; we do not hear Abraham speak, but we do catch a glimpse of what is going on in his mind.

These examples illustrate what Bal means when she says that in her view, focalization is “the most important, most penetrating, and most subtle means of manipulation.”22 By selecting what we see, and by selecting whose eyes we see through, the narrator has great power to influence how we respond to a story. Manipulation is difficult to measure of course, but Bal suggests that we usually feel sympathy for a character who serves as a focalizer, since we are inclined to accept the vision presented by the character whose eyes we see through. At first glance, Gen 21:9–10 may seem to be an exception to this pattern. To use my own initial response as an example, when I see Ishmael through Sarah’s eyes and hear her words, I am not inclined to sympathize with Sarah at all. Although I feel like I partially understand Sarah’s harsh reaction as an expression of her protectiveness towards Isaac, my gut reaction is to recoil from both her words and her attitude. Instead, my sympathies are drawn to Ishmael. Likewise, I find Abraham’s silence in reaction to her words more compelling than any words could be. Sarah’s words come as a shock, and I imagine myself in Abraham’s place hearing them, and being distressed on account of Ishmael (and Hagar). These reactions are of course my own—other readers might respond quite differently—but they do not arise in a vacuum.23 At least to some degree, these responses are manipulated by the way that the story is told, primarily through the subtleties

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22 Narratology, 116.
23 This raises the important question of readers responding to a text in individual ways, which I will address shortly when I talk about narrative gaps.
of focalization. In this case, rather than being manipulated to feel sympathy for the focalizing character, my sympathies are directed towards the focalized object. Of course, I am not merely looking at Ishmael through Sarah’s filter, I am also being shown the situation as a whole through the slant of the narrator. When this is taken into account, my partial appreciation for Sarah’s protectiveness, as well as my sympathy for Ishmael, is consistent with what we might expect according to Bal’s formulation of the theory.  

5. Naming

Closely related in function to focalization is how characters in the story are named. The names in this story are particularly significant. The proper name “Isaac” comes from the verb צחק (“to laugh”), and the Hebrew text plays on this connection in describing both Abraham’s and Sarah’s laughter (Gen 17:17, 18:12, 15, 21:6), as well as Ishmael’s “playing” (Gen 21:9, as already noted). The proper name “Ishmael” means “God hears” (ишמע אלה), and the messenger explicitly tells Hagar that she shall give her son this name, for “the LORD has heard your suffering” (Gen 16:11). In the course of the story, Abraham goes from being Abram (אברם), “father of many,” to Abraham (אברהם), “father of many nations”; Sarah goes from Sarai (שרי) to Sarah (שרה, “princess”—it is not clear whether there is much distinction in meaning between the two here). Even the name Hagar (הגר), at least according to focalization. In this case, rather than being manipulated to feel sympathy for the focalizing character, my sympathies are directed towards the focalized object. Of course, I am not merely looking at Ishmael through Sarah’s filter, I am also being shown the situation as a whole through the slant of the narrator. When this is taken into account, my partial appreciation for Sarah’s protectiveness, as well as my sympathy for Ishmael, is consistent with what we might expect according to Bal’s formulation of the theory.  

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to Philo, may be a word-play on the Hebrew word גָּר, “the sojourner” (Gk.: πάροικος, Congr. 20–22). However, as Adele Berlin observes (drawing on the work of literary theorist Boris Uspensky), it is quite common for biblical narratives to refer to characters by some other locution besides, or in addition to, their names. Not only are these terms “an important sign of significant relationships within the story,” but they can also indicate the point of view from which the characters are being shown.27 In Gen 21:10, for example, Sarah refers to Hagar, not by her name, but as “this slave woman.” No longer is she “my handmaid” (שְׁפָחָה, LXX: παηδίζθε μου), as earlier in the story (Gen 16: 2, 6), now she is simply “this slave woman” (זָאת הָאָם, LXX: η παηδίζθε αὐτή).28 The repetition of the expression in quick succession underscores the emotional content: “Cast out this slave woman and her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.”

A striking illustration of this is the way that characters in the story are often identified in relation to one another along with their proper name. Thus Sarah is repeatedly identified, not merely as “Sarai,” but also as Abram’s wife, Hagar is identified, not merely as “Hagar,” but also as Sarai’s handmaid, and Abraham is identified, not only as “Abram,” but also as Sarah’s husband. To modern readers, this may seem rather redundant, since we already know the relationships between one character and another. However, this has the effect of

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26 This is to say nothing about the significance of the various names of God in the story.
28 The terms שפחתה (“handmaid”) in MT Gen 16 and אמא (“slave woman”) in MT Gen 21 seem to be more or less equivalent (BDB 51, 1046; see also Edward J. Bridge, “Female Slave Vs Female Slave: אמה and שפחתה in the HB,” JHebS 12 [2012], 1–21). The LXX ignores the distinction entirely: in both Gen 16 and 21 the word παιδίσκη appears.
emphasizing the relationship with all its implications. This is seen rather poignantly at the level of the discourse in Gen 16:3, when the narrator describes the giving of Hagar to Abraham: “So Sarai, Abraham’s wife (MT: אָשֶׁר אֲשֶׁר אֶהְפְּרוּ; LXX: ἡ γυνὴ Ἄβραμ), took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid (MT: שפחתה; LXX: τὴν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ παύλακεν)—after Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years—and gave her to Abram her husband (MT: אישה; LXX: αὐτῇ ἀλλήλας).” In dwelling on these relational terms the narrator puts an emphasis on the incredible risk that Sarah is taking, as well as the ambiguity in Hagar’s role as both “slave” to Sarah and “wife” to Abraham. This can also be seen at the level of the story. The messenger in Gen 16:8, for example, addresses Hagar as “Hagar, handmaid of Sarai” (MT: שרית שפחתא שרי; LXX: Αγαρ παύλασκη Σαρας), thus emphasizing her relationship with Sarah. By contrast, in Gen 21:17, after Hagar has been driven out, and is technically no longer anyone’s slave, the messenger addresses her directly using her name alone: “What troubles you, Hagar (MT: הגר לא אשת; LXX: τί ἐστιν Ἀγαρ)?”

These variations in how a character is identified may seem rather accidental to the story’s content, but they have a profound effect on the telling of the story itself. It is here, more than anywhere else, that the narrator of Genesis is most conspicuous. In fact, the words that the narrator selects to refer to the characters (either directly in the narration, or indirectly in the mouth of one of the characters) constitute a form of commentary. This is illustrated most

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29 Uspensky describes in minute detail how the naming of characters in a literary text can indicate shifts in an author’s point of view, even within a single sentence, often quite inconspicuously. This suggests to him a way to proceed: “If we know how different people habitually refer to one particular character (this is easy enough to establish by an analysis of corresponding dialogue), then it may be possible formally to define whose viewpoint the author has assumed at any one moment in the narrative” (Poetics of Composition, 26).
clearly in how Ishmael is identified in Gen 21. Although Ishmael is one of the key figures of the chapter—if not the key figure—he is never identified by name. Yet we know that the narrator is referring to Ishmael because he is explicitly focalized for us through the eyes of Sarah in Gen 21:9 as “the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham.” Although at one point Sarah may have imagined being “built-up” if Abraham produced children through Hagar, she does not seem to have any kind of relationship with this child at all.30 The person whom Sarah sees when she looks at Ishmael in Gen 21:9 is not described in relation to her: rather he is “the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham,” which barely acknowledges that he is even Abraham’s son. In Gen 21:10, when Sarah speaks about him, he is no longer even “the son of Hagar,” but “the son of this slave woman,” now two steps removed from any relationship with her, and his relationship with Abraham has dropped out of the picture entirely. On the other hand, when the narrator tells us in Gen 21:11 that the matter was very bad in Abraham’s eyes, we are specifically told that this is on account of “his son” (MT: בָּנֹ; LXX: τοῦ γιοῦ αὐτοῦ), which explicitly identifies Ishmael in relation to him. (We will look at this again in the next section when we get to the effect of implicit information.) By contrast, when the LORD starts speaking to Abraham in

30 In fact, the text of Genesis does not indicate at any point that Sarah ever has any kind of direct relationship with the child, as noted by Pamela Tamarkin Reis, “Hagar Requited,” *JSOT* 87 (2000): 77–78. This makes the focus on surrogacy in the history of interpretation all the more interesting. Modern interpreters are inclined to assume that this is a surrogate relationship, often drawing attention to paragraph 146 of the Code of Hammurabi or legal documents from Nuzi to define what Sarah’s legal relationship with her surrogate child would have been. See Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12–50* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 51; Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 119; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 120; Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), 252–69.
the next verse, Ishmael is referred to as “the lad” (MT: נער; LXX: τὸ παιδίον) and “the son of the slave woman,” without any reference to his relationship to Abraham.

As the narrative continues, the Masoretic Text refers to Ishmael as the “boy” (נער) in several instances (Gen 21:14, 15, 16) and then as the “lad” (נער) at several other points (Gen 21:17, 18, 19, 20), though the Septuagint uses the term τὸ παιδίον (“child”) in each case. The distinction in meaning between these two terms in Hebrew is not clear, and there is a great deal of overlap between the two, but נער generally refers to someone who is older, often a young man of marriageable age, while נער has connotations of infancy.\footnote{See BDB 409, 654–55, where נער is defined as “child, son, boy, youth,” and נער is defined as “boy, lad, youth.”} Ishmael’s age is not explicitly stated in this part of the narrative, but if one does the math, he was born about fourteen years before Isaac, so assuming Isaac was weaned at about age three, Ishmael might have been about seventeen here.\footnote{Commentators who pay attention to Ishmael’s age in Gen 17:25 usually interpret “putting the boy on her shoulder” in Gen 21:14 to be a figure of speech; others take it as an indication of Ishmael’s young age. For example, Josephus refers to Ishmael here as an “infant child” (παιδὸς νήπιον, Ant. 1:216). Genesis Rabbah 53:13, however, reports a tradition that Ishmael is twenty-seven years old here.} In any case, the use of the two terms in the MT coincides closely with changes in how Ishmael is focalized: when Ishmael is focalized through the perspectives of Abraham or Hagar, he is referred to as a נער; when he is focalized through the perspective of the LORD, the messenger, or the narrator, he is referred to as a נער.\footnote{This is noted by Reis, “Hagar Requited,” 100.} In the first instance, Abraham takes bread and water, and places them, along with “the boy” (נער), on “Hagar’s shoulders.” Hagar leaves “the boy” (נער) under one of the bushes. She turns away, saying, “Let me not look on as the boy (נער) dies.” But God hears the cry of
“the lad” (נער). The messenger tells Hagar that God has heard the cry of “the lad” (נער) and tells her to lift up “the lad” (נער). Finally the narrator relates that God was with “the lad” (נער) as he grows up.34

The terms used to refer to Ishmael throughout the chapter are useful as indicators of the shifts in focalization that appear in the narration. First, the narrator refers to Ishmael as he appears to Sarah: as the son that Hagar the Egyptian bore to Abraham. Then the narrator refers to him as he appears to Abraham: as “his son.” When the narrator refers to Ishmael again, he is “the boy” (MT: הילד; LXX: παῖς), as seen, first through Abraham’s eyes, being sent off with Hagar, then as seen through Hagar’s eyes, being cast under the bush. At this point, the narrator shifts and refers to Ishmael as “the lad” (MT: נער; LXX: παῖς), adopting the point of view of the LORD, who has already referred to him as “the lad” when speaking to Abraham, and now hears the lad’s cries, and is with him as he grows. By contrast, when the narrator gets around to telling the story of Ishmael in its own right in chapter 25, there is no reticence over using Ishmael’s name. In fact, the narrator seems to insist on mentioning all their names, as if to sum up the whole story of Ismael’s birth: “This is the line of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s handmaid (MT: שפחתה; LXX: παῖδις), bore to Abraham” (Gen 25:12). This short statement gives pride of place to the proper noun “Ishmael” as his chief designator, but it also contains reference to Ishmael’s relationships with all three of these other characters in all their ambiguity and complexity.

34 A possible exception to this pattern appears in Gen 21:19 (MT), when Hagar returns to “the lad” and gives him water to drink. It is not clear whether this is character focalization through Hagar, or external focalization through the narrator.
6. Narrative Gaps

Having examined narrative levels, focalization, and naming, I am now ready to turn my attention to narrative gaps. Literary theorist Shlomith Rimmon makes the point that all narratives contain gaps: “Gaps are a necessity because no narrative . . . can render every detail of the corresponding ‘reality.’ It is therefore imperative to select, to decide which events, motives, thoughts, will be told or dramatized and which will be left untold or undramatized—a gap for the reader to fill in.”35 Of course, this is a characteristic of language itself: one could extend this even further and note that all reading requires filling in gaps: ambiguity and uncertainty occur even at the level of grammar and syntax. Narrative, however, makes use of gaps in rather interesting ways, and Genesis provides a particularly stark example of this. It is this style of narration that leads literary critic Erich Auerbach to describe the narrative style of the Hebrew Bible as rätselvoll und hintergrünlig.36 Many questions are opened up in the course of the telling of the story that are never answered, and the readers of Genesis have to fill in these gaps for themselves. We have already observed how this occurs in Gen 21:9, with the ambiguities that arise with the word “playing.” Paradoxically, however, the issue posed by narrative gaps is not so much the gaps themselves but what the gaps, by withholding information, also seem to be suggesting. Genette expresses this paradox when he says, “Le récit en dit toujours moins qu’il n’en sait, but what he means by withholding information, also seem to be suggesting.

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mais il en fait souvent savoir plus qu’il n’en dit.”

Helpful here are some of the distinctions that Gerald Prince offers up in his analysis of how information (explicit, implicit, and presupposed) is imparted in narratives. Much of the information that a narrative provides is stated explicitly. Take these two statements that appear in sequence in Gen 16:6: “Sarai treated her [Hagar] harshly,” and “Hagar ran away.” Sometimes explicit information also implies implicit information that is not stated. We might conclude from the juxtaposition of these two statements, one after the other, that Hagar runs away because she could not stand Sarah’s harsh treatment, but this is not stated in the text, it is something that we have to infer from the explicit information. Some types of implicit information seem to be so obvious that we can (presumably) take them for granted: we share enough of a cultural background with the text that we are confident that we are making the right connection (whether this is actually true or not). However, there are various degrees of implicitness, and sometimes the connections are more tenuous. As a result, the greater the degree of implicitness, the more tenuous the connections will be. At the same time Prince notes that narratives also presuppose information that is contained in the explicit information. When the text states in Gen 21:11 that “the matter was very bad in Abraham’s eyes, on account of his son,” this presupposes first of all that Abraham has a son, or rather,

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37 “The narrative always tells us less than it knows, but it often makes known more than it says” (Figures III, 213).
38 Hebrew syntax can be quite suggestive in this regard. The juxtaposition of two clauses introduced with waw consecutive and imperfect verbs, but having different subjects, can express a temporal relationship between the two clauses, but it can also express that the action described in the second clause is the result of the action described in the first (Ronald J. Williams, Hebrew Syntax: An Outline [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967], §178, §495, §524).
because Ishmael is being focalized here through Abraham’s eyes, it presupposes that Abraham is still acknowledging Ishmael as “his son,” which is not something we can take for granted, given the way that the story unfolds. Implicit information, according to Prince, is unstated, though it may be implied in what is explicit, whereas presupposed information is stated, though not directly, in the explicit information that is posed. For this reason, Prince quips that it is “easier to deny having implied something . . . than to deny having presupposed something.”

Presupposed information often relates to communication taking place between entities at the same diegetic level of a narrative, such as when the narrator communicates something explicitly to the narratee. Prince observes that with presupposed information, “the narratee is immediately made into an insider of the world to be presented, familiar with parts of it at least, and ready to add new information . . . to the information presupposed.” An example of this appears in Gen 16:14. After Hagar’s encounter with the messenger in the desert, the narrator speaks of the well where the encounter took place, and adds, “Behold, it is midway between Kedesh and Bered.” Presupposed in this explicit information is the existence of two such places, known to the narrator, if not the narratee. This tells us something about the two of them. They share a world where names of places are important, where naming a place gives it significance, and where it is important to specify the well according to its location.

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39 Narratology, 42.
40 Chatman notes that we are often more inclined to accept presupposed information at face value than information that is posed outright, even when it is stated to us directly from the mouth of a reliable narrator. This is because we are given no opportunity to scrutinize it without changing the topic (Story and Discourse, 210–11; see also Prince, Narratology, 42–43).
41 Narratology, 43–44.
between two such places. Through this presupposed information, the narrator builds up a bond with the narratee. Regardless of our limited knowledge as readers (which varies from reader to reader), we are invited to share in this world of meaning between the narrator and the narratee. Implicit information, on the other hand, often works across diegetic levels. This is where the most interesting gaps open up.\footnote{The extreme of this is what Booth and Chatman term “unreliable” narration: this is the situation where the implied author seems to be providing implicit information to the implied reader that is at odds with what the narrator is explicitly communicating to the narratee (Booth, \textit{Rhetoric of Fiction}, 158–59; Chatman, \textit{Story and Discourse}, 148–49).} Whereas presupposed information often reduces the separation between the narrator and the narratee, implicit information often works in the other direction, towards fragmentation. In fact, implicit information is not very effective in its singularity: only when seen as a complete pattern can it be effective. Various clues in the text have to be brought together in order to make sense of the narrative. It is up to the readers to bring these fragments together, but there is no guarantee that they will be able to “put two and two together.”

Examples of this can be seen in Gen 21:11–12. The text tells us explicitly that the matter was very bad in Abraham’s eyes, and this “on account of his son.” We have already seen how this contains presupposed information as to how Abraham perceives Ishmael, but it seems to be implying something else as well. On the one hand, we are given a rare (but momentary) glimpse into Abraham’s mind, but it is a very selective glimpse. The text indicates to us what Abraham is feeling, and even tells us on whose account he is feeling this way, but it does not give us much insight into why he is distressed at the thought of casting out his son, nor does it tell us anything at all about how he feels about Hagar. However, the
narrator (in both the MT and the LXX, though it is more pronounced in the MT because it says “your” slave woman) then tells us that the LORD speaks to Abraham, telling him precisely not to “let it be bad in your eyes on account of the lad and your (MT; LXX: ‘the’) slave woman.” Is this sloppy narration, or is the narrator trying to tell us something here? Is the LORD tacitly telling Abraham that he should be as concerned about driving out Hagar as he is about driving out Ishmael (even while ostensibly telling him not to worry about either one)? Is it significant that Hagar is now referred to as Abraham’s “slave woman” (or simply as “the” slave woman as in the LXX), rather than “Sarah’s slave woman”? And is there a reason why Ishmael is referred to as “the lad” (and in the next verse as “the son of the slave woman”) rather than “your son”? And searching more widely for patterns, should we take into account that in the earlier situation of conflict, Abraham seemed quite willing to turn Hagar over to Sarah without regard for the consequences for her? And even wider, that when Abraham’s life was potentially threatened, on more than one occasion he was more than willing to let Sarah fall into hostile hands in order to save his own skin (Gen 12:14–20, 20:1–18)? The text opens up to greater and greater fragmentation as we consider these implicit possibilities.

This example reveals the quandary caused by implicit information. The narrator may be trying to communicate something implicitly to the narratee (or the implied author may be trying to communicate something to the implied reader), but it is up to the text’s real readers to infer what this is. For this reason, the reading of implicit information actually involves crossing, not only the diegetic levels of a narrative, but also the boundaries of the narrative
itself. However, this brings into play all kinds of considerations that are external to the text. The ability of real readers to correctly interpret the information given implicitly in the text will depend on any number of unpredictable factors: their knowledge of the language used in the text, the degree to which they share the same cultural assumptions as the writer, their disposition when reading, their attitude toward the text, even issues related to gender and class come into play, etc. This is all the truer, the greater the degree of implicitness. A plethora of implicit information is therefore, inevitably, a recipe for a plethora of interpretations. As these real readers try to make sense of the text, by picking up on different clues in the text and weighing them differently, they will come to their own conclusions.

As it turns out, this is exactly what we find in the history of interpretation. To pause for a few moments to consider how real interpreters have responded to the text of Genesis over the course of the centuries, let us look at what they have to say about Hagar’s flight from Sarah’s affliction in Gen 16:8. Didymus the Blind (ca. 313–398), for example, is full of praise for Hagar: her virtue is seen in the fact that God’s messenger converses with her, and her graciousness (εὐγλύνειν) is revealed in her answer to the messenger, since when she says, “I am fleeing from the face of Sarah, my mistress,” she says “nothing petty (φαῦλον) concerning her.”44 Ambrose of Milan (339–397), however, reading the same words (albeit in Latin rather than Greek) detects in Hagar’s response an expression of “immoderate pride” (tumoris immodici), since she speaks Sarah’s name first, and only afterward indicates that

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43 As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan observes, a gap always “enhances interest and curiosity, prolongs the reading process, and contributes to the reader’s dynamic participation in making the text signify” (Narrative Fiction, 129).
she is her mistress.\footnote{De Abraamo 1.16 (PL 14:431D).} The medieval Jewish interpreter, Nachmanides (1194–1270), finds more of the fault with Sarah and Abraham: “Sarah sinned (חטאה) in this affliction (הזה) in this affliction (הזה), and also Abraham in allowing her to do so. The Lord God therefore heard Hagar’s distress, and gave her a son who would be a wild ass of a man to afflict (לענות) the descendants of Abraham and Sarah with every sort of affliction (הענוי מיני בכל).”\footnote{The Torah: with Ramban’s Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated (ed. Yaakov Blinder; New York: Mesorah, 2004), 1:374. Incidentally, in siding with Hagar in this way, Nachmanides stands out from most other medieval Jewish interpreters.} John Calvin, by contrast, in his Genesis commentary of 1554, while also finding fault with Sarah and Abraham, singles Hagar out for particularly strong criticism: Hagar fled because of her “stubbornness” (contumacia) and “indomitable ferocity” (indomitae ferociae). She preferred “to flee rather than return to favour by humbly acknowledging her guilt.”\footnote{Ioannis Calvini commentari in primum librum Mosis, vulgo Genesin (Amsterdam: Ioannis Schipperi, 1671), 84.} To turn to two recent examples, Phylis Trible (1984), approaching the text from a feminist perspective, comments, “Without doubt, these two imperatives, return and submit, bring a divine word of terror to an abused, yet courageous woman.”\footnote{Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 16.} Renita Weems (1988), by contrast, approaching the text as an African-American woman, agrees but adds, “If we are committed to the whole truth, we cannot dismiss Hagar’s participation in this story. Notice her pathetic sense of herself . . . We admire her courage in getting out of the abusive relationship with Sarah . . . But we are disappointed that in the end she did not even have the wherewithal to remain gone.”\footnote{Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible (San Diego: Luramedia, 1988), 12.}
The text itself says nothing explicit about Hagar’s virtue or insolence, yet these interpreters make inferences on the basis of information they have been given in the text, almost as if the text, by the strategic use of these gaps, is compelling them to take sides. To be sure, they are also bringing their own background to bear on how they weigh the information, but it is the text that is providing them with the raw material for their judgments. On the whole, ancient interpreters seem to be more inclined to side with Abraham or Sarah against Hagar, while more recent interpreters seem to be more inclined to side with Hagar, but they all end up taking sides.50 Dry historical-critical interpreters are not immune from this tendency: they do it as much as the others, even if they are more circumspect in how they express it. Observe this remark of Gerhard von Rad from his commentary on Genesis (1952), “All the players (alle handelnden Personen) appear in a negative light: yet the narrator seems to feel the strongest sympathy with Hagar (even though she had offended against right and custom the most).”51 It is perhaps ironic that the narrator of Genesis seems to go out of the way so as to appear to avoid the appearance of taking sides, while interpreters of Genesis inevitably seem to get caught up in it.52

51 Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis Kapitel 12,10–25,18 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952), 166.
52 This is not to say that the text can actually be “neutral” with respect to the characters in the story. Not all interpreters would agree with von Rad that the narrator sympathizes the most with Hagar. Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan, for example, suggests that “the narrator in Genesis 16 places the blame squarely on Hagar for her misfortunes,” casting her as the “other,” the focus of hate and envy in the story (“Neither Here nor There: Boundary and
7. The Wandering Viewpoint

These examples make it clear that when it comes to the implicit information offered within a text, the “real readers” have a crucial part to play in the reading process that cannot be fully predicted or controlled by the text as such. Wolfgang Iser’s concepts of the implied reader and the wandering viewpoint are useful here. Unlike the concept of the implied reader as employed by Booth and Chatman (and generally in narrative theory), Iser’s implied reader (“implizier Leser”) is not merely a construct of the text, but also a potential role that any actual reader of a text must fill in the process of reading. On the one hand, this role is structured by the text as readers follow its guidance, but on the other hand, the fulfilment of the role comes about only by readers incorporating the new experiences that they receive through their reading into their store of knowledge. In Iser’s words,

The fact that the reader’s role can be fulfilled in different ways, according to historical or individual circumstances, is an indication that the structure of the text allows for different ways of fulfilment. Clearly, then, the process of fulfilment is always a selective one, and any one actualization can be judged against the background of the others potentially present in the textual structure of the reader’s role. . . . This is a vital function of the whole concept of the implied reader: it provides a link between all the historical and individual actualizations of the text and makes them accessible to analysis. (The Act of Reading, 37–38)

Since each actualization represents a selective realization of the structure of the implied

Identity in the Hagar Story,” in Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation [ed. Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan; St. Louis: Chalice, 2006], 79). See also Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, who draws on the perspectives of Esther Fuchs to suggest that the narrator puts the blame on both women, depicting them as vicious and competitive (Far More Precious than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991], 155).
reader, this very structure provides a frame of reference within which individual responses to a text can be communicated to others. Iser thus provides a “phenomenology of reading” that describes the dynamic interaction between text and reader from the side of the text.\(^\text{53}\) Although one of the critiques that is sometimes levelled against Iser’s model is that it does not actually go beyond the text, this is precisely what makes it useful for my purposes here. It allows me to acknowledge the part that real readers play in the construction of meaning, while still keeping my focus on the internal dynamics of the text itself.

What drives this, according to Iser, is the presence in the text of what he describes as blanks and negations. These “gaps” in the narrative can be filled only by the actual reader: “They are present in the text, and they denote what is absent from the text, and what must and can only be supplied by the reader’s ideational activity.”\(^\text{54}\) When readers encounter an incoherence in their reading, they try to make sense of it by drawing upon their own store of experience, but a blank, as a negation, can also have the effect of calling into question a reader’s “repertoire of norms.” According to Iser, since the words of a written text must be read sequentially, the interaction between text and reader is dynamic: as readers encounter different perspectives in what they read, they begin to integrate these perspectives into their own previous expectations, but in the process their expectations are themselves gradually transformed. This is what Iser describes as the wandering viewpoint of the text. Although the process is structured by the text, the process itself cannot be performed by the text as such. The connections that a reader makes among the perspectives are the reader’s own. Yet they

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\(^\text{53}\) Describing the interaction from the side of the reader is more the specialty of Rezeptionsgeschichte, as we will see in chapter four.

\(^\text{54}\) The Act of Reading, 216.
are not arbitrary: they have as their reference the *wandering viewpoint*, which leads the reader through the sequence. According to Iser, *negativity*, as a constituent of communication, is therefore an “enabling structure” (*Ermöglichungsstruktur*): it demands a decision or determination (*Bestimmung*) that can only be implemented by the subject, and “this gives rise to the subjective hue of literary meaning, but also to the fecundity of that meaning, for each decision taken has to stabilize itself against the alternatives which it has rejected.”

In Gen 21, readers must look at the scene first through the eyes of the extradiegetic narrator, who observes that the LORD took note of Sarah as promised, and that she conceived and bore a son for Abraham in his old age. This sets everything in play: over the next fifteen verses, readers pass through a sequence of shifting viewpoints. We hear the direct speech of Sarah, which tells us what she is thinking: “God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me” (Gen 21:6). From there, readers are placed in the position of everyone who hears: individual readers may respond differently, but they have all been placed by the text in the position of imagining themselves laughing with (or at) Sarah. In the next scene, we are back to external focalization, but with the narrator showing us Sarah looking at Ishmael “playing” (character focalization embedded in external focalization). We see what she sees, but we do not know what she is thinking. Nevertheless, by stimulating our imagination, this blank puts us into her mind more effectively than anything the narrator could have told us explicitly. Then she addresses Abraham, and we hear through Abraham’s ears her words to him: “Cast out this slave woman along with her son, for the son of this

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55 Ibid., 230.
slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac!” (Gen 21:10) We do not hear Abraham’s response: again, we have to imagine it for ourselves. In the same vein, the wandering viewpoint takes the reader likewise through various shifting perspectives as the passage continues. From Abraham, the viewpoint switches to the LORD telling Abraham to listen to Sarah’s words but also promising to make Ishmael into a nation. Then we return again to external narration, with focalization, first on Abraham (“Abraham rose in the morning . . . ,” Gen 21:14) and then on Hagar (“and she wandered in the desert of Beersheba . . . ,” Gen 21:14–19). Finally the viewpoint shifts from Hagar to Ishmael: “God was with the lad, and he grew;” and, as the text says, “his mother took for him a wife from the land of Egypt” (Gen 21:20).

The net effect of all this is that readers have to integrate for themselves these multiple points of view. Through the process of making their way through the passage, readers experience the situations of all the characters in the episode, and are given an opportunity to feel sympathy (or the opposite of sympathy, as the case may be) for each of them. Actual readers will integrate these shifting perspectives differently, but the wandering viewpoint of the text ensures that all of them will have had to work their way through the various perspectives. According to Iser, how an individual reader fills in the blanks is not nearly as important as the structure of the blank itself: by stimulating and guiding the reader’s powers of imagination, the blanks in the text have in effect pulled the reader experientially into the narrative. This helps to explain some of the patterns we have already observed in the history of interpretation of Genesis. According to Iser’s theory, part of the reason that the documented readers of the text display the diverse responses that they do is because they
have been stimulated by the text to take sides. The process of reading the text itself has drawn them into the narrative and they have responded at a personal level to produce their own distinctive understandings.56

8. Concluding Thoughts

As we have discovered, the ways in which Genesis tells the story of Abraham’s family is as important as the story itself. In my description of the Genesis account, I identified a number of features—*narration and narrative levels, focalization, naming, narrative gaps,* and *wandering viewpoint*—that illustrate the distinctive ways that Genesis tells this particular story. Among these features, the most important is the wandering viewpoint, which ensures that readers experience the conflict of the story from multiple points of view. At the same time, the text leaves the tension of the story unresolved at the level of the discourse. Readers are not told who is in the right or who is in the wrong, who is being treated fairly or who is being wronged, which characters are at fault or what they should have done. The readers have to judge these things for themselves on the basis of the information they have been given, and having taken into account what they have seen and heard, they are given the task of resolving the tension on their own. This is an uncomfortable position for readers to be in.

56 Although Iser developed his theory of aesthetic response in an attempt to describe how modern literary texts work, some scholars have found it useful for describing ancient texts, especially texts that contain the kind of rich narratives that we find in Gen 16 and 21. Amanda Benchkhuysen, for example, uses the interpretations of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Phylis Trible, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky to show how the text of Genesis guides the reader while yet “inviting multiple and diverse responses to the textual structures” (“Actualizing Hagar’s Story: The Interchange between the Reader and the Text in the Interpretation of Genesis 16 and 21,” PhD diss. University of St. Michael’s College, 2010, 248). See also Krzysztof Sonek, *Truth, Beauty, and Goodness in Biblical Narratives: A Hermeneutical Study of Genesis 21:1–21* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), esp. 212–23.
The effect of this is that they are pulled into the conflict in spite of themselves, and it is almost impossible for them not to end up taking sides. As we have seen, this is exactly what real readers of the text of Genesis have done throughout the history of interpretation: inevitably they are dragged into the conflict as they seek to resolve the tension. Because of this, we might characterize the narrative of the story of Abraham, Hagar and Sarah, Ismael and Isaac, as it appears in Genesis, as “filled with conflict and fraught with tension.”

Genesis thus sets dangerous dynamics in motion. How individual readers will respond to the story is quite unpredictable, and consequently, the end results cannot be foreseen. Yet, even while not controlling how readers respond to the story, the text also sets limits. The wandering viewpoint provides a system of checks and balances that keeps the structure of the narrative within bounds. Just when the conflict seems to be on the verge of spiralling out of control, the narrative shifts back into balance, such as when it picks up on the story of Hagar and Ishmael in the desert after they have been cast out. Disaster is averted at the one moment when it had seemed so inevitable. In moves like this, the complexity of the Genesis account is revealed most starkly. On the one hand, readers are almost compelled by the tension to take sides, and inevitably they will do so. Yet a sensitive, careful, even “faithful,” reading of the account should also cause them to pause before responding too quickly. Even as readers are being stimulated to take sides in the conflict, they are also being offered the possibility of taking more than one side in the conflict, even of taking multiple sides.

57 Of course the story can also be told in other ways. See appendix 1 for four alternative versions of how the story was told in ancient times.

58 To anticipate chapter three and beyond, we can look at Galatians as an instance in the problematic history of effects of Genesis.
Although readers in their efforts to resolve the uncomfortable tension may pick up on only one grain and push it for all it is worth, their response will have to rub up against all the other grains. In this way, Genesis has a “multigrain” texture that runs along multiple lines, and holds the structure in balance.

To return to my own responses to the text, Genesis tells a story that I find to be troublesome, and it is troublesome at multiple levels. In particular, I find the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael into the desert with only a meagre provision of water and food after they are no longer of any use to Abraham and Sarah to be especially troubling. This story would probably be troublesome no matter how it is told, but Genesis tells the story in such a way that these troublesome aspects are accentuated. As a result, along with other readers of the text, I am thrown into the uncomfortable position of having to resolve the tension for myself, and I too end up taking sides, as I follow up one or the other of the grains. But regardless of the grain I end up following, I inevitably come up against the wandering viewpoint of the text. By telling the story from a perspective that includes Hagar’s and Ishmael’s point of view, the text seems to be saying that the story of the covenant cannot be told without also attending to those who are excluded. While it may be true, as Genesis also seems to be suggesting, that the making of a covenant necessarily entails including some and excluding others, ultimately this story is not merely the story of the triumph of Isaac’s line. In telling the story in the way that it does, Genesis seems to be affirming that the story cannot be properly told without also including what happens to those who have been excluded. The story that Genesis tells is therefore troublesome, and a story that has to be troublesome, so much so that if we are not troubled by it, we have not “gotten the story right.”
Chapter Three
Galatians

1. Preliminary Comments

The task of this third chapter is to provide a description of what Paul does with the Genesis story of Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac, in his letter to the Galatians. As in the previous chapter, this is not a proper “exegesis” of the passage, but merely a description of what lies on the “surface of the text,” as it were.1 Here again, however, this is not as simple as it might seem at first glance. Although Paul comes across here in this passage as making an argument rather than retelling a story, many of the same difficulties present themselves as arose in my examination of the narrative of Genesis. Like the narrative of Genesis, Paul’s argument here is full of gaps. It is nearly impossible not to succumb to the temptation of attempting to enter into Paul’s mind to figure out what he is trying to say so as to make it intelligible. This is what interpreters of Galatians inevitably must do in the process of reading the passage, but it is precisely what I want to avoid (at least, as much as possible). My aim here is not to provide an exegesis of Paul’s argument, or even to try to make sense of what he is saying, but merely to produce a description of the text.2

It is important to emphasize at the outset that when I refer to “Paul” here in this chapter, I am not referring, strictly speaking, to the historical figure who produced the text. To draw again from the language of literary theory, I am referring to the implied author of Galatians

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1 I say this with the caveat that there is no such thing as a “neutral” description of the text. I am, of course, just another reader of the text of Galatians in the history of interpretation, offering a perspectival description of the text.

2 And I should also reiterate, not a description of the text for its own sake, but rather a description of the condition for the possibility of the history of interpretation: there is of course no fixed “text” that exists independently of the history of interpretation.
that is embedded in the text. It is this implied author who, as an internal function of the text, is held to be responsible (at least by literary theorists) for the discourse that appears within it. More precisely, my task in this chapter is to track divergences within the Christian canon between the story as it is told in the text of Genesis and how it is treated in the text of Galatians. This is a synchronic question of the canon, not a diachronic question of the text’s historical formation. What the historical Paul was trying to accomplish when he produced the text is a different question. Although Paul (the implied author) does not say explicitly in Gal 4:21–5:1 that he is working with the text of Genesis, there are good reasons for inferring that this is so. Not only does Paul tell the Galatians that they should listen to “the law” (Gal 4:21), and that “it has been written” (Gal 4:22) when introducing the point that Abraham begot two sons, but he also quotes “the Scripture” as saying words that exactly (or nearly exactly) coincide with words that appear in the written text of Genesis as we have it in Gen 21:10 (both the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint). Moreover, almost all interpreters of this passage in the history of interpretation have assumed that Paul is referring to the biblical book of Genesis here. However, the decisive reason for bringing Genesis and Galatians into relationship is simply that they both appear together in the Christian canon of Scripture. When I refer to “Paul” in this chapter, therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the version of Paul to whom I am referring is the implied author of Galatians as it is found within the canon of the Christian New Testament.3

As already noted, Paul seems to be making an argument here rather than retelling a story.

3 And again, as I mentioned in the last chapter, what I mean by this is the canon as it has been passed down in the traditions of the Western church.
Nevertheless, I can begin much as I began in the previous chapter. There I distinguished between the *story* (as the basic content of *what* is told), and the *discourse* (which relates to *how* the content is told). In the case of Galatians, the basic content is expressed primarily through Paul’s argument. Therefore, just as I began my investigation in the last chapter with a summation of the story that is told in the narrative of Genesis, I will begin here with an analysis of the structure of Paul’s argument as a summary of the passage. However, analyzing what we might call the “argumentative” aspect of Paul’s discourse will not be enough to provide a thorough description of the passage. Other aspects of Paul’s discourse are also worth exploring. One of these is what we might call the “allegorical” aspect. We cannot avoid Paul’s use of the term “allegorical” in Gal 4:24 (as much as some of us might like). This is by far the issue that has garnered the most attention in the history of interpretation of the passage. Even if Paul is not actually doing allegory here (as some have claimed), he presents it as such. Indeed, as we shall see, Paul seems to be employing multiple figurative associations (however we might refer to them), and it is necessary to sort these out before proceeding. Finally, there is also a “narrative” aspect to Paul’s discourse that deserves attention. As part of his argument Paul makes reference to the story that appears in Genesis. His discourse in effect tells a version of the story even as he makes his argument. This passage can therefore be subjected to an analysis of its narrative structure similar to what I conducted on passages from Genesis in the previous chapter. Thus my description of Gal 4:21–5:1 will consist of (1) an analysis of the structure and flow of Paul’s argument, (2) an analysis of the allegorical structure of his discourse, and (3) an analysis of the narrative structure of the text.
2. Structure and Flow of Paul’s Argument

Analyzing the structure and flow of Paul’s argument provides us with a summary of Gal 4:21–5:1. Of course, the study of Paul’s style of argumentation is a topic of its own, and Hans Dieter Betz, for one, makes the category of forensic argumentation in ancient Greek rhetorical theory the cornerstone of his analysis of Galatians as a whole.\(^4\) Here, however, I am not interested in the genre of Paul’s argument, nor am I interested in its persuasiveness.\(^5\) Rather, my purpose here is to describe the basic content of what Paul says in as simple terms as possible. This means that I will not be trying to fill in the gaps or resolve the apparent contradictions. Interpreters variously fill in the gaps in Paul’s discourse as best they can, and I will draw attention to a few of the places where they seem to be especially compelled to do this, but I will mention them only in so far as they assist in describing the text. Through the

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\(^4\) On the basis of the letter’s argument, Betz characterizes Galatians as an “apologetic speech,” and he identifies Gal 4:21–31 as the sixth argument of the probatio (which stretches from Gal 3:1 to 4:31). As such, the passage constitutes Paul’s final (and most persuasive) argument (Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 15, 238–40). Against Betz, others see Galatians as primarily composed of deliberative rather than forensic rhetoric, since it is aimed at convincing the Galatians to adopt a particular course of action. Ben Witherington III: “The allegory, being part of a piece of deliberative rhetoric, is attempting to aid the Galatians’ decision-making process by emphasizing the enslaving results of submitting to the Law” (Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 326 n.15).

course of his argument, Paul makes use of many words that typically function as logical connectors in Greek texts: ἀλλά (“but”), γάρ (“for”), δέ (“and” or “but”), δηό (“consequently”), καί (“and” or “also”), μέν (“indeed”), and οὖν (“therefore”), as well as the construction μέν/δέ (on the one hand . . . , while on the other . . . ). That he uses these words at all is enough to treat his discourse here as an argument; of what sort it is, or whether it even makes any sense, is another question.

Paul begins by appealing directly to his readers. “Tell me,” he says, “you who want to be under the law (ὑπὸ λόγον), you listen to the law (ὁ λόγος), do you not?”6 With this second person plural imperative, Paul addresses his readers collectively by characterizing them according to the point that is at stake. They want to be “under the law,” but Paul has already explained to them that to be “under the law” is to be under the control of a custodian (Gal 3:23–24) and to be in need of redemption (Gal 4:4–5). Now Paul seems to be saying that since they desire to be under the law, they should pay attention to what “the law” actually says. The point he seems to be making is that a correct understanding of the law should be telling them that, contrary to what they may be thinking, they ought not to be putting themselves “under the law.” He is thus pitting two uses of the term “law” (νόμος) against each other.7 The verb here, “listen” (ἀκούω), in this situation might also have an additional sense of obedience: since they desire to be under the law, Paul is now going to show them

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6 λέγετε μοι, οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι, τὸν νόμον οὐκ ἀκούετε; (Gal 4:21).
7 J. Louis Martyn: “Striking is Paul’s dual reference to the Law in 4:21, once negative—‘wish to live under the power of the Law’—and once positive—‘really hear what the Law says’—the latter being the first positive note about ‘the Law’ in the letter” (Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary [AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997], 433).
from the law itself what they need to do.\textsuperscript{8}

Paul then continues, “for it has been written” (γέγραπται γὰρ) that Abraham begot two sons.\textsuperscript{9}

Elsewhere Paul uses this formula to introduce a direct quotation from the Scriptures, but here he seems to be using it to introduce, not a direct quotation, but a summary of the Abraham story as it appears in Genesis.\textsuperscript{10} He seems to take for granted that his readers would know the events to which he is referring.\textsuperscript{11} Strictly speaking, however, nowhere does it say in Genesis that Abraham begot “two sons”: as a matter of fact, he has eight, if we include the list of sons through Keturah that appears in Gen 25:2.\textsuperscript{12} Paul’s reference therefore presupposes the point in the story after Isaac has been born but before Ishmael has been cast out: at this point in the story, Abraham does indeed have two sons. Paul then

\textsuperscript{8} LSJ 53–54.


\textsuperscript{11} Most commentators also take this for granted. De Boer: “The Galatians would have seen the connection, knowing enough of the story of Sarah (and of Hagar) to make that connection” (“Paul’s Quotation of Isaiah 54.1 in Galatians 4.27,” NTS 50 [2004]: 377 n.30); Troy A. Miller: “The most likely (or perhaps only) logical reason for how Paul can so matter-of-factly (i.e., without argumentation) present this highly charged, dualistic characterization of these two figures, is that his hearers and/or readers share with him a common knowledge of the Jewish traditions on these figures” (“Surrogate, Slave and Deviant? The Figure of Hagar in Jewish Tradition and Paul [Galatians 4.21–31],” in Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality [ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias; London: T&T Clark, 2009], 2:150).

\textsuperscript{12} As can be seen in appendix 2, some commentators puzzle over this: how can Paul say that Abraham begot only two sons?
begins a series of several contrasts. One son, he says, was “from the slave woman” (ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης), while the other was “from the free woman” (ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθέρας). He then elaborates by saying further: but (ἄλλα) on the one hand (μὲν), the son from the slave woman had been begotten (γεγέλλεν, passive of γελλάω) in “accordance with the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα), while on the other (δὲ), the son from the free woman had been begotten “through a promise” (δι’ ἐπαγγελίας), sharpening the contrasts through the use of the particles ἄλλα, μὲν, and δὲ. At this point Paul is not explicitly “allegorizing,” but he is doing something similar in that he is setting up a structured dichotomy between two contrasting entities.

Paul then declares that “these things” (ἄτινα, neuter relative plural pronoun) are Ἀλληγοροῦμενα, (present passive participle of Ἀλληγορέω). This might be translated variously as “are allegorical,” or “when rendered allegorically,” or “when allegorized.” I will refrain from tackling the issue of “allegory” for the moment, but there is also a gap here in that it is not precisely clear what the antecedent to the pronoun is—i.e., what are “these things” that he is referring to? As he continues, Paul explains that these (αὕτω, feminine

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13 ἵνα ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης καὶ ἵνα ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθέρας (Gal 4:22b). From Paul’s use of the articles, C. K. Barrett argues that Paul does not introduce these terms into the discussion by his own choice: he has been forced to use them because his opponents were using them and he could not escape them. Where Paul says “of the slave woman” (ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης) and “of the free woman” (ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθέρας), Barrett points out, “Of which slave, and of which free woman? The wording implies that the story is already before the Galatians; they will know that the slave is Hagar, the free woman Sarah. The articles are anaphoric in this sense” (“The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians,” in Essays on Paul [London: SPCK, 1982], 161).

14 ἄλλα ὁ μὲν ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης κατὰ σάρκα γεγέννηται, ὁ δὲ ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθέρας δι’ ἐπ’ ἄγγελίας (Gal 4:23).

15 ἄτινα ἐστιν Ἀλληγοροῦμενα (Gal 4:24a). See appendix 2 for how interpreters handle this
plural demonstrative) are two “covenants” (διωθηκαί), one of which “gives birth into slavery” (ἐἰς δουλεῖαν γεννώσα, active form of γεννάω) from Mount Sinai. He never gets around to describing the other covenant, even though he starts off with what looks like a μέν/δέ construction, which would have allowed him to describe the other covenant in a second clause. Instead, he seems to be distracted from finishing his thought by describing the first covenant in more and more detail. Using language that is conventionally associated with allegory to equate one thing with another, he declares, “This is Hagar” (ἡτίς ἐστίν Ἁγαρ), referring to the covenant that gives birth into slavery from Mount Sinai. He then adds (using δέ) that this mountain, which he calls “Hagar” (with the neuter article ἡ) and identifies as Sinai, is in Arabia. He continues (using another δέ), saying that it “is in line with” (συστοιχέω) the present Jerusalem (νῦν Ἰερουσαλήμ). Again, it is not clear what Paul means by this exactly. In any case, Paul seems to be making a connection between Mount Sinai/Hagar and the present-day city of Jerusalem, arguing that this is because she (that is, the present-day city of Jerusalem presumably) is enslaved (δουλεύω) along with her children.

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16 ἀντι αὐτής ἐτεν δῶο διαθήκαι, μία μέν ἀπὸ ὀροὺς Σινᾶ εἰς δουλεῖαν γεννώσα, ἡτίς ἐστίν Ἁγαρ (Gal 4:24b). Here is another gap: what is the connection between Hagar and Sinai here? (Again, see appendix 2.)

17 τὸ δὲ Ἁγὰρ Σινᾶ ὦρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ (Gal 4:25a). There are a number of textual variants of this verse appearing in the manuscript tradition. (This of course has also attracted a great deal of attention on the part of interpreters.) Aside from the text-critical issues, it is also not clear to interpreters why Paul even brings in a reference to Arabia. See appendix 2.

18 συστοιχέε δὲ τῇ νῦν Ἰερουσαλήμ (Gal 4:25b).

19 LSJ 1734: “to stand in the same rank or line, of soldiers; to be coordinate with, correspond to; to walk according to.” Again, see appendix 2.

20 δουλεύει γὰρ μετὰ τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς (Gal 4:25c). Here is another gap: how can it be said that the present-day city of Jerusalem and her children are enslaved? (See appendix 2.)
By contrast (using δέ), the “Jerusalem above” (ἡ ἢνω Ἰερουσαλήμ) is free.21 It is not at all clear what he means by this, but Paul does say, again using language conventionally associated with allegory, “This is our mother” (ἡτις ἐστὶν μήτηρ ἠμῶν).22 Nor is it precisely clear to whom he is referring when he says “our” (ἡμῶν). He may be thinking of himself along with the Galatians in particular as children of the same “mother,” but he does not make this explicit. Paul then introduces a direct quotation from the Scriptures, this time from Isaiah, using the formula: “Rejoice, barren woman (στείρα) who does not give birth (τίκτω); break out and shout, you who do not suffer birth pangs, because the children of the desolate woman (ἐρήμως) are more numerous than the children of the woman who has the husband.”23 Again, Paul does not explain how this fits with his argument.24 He seems to be making a connection between the “Jerusalem above” who is our mother, and the desolate woman mentioned in the quotation who does not have the husband, but this is not made explicit. However, Paul then explicitly addresses his readers again by saying, “But (δέ) you,

21 Or “is a free woman,” but the contrast here is with the verb δουλεύω in the previous verse, not with παιδίσκη in 4:22–23, so it is probably better to read it adjectivally, as argued by Sam K. Williams, Galatians (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 125.
22 ἡ δὲ ἢνω Ἰερουσαλήμ ἔλευθερα ἐστίν, ἡτις ἐστὶν μήτηρ ἠμῶν (Gal 4:26). This of course also provides much fodder for interpreters to fill in the gaps. Again, see appendix 2: what does Paul mean by the “Jerusalem above”?
23 γέγραπται γάρ· εὐφράνθητι, στείρα ἡ οὐ τίκτωσα, ῥήξον καὶ βόησον, ἢ οὐκ ὄδινουσα· ὅτι πολλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐρήμου μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα (Gal 4:27). This is identical to Isaiah 54:1 as it appears in the Septuagint. The interpretation of Is 54:1 is a subject in its own right. Kamila Blessing notes that the “barren woman” motif in the MT and LXX is not one but two distinct figures, juxtaposed here but not conflated, each with its own meaning (“Desolate Jerusalem and Barren Matriarch: Two Distinct Figures in the Pseudepigrapha,” JSP 18 [1998]: 47–69).
24 See appendix 2 for how interpreters fill this gap.
brothers and sisters (ἀδελφοί) are children of promise, like Isaac.‖

At this point, Paul picks up again the reference to Isaac and returns to the Genesis story, saying, “but” (ἀλλά) just as at that time “the one who had been begotten in accordance with the flesh” (ὁ κατὰ σάρκα γεννηθεῖς, the passive form of γεννάω again) used to persecute the one who “had been begotten in accordance with the spirit (τὸν κατὰ πνεῦμα), so also now.”

There are several difficulties here, as we shall see when exploring the allegorical and narrative aspects of the passage, but one such difficulty is that there is no (explicit) reference to persecution in the Genesis account. Another is that Paul neither indicates explicitly who in his own situation is being persecuted, nor who is doing the persecuting. Nevertheless, “the Scripture” (ἡ γραφή), according to Paul, has something to say in this situation: “But (again using ἀλλά),” he asks, “What does the Scripture say?” He then quotes words that are identical (or rather, nearly identical) to the words of Sarah as they appear in Genesis (both LXX and MT): “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will surely not inherit along with the son of the free woman.” Paul diverges from the text of Genesis here with regard to three details, two of which can be regarded as minor, and one which can be regarded as major. First, whereas Genesis (both MT and LXX) reads “this slave woman” (LXX: τὴν παιδίσκην ταύτην; MT: יתגר עליה) and “the son of this slave woman” (LXX: ὁ υἱὸς τῆς παιδίσκης ταύτης; MT: יתגר עליה), Paul merely says, “the
slave woman” (τὴν παιδίσκην) and “the son of the slave woman” (ὁ υἱὸς τῆς παιδίσκης) respectively. This seems to reflect the broader perspective of Paul’s allegory: he is not so much referring to a particular slave woman (as Sarah in Genesis is doing), but to the category of person that this slave woman represents.\(^\text{29}\) Secondly, whereas Genesis reads merely that the son of the slave woman will not (LXX: οὐ; MT: כֵּן) inherit, Paul says that he will “surely not” (οὐ μὴ) inherit. This serves to intensify the son’s exclusion.\(^\text{30}\) Finally, whereas the text of Genesis has Sarah saying “along with my son Isaac” (LXX: μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ μου Ἰσαὰκ; MT: לאשענ—אשא–זא), Paul has the Scripture saying, “along with the son of the free woman” (μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἐλευθέρας). This constitutes a major divergence in that it indicates a shift in perspective from Sarah to a perspective outside the story itself. I will return to this point in my exploration of the narrative structure of the passage, but here let me note that it again seems to reflect that Paul has in mind, not just a particular son, but a category of person.\(^\text{31}\)

The next two verses provide conclusions to what Paul says in the passage (introduced with διό and οὖν respectively). “Consequently (διό), brothers and sisters (ἀδελφοί),” he says, “we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman.”\(^\text{32}\) It is not quite clear how this

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\(^{29}\) Witherington: “Notice that Paul is not really interested in the characters in the story itself. Sarah is never mentioned by name nor is Ishmael, and Isaac is not mentioned by name until vs. 28. It is what these characters represent (promise and freedom on the one hand or flesh and slavery on the other) and what their story tells us about the ways of God with his people that Paul is interested in” (Grace in Galatia, 336).

\(^{30}\) As noted by James D. G. Dunn (The Epistle to the Galatians [BNTC; London: A & C Black, 1993], 258); Susan G. Eastman, “‘Cast Out the Slave Woman and her Son’: The Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion in Galatians 4.30,” \textit{JSNT} 28 (2006): 310.

\(^{31}\) This is of course another gap that readers have to fill in. (See appendix 2.)

\(^{32}\) διό, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἐσμέν παιδίσκης τέκνα ἄλλα τῆς ἐλευθέρας (Gal 4:31).
follows from the previous statement, but it serves to affirm what he has already pointed out in Gal 4:28, that the Galatians are children of promise, like Isaac, but now Paul seems to be including himself as well. For most of the history of interpretation of this passage, this was seen as the conclusion of the pericope. Hence the statement that follows has been traditionally severed from the rest of the passage by its inclusion in chapter five when Galatians was divided into chapters in the eleventh century. More recently, however, Galatians 5:1 has been seen as the conclusion to the pericope, and as a result I have included it in my own delineation of the passage in this investigation. Here Paul concludes with another second person plural imperative, in parallel to the one with which he began: “Christ set you free (ἐλευθερόω) for the sake of freedom (ἐλευθερία),” he says, “Stand therefore (οὖν) and do not get caught up again in a yoke of slavery (δουλεία).” He thus finishes his thought by making a final contrast between slavery and freedom.

By way of summary, the structure and flow of Paul’s argument can be presented diagrammatically. Diagram 1 illustrates the symmetrical (but unbalanced) binary structure of the passage; diagram 2, the flow of Paul’s argument across the structure. As can be seen in diagram 1, Paul starts off by noting the two sons of Abraham, but this immediately results in

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33 Some commentators from earlier in the twentieth century treat v. 30 as the end of the pericope: Zahn (1922), Bousset (1917), Lagrange (1926), Oepke (1937), also Cosgrove (1987), Suhl (1987). Most commentators, however, follow the tradition in taking it to the end of v. 31: e.g. Burton (1921), Longenecker (1990), Matera (1992), Dunn (1993), Moo (2013), Das (2014).

34 More recently, some commentators take the pericope through to 5:1: e.g. Bruce (1982), Fung (1988), Martyn (1997), Witherington (1998), de Boer (2011), but this is also the position of Lightfoot (1865).

35 τῇ ἔλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν: στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγὸ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε (Gal 5:1).
a separation into two contrasting binaries that line up neatly.\textsuperscript{36} One son is from a slave woman, having been begotten in accordance with the flesh; the other from a free woman, having been begotten through a promise. (As noted, he is of course referring to Ishmael and Isaac respectively, but he does not need to mention them by name.) I therefore arrange these in two parallel columns. Paul then moves on to the two covenants, which are similarly distinguished by their contrasting features. This time, however, Paul does not explicitly state both sides of every contrast. Having established the structure in Gal 4:21–23, he can now quickly move from one side of the binary structure to the other without spelling out the exact correspondences in every case. We can infer what he means in most cases, however, and they are included here in diagram 1 in brackets. Sometimes this is self-evident, as in the case of Sarah as the analogue to Hagar. Nowhere in the passage does he mention Sarah by name, but he does not need to, any more than he needs to mention Ishmael by name. Sometimes, however, it is not so clear, as in the analogue to Mount Sinai in Arabia. We could suppose that he is somehow thinking of Mount Zion in Jerusalem, which I have included here in the second column with a question mark. And so it continues through the rest of the passage. At points Paul focuses on one side of the binary structure, and at other points he focuses on the other side, but rarely does he explicitly treat both. By “zigzagging” in this way, he is able to leave some points in complete obscurity. For example, who are “they” in Gal 4:28, who are in contrast to “you,” the children of promise, or in Gal 4:31, in

\textsuperscript{36} A similar diagram appears in Johann Albrecht Bengel’s \textit{Gnomon Novi Testamenti} (Tübingen: Philippi Schrammii, 1742), 756, and in the commentaries of many subsequent interpreters. By arranging the elements in two parallel columns, these commentators present the contrasting elements in a single glance. Martyn includes two diagrams: one that presents Martyn’s understanding of the binary structure of Paul’s argument and a second that presents Martyn’s reconstruction of the simpler binary formations of the Teachers.
contrast to “us,” who are children of the free woman? Or, who is it in Gal 4:30 who is being told to “cast out the slave woman and her son”? This “zigzag” pattern is illustrated in diagram 2. The flow of Paul’s argument follows a zigzag pattern that moves back and forth across the structure. This makes for a very lively (and needless to say, rather confusing) dynamic.
Diagram 1:
Binary Structure of Galatians 4:21–5:1


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>one son, [Ishmael]</th>
<th>one son, [Isaac]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>from the slave woman</td>
<td>from the free woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>begotten in accordance with the flesh</td>
<td>begotten through a promise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gal 4:24–27: “these are two covenants”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>one covenant, “Hagar”</th>
<th>[one covenant, “Sarah”]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>from Mount Sinai</td>
<td>[from Mount Zion?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giving birth into slavery</td>
<td>[giving birth into freedom]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Arabia</td>
<td>[in Jerusalem?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present Jerusalem</td>
<td>Jerusalem above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is enslaved</td>
<td>is free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children are slaves</td>
<td>[children are free]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[she is “their” mother; who are “they”?]</td>
<td>she is our mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woman with the husband</td>
<td>barren/desolate woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[does not rejoice?]</td>
<td>Rejoices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[few children?]</td>
<td>many more children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gal 4:28–29: “But just as at that time . . . so also now”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[who are the children of the flesh?]</th>
<th>you are children of promise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[like Ishmael]</td>
<td>like Isaac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>son begotten in accordance with the flesh</td>
<td>son begotten in accordance with the spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persecutes</td>
<td>Persecuted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gal 4:30–5:1: What does the Scripture say?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>slave woman and her son to be cast out</th>
<th>[who is to cast out the slave woman and her son? The free woman and her son?]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>son of the slave woman will not inherit</td>
<td>son of the free woman will inherit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[who are the children of the slave woman?]</td>
<td>“we” are the children of the free woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yoke of slavery</td>
<td>Freedom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tell me, you who want to be under the law, you listen to the law, do you not? For it has been written that Abraham begot two sons:

one from the slave woman, and one from the free woman.

But the one from the slave woman had been begotten in accordance with the flesh, while the one from the free woman (had been begotten) through a promise.

(which things are allegorically rendered, for they are two covenants,) one, indeed, giving birth into slavery from Mount Sinai. This is Hagar. But the Hagar/Sinai mountain is in Arabia, but it corresponds to the present-day city of Jerusalem. For she is enslaved along with her children.

But the Jerusalem above is free, this is our mother. (For it has been written) Rejoice, barren woman who does not give birth, break out and shout, you who do not have birth pangs, because the children of the desolate woman are more numerous than the children of the woman with the husband. But you, brothers and sisters, are children of promise, like Isaac.

(But just as at that time) the one who had been begotten in accordance with the flesh used to persecute the one who had been begotten in accordance with the spirit (so also now)

(But what does the Scripture say?) Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will surely not inherit along with the son of the free woman. Consequently, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman. Christ set you free for the sake of freedom, stand therefore and do not get caught up again in a yoke of slavery.
3. **Analysis of the Allegorical Structure**

This passage, when examined in terms of its “allegorical” aspect (to use the term loosely), presents us with a hall of mirrors. Within the space of eleven verses, Paul introduces numerous allegorical relationships in quick succession, without fully developing any of them. He starts with allusions to Genesis, mentioning Abraham and his two sons, but he quickly switches to the two mothers, whom he explicitly allegorizes as two covenants. He associates one of these covenants with Mount Sinai. This constitutes an allusion to Exodus, but he leaves what he means by the other covenant obscure. This first covenant quickly transmutes, however, into the “present Jerusalem,” which, apparently, “is enslaved, along with her children.” This language seems vaguely reminiscent of themes in Second Isaiah.

This is followed by the “Jerusalem above,” which is different again. When Paul does introduce a direct quotation from Isaiah, he selects a passage that makes a distinction between the ἐρήμος (“the desolate woman”) and the ἔχοντας τὸν ἄνδρα (“the woman who has the husband”). As we already noted, this may already be a play on themes from Genesis. Each of these allegorical elements has potential to bounce off any of the others, even if Paul does not do so intentionally. For example, what, if anything, does the contrast between the desolate woman and the woman with the husband say about Sarah and Hagar in Genesis? At the same time, the issue is compounded because Paul seems to use terms that fit better with one allegorical relationship when he is talking about another, such as when he equates Hagar (who is associated with Genesis) with Mount Sinai (which is associated with Exodus), and then in turn associates both with Arabia. Likewise, he is not entirely consistent in his terminology. For example, at one point he refers to Isaac as the son begotten “through a
promise” (v. 23), but at another point, as the son begotten “according to the spirit” (v. 29). These may be equivalent in Paul’s mind, but at the level of the words they are quite different. As a result, describing the allegorical aspect of the passage is particularly difficult. The various allegorical elements overlap, interconnect, and bounce off each other in a myriad of directions that threaten to disappear into an endless stream of mirror images, and any attempt to describe them is inevitably going to be messy.\(^{37}\)

Add to this that the modern discourse about allegory is itself something of a minefield. As literary historian Jon Whitman notes, the critical terms allegory and symbol, “not only vary in definition over time; in the course of their development, they expose varying attitudes toward time itself.”\(^{38}\) For the early allegorists of the first century B.C.E. and C.E. who developed allegory as an approach for dealing with ancient literary texts (in their case, primarily Homer), the word ἀλληγορέω signified that one thing was being said (ἀγνξεύσ), while something else (ἀἰιόο) was being signified.\(^{39}\) Starting with Paul (or perhaps not with Paul himself, but with his interpreters), however, the word began to imply “not just a shift in language and thought, but a transition in time.”\(^{40}\) As a result, in the patristic period the term

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\(^{37}\) Just for the record, Philo would be appalled. With Philo, a good allegorical rendering needs to give an account of every detail in the originating text.


\(^{39}\) This definition comes from Heraclitus (*Homeric Allegories* 5.2), but others use the terms ἀλληγορέω and ἀλληγορία in much the same way: Tryphon (*De tropis* 1.1); Demetrius (*On Style*, 151); Strabo (*Geog.* 1.2.7); Plutarch (*Moralia* 19f, 362b); Longinus (*On the Sublime* 9.7), Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Rom Ant* 2.20.1.3), as well as Philo (*Leg.* 2.10) and Josephus (*Ant.* 1.24) in the Jewish tradition, and Cicero (*Att.* 2.20) and Quintilian (*Instit.* 8.6.48) in Latin.

\(^{40}\) Whitman, “From the Textual to the Temporal,” 162. See also *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 60–68, 266.
allegory began to be used to describe how early events in sacred history prefigure later ones.\textsuperscript{41} This was systematized in the medieval period with the “four senses of Scripture.”\textsuperscript{42}

During the Renaissance and Reformation, allegory began to fall out of favour, and especially during the Romantic period at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a sharp reaction against its use. As Whitman points out, the term allegory was increasingly replaced by symbol as the preferred term for describing the relation between texts and time.\textsuperscript{43}

Allegory came to be regarded as abstract, artificial, arbitrary, and rigid; it was through symbol that the unfolding of history could be properly represented.\textsuperscript{44} This hostility to allegory persists to the present day, though in more recent criticism, especially under the influence of poststructuralism, there has been a movement towards the rehabilitation of allegory.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{41} Augustine, for example, says, “When the apostle called it an allegory (allegoria), he had discovered it, not in the words, but in the deeds, as when he showed, from the two sons of Abraham, one from the slave woman, the other from the free woman, that the two covenants should be understood, not as something spoken, but as something done” (De trinitate 15.9.15 [ed. W. J. Mountain; Turnhout, Brepols, 1968, CCSL 50A:482]).

\textsuperscript{42} See my discussion in chapter four on medieval interpretation of the passage.

\textsuperscript{43} “From the Textual to the Temporal,” 167. Whitman focuses in particular on Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s The Statemans’ Manual (1816).


Given this background, it is not surprising that Paul’s use of the term ἀλληγορέω in Gal 4:25 is a source of confusion and controversy at various points in the history of interpretation. For all his admiration of Paul’s rhetorical prowess, for example, John Chrysostom says in the fourth century that Paul “incorrectly” (καταχρηστικῶς) calls the “type” (τύπος) an “allegory” (ἀλληγορία). Similarly, Jerome (perhaps with some embarrassment) says that Paul, in calling it an allegory actually demonstrates the meaning of the passage more strongly by “misusing” (abusio) this Greek word. Calvin, writing in 1548, insists that by his use of the term, Paul means merely that he is making a “comparison” (similitudo) between the past and the present. For more modern interpreters, Paul’s use of the term is even more contentious. Nineteenth-century interpreters dance around themselves trying to deal with their embarrassment. Among recent interpreters, some insist that Paul is not doing allegory here at all, but rather typology, or typology as a very specific (and safely legitimate) form of

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46 Commentarius in epistola ad Galatas 4.24 (PG 61:662).
49 Reflecting on this from a theological point of view, Andrew Louth remarks, “There seems to be a fundamental distaste for, or even revulsion against, the whole business of allegory.” He suggests that this is because it seems to offend against both the Protestant principle of sola scriptura, as well as the modern concern for the historical sense (Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983], 97).
50 For example, John Eadie writes in 1869: “To be allegorized, then, is to be interpreted in another than the literal sense. The simple historical facts are not explained away as if they had been portions of a mere allegory, like the persons and events in Bunyan’s Pilgrim; but these facts are invested with a new meaning as portraying great spiritual truths, and such truths as they were intended and moulded to symbolize. But to say that a portion of early history is allegorized is very different from affirming that it is an allegory, or without any true historical basis” (A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869], 359–60).
allegory, while others insist that Paul is most assuredly doing allegory, just as he says.\footnote{See appendix 2 for a detailed description of these positions.} Most recent interpreters, however, opt for some kind of combination of the two. Other debates range over questions of whether Paul’s hermeneutical approach is closer to “Alexandrian” or “Palestinian” allegory, whether Paul is saying that the passage itself is allegorical or merely that it should be read allegorically, whether the passage serves merely to illustrate a point already proven on other grounds or is a key part of Paul’s argument.\footnote{Again, see appendix 2.}

I am going to try to sidestep this minefield by adopting the working definition of allegory that David Dawson develops in \textit{Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria}. Dawson establishes that for the purposes of his book, allegory “always tries to tell a story: either the 'other meanings' that allegory offers or the ‘literal meanings’ that it plays off against must assume a narrative form.”\footnote{David Dawson, \textit{Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 4.} For Dawson, the so-called ‘literal meaning’ is not a fixed characteristic of the text. Rather, it is the meaning attached to a text by convention. Allegorical readings break away from this conventional meaning by offering something different, but they do so by paying lip service to the conventional meaning. If an allegorical reading actually supplants the “literal” meaning, then it simply becomes a new literal meaning in place of the older one and ceases to be allegory.\footnote{We shall see examples of this with respect to Gal 4:21–5:1 in the next chapter.} Dawson goes on to say that “although the ‘literal sense’ has often been thought of as an inherent quality of a literary text that gives it a specific and invariant character, . . . the phrase is simply an honorific title given to a kind of meaning that is culturally expected and automatically recognized by
By the same token, “typology” is just a specialized category of allegory. As Dawson observes, “On this view, typology is simply a certain kind of allegorical reading promoted as nonallegorical for specific theological and rhetorical reasons.” With this perspective in mind, I refer to the “literal” story of Hagar and Sarah, Ismael and Isaac, as the “originating story” and Paul’s allegorical treatment of it as the “allegorical story.”

As we noted, it is difficult to sort out the allegorical relationships in this passage, since they overlap, interconnect, and reflect back on each other. Fortunately, only one of these relationships is of much interest to us. Within the flow of Paul’s argument, it is possible to delineate the basic outline of at least two distinct but overlapping stories. On the one hand, there is the originating story of Sarah and Hagar, of Ishmael and Isaac. On the other hand, there is the allegorical story that reflects Paul’s contemporary situation. These two stories are conceptually distinct from each other, but they are conflated in Paul’s discourse. One is about the tortured relationships among the members of a family that took place in a previous era, the other is about the conflicts taking place in the churches in Paul’s day. Yet Paul presumably sees similarities between these stories, otherwise he would not be allegorizing the one with the other. As a result, Paul’s telling of these two stories as he makes his way through his argument is tightly interconnected, and it is difficult to know where the one ends and the other begins. Nevertheless, there are clues that can help us infer what is going on “in

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55 Ibid., 7–8.
56 Ibid., 16.
57 Although one could argue that Paul’s allegorical treatment of the originating story does not take explicit narrative form, Dawson’s definition is still satisfied, since the originating narrative to which Paul explicitly refers does assume a narrative form.
Paul’s mind” as it were.⁵⁸ Martyn, for example, observes that Paul consistently uses the present tense when he has the contemporary situation primarily in mind, but other tenses (particularly the aorist) when he is referring back to the “literal” story.⁵⁹ This suggests that at least some of the statements that Paul makes may be explicitly referring to the originating story, even though at any point he may also be ambiguously referring to both stories at the same time.

Paying attention to Paul’s use of tenses yields the following version of the originating story. Abraham, Paul says in Gal 4:22, “begot two sons” (aorist tense of ἔχω). Moreover, one son was from a slave woman, and the other was from a free woman. In Gal 4:23 he says (while looking back to a previous time) that the one who was from the slave woman “had been begotten” (perfect tense of γελλάσω) in accordance with the flesh, whereas the one who was from the free woman (had been begotten) through a promise. Paul then shifts to the allegorical story in his use of tenses, but then in Gal 4:28 he says to the Galatians, “You, brothers and sisters, are (present tense of εἰμί) children of promise, like Isaac.” Although this is primarily a reference to the allegorical story, it also presupposes that Isaac in the originating story had been a “child of promise.” This perhaps helps to explain what Paul means by begotten “through a promise” in Gal 4:23, but what he means by begotten “in accordance with the flesh” remains unclear. Nevertheless, he continues in Gal 4:29 by saying that “the son who had been begotten in accordance with the flesh” (whatever that means) “was persecuting” (whatever that means) “the one who had been begotten in

⁵⁸ Again, when I say “in Paul’s mind” here, I am referring, strictly speaking, to the implied author of the text of Galatians.
⁵⁹ Galatians, 453.
accordance with the spirit.” Paul does not explicitly say that this is Ishmael, but this seems to be what he means. These references are ambiguous, in that they might simultaneously have as much to do with the allegorical story as they do with the originating story, but Paul’s use of tenses seems to suggest that it is their significance for the originating story that is predominating here.

Another avenue to Paul’s version of the originating story is opened up to us in the implicit references he makes to the Genesis account. In this passage Paul is not merely recounting the story of Hagar and Sarah, but invoking the particular telling of that story that appears in the text of Genesis. His use of the formula “it has been written” (γέγραπται γάρ) in Gal 4:22, as well as his explicit, word-for-word quotation of “the Scripture” (ἡ γραφή) in Gal 4:30, indicates that he is referring back to a written text (if only from memory). As a consequence, he does not need to refer to every event in the story, since he knows (or seems to expect) that the reader will be able to fill in the gaps with reference to the text of Genesis. Yet these implicit connections also tell us a great deal about how Paul reads the story. As I noted in my analysis of Paul’s argument, when Paul says that one son “had been begotten in accordance with the flesh,” and the other “through a promise,” his descriptions seem to be heavily coloured by his allegory. This seems to be true even of his use of a term like “begotten” (Greek: γεννάω in the passive; Hebrew equivalent: יִּלַּד in Hifil) The text of Genesis presupposes of course that both sons had been physically begotten, but never actually uses the term in this part of the narrative to describe the begetting of either son.60 Nor do the

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60 Martyn, Galatians, 434. However, when the narrative turns to relating the story of Isaac in Gen 25:20, it does use the term to say that Abraham “begot” (MT: יִּלַּד, LXX: γεννάω) Isaac.
words “flesh” (Greek: σάρξ; Hebrew: בָשָׂר) or “promise” (Greek: ἐπαγγελία; Hebrew: סֵפֶר) appear anywhere in the originating narrative. Nevertheless, we can suppose at the very least that Paul describes Isaac as a “child of promise” (v. 28) and “begotten through a promise” (v. 23) because he was begotten after a son had been explicitly promised to Abraham and Sarah in their old age (Gen 21:2), whereas he describes Ishmael as “begotten in accordance with the flesh” (vv. 23 and 29) because no such explicit promises preceded his conception. On the other hand, describing Isaac as “begotten in accordance with the spirit” seems to arise purely from Paul’s allegorical situation. There is no mention of “spirit” (Greek: πνεῦμα; Hebrew: נר) in the Genesis account, whereas Paul frequently refers to “the spirit” elsewhere in Galatians, and especially to “the promise of the spirit” with regard to the situation in his own time.61

Paul’s reference to persecution in Gal 4:29 is an interesting example. He explicitly states that one son used to persecute (imperfect tense of δηώσ) the other, and this took place “at that time” (τότε). He is thus explicitly referring to the originating rather than the allegorical story. However, Genesis says nothing explicitly about persecution (MT or LXX). At the formal level, therefore, Paul’s version of the story and the narrative of Genesis are at odds with each other at this point.62 What the text of Genesis does say (at 21:9) is that Sarah saw Ishmael “playing” (MT: מצחק) or “playing with Isaac” (LXX: παίζοντα μετὰ Ισαακ). It is

61 Gal 3:14: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse on our behalf . . . in order that the blessing of Abraham might be in Christ Jesus in order that we might receive the promise (ἐπαγγελία) of the spirit (πνεῦμα) through faith.”

62 We can see something similar with Philo’s allegorical account of the Genesis story: the text of Gen 16:6 describes Sarah as “afflicting” (MT: הָנָש; LXX: ἐκάκωσεν) Hagar, whereas in Cong. 172 Philo insists on softening it to mean “disciplining” (παιδεύω), “admonishing” (νουθετέω), or “instructing” (σωφρονιζω). See appendix 1.
possible that Paul is alluding here to an earlier version of some of the traditions that we recounted in the last chapter that “read between the lines” and see in Ishmael’s “playing” something more devious. Or perhaps even at this point Paul is already thinking of the situation in his own time. At the allegorical level, “the son who had been begotten in accordance with the flesh” (possibly Paul’s opponents, those whom Martyn styles the “Teachers”) is persecuting “the son who had been begotten in accordance with the spirit” (presumably Paul or Paul’s Galatian congregations). This may also be influencing his choice here of the imperfect tense as well. He has repeated persecutions in mind with respect to his own situation, and this affects his telling of what took place “at that time” in the originating story, even though Genesis mentions only a single instance of “playing.”

Finally, we have yet a third avenue of access to Paul’s version of the originating story in the allegorical story that he is trying to tell. The allegorical story “plays off” the originating story from which it derives (to use Dawson’s term). We can therefore derive insights as to how Paul views the originating story by the way in which he allegorizes it. This is rather precarious, of course, since the content of the allegorical story itself is rather elusive. Again, it helps that Paul seems to shift into the present tense whenever he seems to have his own situation foremost in mind. This is most obvious in Gal 4:24, when he says, “These things are (present tense of εἰμί) being rendered allegorically,” but he continues in the same tense throughout most of the rest of the passage. The allegorical story that is told in these verses has something of the following outline. There are two covenants, both of which are like women bearing children (v. 24). One is enslaved and bears into slavery; the other is free and

63 Longenecker provides a listing of the various references (Galatians, 200–206).
(presumably) bears into freedom (v. 26). The former corresponds to the “present Jerusalem” (v. 25); the latter to the “Jerusalem above” (v. 26). Paul emphasizes twice that he and his Galatian congregations are children of the latter (vv. 28 and 31), while implying that those who are persecuting them are children of the former (v. 29).

One of the themes of the allegorical story (indeed, of Paul’s argument in general) is the contrast between slavery and freedom. Paul spends much effort describing the allegorical “Hagar” in terms of her status as a slave: the covenant from Mount Sinai gives birth “into slavery” (εἰς δουλείαν, v. 24), the present-day city of Jerusalem “is enslaved” (δουλεύει) along with her children (v. 25), and he declares that we are not “children of the slave woman” (οὐκ ἐσμὲν παιδίσκης τέκνα, v. 31) but of the free woman (ἀλλὰ τῆς ἐλευθέρας). In Genesis, however, while it is true that Hagar is referred to as a “slave woman” (Heb.: נבש and נבש; Gk.: παιδίσκη), her status as a slave is taken for granted as so ordinary as to require no special emphasis. Moreover, although the text of Genesis does not explicitly say so, Abraham’s expulsion of Hagar in effect grants her freedom, which means that Hagar is actually a freed woman in the latter part of the story. The same applies even more to Ishmael, whose status in Abraham’s household is not explicitly specified in the text of Genesis. Paul’s claim that the allegorical Hagar “bears into slavery” (εἰς δουλείαν γεννώσα, v. 24) and “is enslaved along with her children” (δουλεύει γὰρ μετὰ τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς, v. 25) seems to presuppose that Ishmael is a slave. In doing this Paul is reading practices from

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64 Rather, if anything, the emphasis seems to be on her ethnic background, as when the narrator goes out of the way to tell us in Gen 21:9 that Sarah saw the son of “Hagar the Egyptian” playing.
his own time into the text of Genesis. Yet nowhere in Genesis is Ishmael described as a slave. Even though Sarah refers to him as “the son of this slave woman” in Gal 4:30, her insistence that Ishmael shall not inherit along with her son Isaac betrays anxiety over his eligibility to share in the inheritance. Indeed, there would be no reason to expel Ishmael from the household if his status as a son of a παιδίσκη stood in the way of his sharing in the inheritance. Ultimately, Ishmael, like Hagar, finds his destiny as a free person in the desert, but in his case not as a manumitted slave but as someone who never was one. Paul’s emphasis on the status of Hagar and Ishmael as slaves, therefore, does not reflect how the originating story in Genesis turns out.

To continue with Paul’s allegorical treatment of Hagar and Sarah, Paul takes every

65 According to contemporary Greco-Roman practices, the son of a παιδίσκη (Lat.: ancilla) would have the status of a slave, and would certainly not be eligible to inherit. According to practices that had prevailed at earlier times in the Ancient Near East, however, the child of a slave and a free person inherited the status of the free parent, whatever the sex. (See Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982], 139, 144.) This is the practice that is presupposed elsewhere in Genesis. For example, in Gen 49, all the sons of Jacob share in the inheritance, even though two are sons of Rachel’s slave woman (ヶ月, παιδίσκη) Bilhah (Gen 30:3–8), and two are sons of Leah’s slave woman (ษา, παιδίσκη) Zilpah (Gen 30:9–13). Although in Gen 21 there is some ambiguity regarding Ishmael’s status in the household vis-a-vis Isaac, Ishmael’s right to a share in the inheritance is taken for granted. As F. Charles Fensham notes, what Sarah was demanding of her husband would have been considered illegal under Mesopotamian law (“The Son of a Handmaid in Northwest Semitic,” VT 19 [1969]: 317).

66 This in fact presents a problem for ancient interpreters of Genesis who read the text with Roman legal practices in mind. Josephus, for example, presents Ishmael’s expulsion, not as a “disinheritance” but as a “sending away” (ἐθπέκπεηλ) to found a settlement (εἰο πνηθίαλ) elsewhere, out of fear that he might do harm to Isaac after Abraham’s death (Ant. 1, 215). Likewise, John Chrysostom suggests that Sarah’s motivation for expelling Ishmael is not only that she needed to hold his great rashness in check, but also that she could not bear to see the son born from grace and the gift of God “associating” (ζπλαλαζηέθσ) with the son of the Egyptian slave woman (Hom. Gen. 46.2 [PG 54:423]).
opportunity available to draw attention to the contrast between the two: the one has to do with slavery, the other with freedom; the covenant from Mount Sinai “bears into slavery” (v. 24) he says explicitly, and the other (presumably) bears into freedom, since she is “free” (v. 26); the children of the “present Jerusalem” are enslaved, along with their mother (v. 25), while the Galatians have the freewoman, “the Jerusalem above” as their mother (v. 25). With the introduction of the quotation from Isaiah in Gal 4:27, however, Paul shifts to another contrast between the two of them. The woman who does not bear is to rejoice and shout, and the reason for this is that the desolate woman has (or will have) many more children than the one who has the husband. It is not clear how Paul intends this quotation to apply to the allegorical story, but the implication seems to be that the “Jerusalem above,” whom Paul identifies as “our mother,” who presumably also corresponds to the other covenant whom Paul would name as Sarah if he ever slowed down long enough to fill out each of his allegorical relationships, will end up having many more children than the “present Jerusalem,” who corresponds to the covenant from Mount Sinai, whom Paul refers to quite explicitly as “Hagar.” Again, this too cannot help but reflect back on Hagar and Sarah in the originating story. In Paul’s version of the allegorical story, therefore, the descendants of the allegorical “Sarah” will end up being more numerous than the descendants of the allegorical “Hagar.” By association, this implies that in the originating story, the descendants of the literal Sarah will also end up being more numerous than the descendants of the literal Hagar. Again, this differs from what we have in the Genesis account. In Gen 17:16 (both MT and LXX), the LORD promises Abraham that Sarah will have a son who “will become nations,” and “kings of peoples will be from him.” A similar promise is made directly to Hagar by the
messenger in Gen 16:10 (both MT and LXX): “I will greatly increase your offspring, and they shall be too many to count.” Genesis makes no effort to rank the two promises. In fact, they both seem to be elaborations on the promise to Abraham in Gen 15:5 that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars of the sky. Indeed, the LORD seems to emphasize this when explaining to Abraham in 17:20 that although the covenant will not be through Ishmael, the lad will nevertheless be the father of a great nation. In contrast to the account in Genesis, Paul’s version of the story of Hagar and Sarah pits the two against each other, and on every score the one is preferred over the other.

To look at one final point in the allegorical story, there is the direct quotation from Genesis in 4:30. Paul also puts this in the present tense. He does not say, “What did Sarah say?” (as if it applied to the originating story), but “What does the Scripture say?” (as if he sees it applying to his own situation in the present). The “son of the slave woman” in the originating story had been begotten “in accordance with the flesh.” Now in the allegorical story “the one who had been begotten in accordance with the flesh” has been persecuting “the one begotten in accordance with the spirit.” We might reasonably imagine that Paul is referring respectively to his opponents here (those whom Martyn styles as “the Teachers”) and either Paul himself and/or his own Galatian congregations, but this is a gap for the readers to fill in. As interpreted by Paul, the Scripture’s pronouncement upon this situation is that the slave woman and her son are to be cast out, “for the son of the slave woman will not inherit along with the son of the freewoman.” We do not know what this means at the allegorical level precisely, but as far as Paul is concerned, these are the Scripture’s final words on the matter. In fact, however, we know that the narrative of Genesis has more to say
about the fates of Hagar and Ishmael (as well as about the relationship between Isaac and Ishmael later in life), but Paul stops here. This implies that the interests of the “son of the slave woman” and “the son of the free woman” in the allegorical story are ultimately irreconcilable. By association this again presupposes that the interests of Isaac and Ishmael in the originating story are irreconcilable as well.

Paul has raised the stakes in the allegorical realm so much higher than they were in Genesis. What was troubling (even feared) in the Genesis account has now ruptured into an all-or-nothing struggle for exclusive claims to inheritance. A comparison with Philo’s allegory of Hagar and Sarah is helpful here. In various writings, Philo allegorizes Sarah as “virtue” (ἀρετή), and Hagar as her attendant, “the preliminary studies” (τὰ προπαιδεύματα). According to Philo, before one can fruitfully mate with virtue, one must first consort with the preliminary studies, but after one has excelled, one discards the attendant (ζεξαπλιο) and comes into a permanent relationship with true virtue and wisdom. To be sure, there is a tension between the two, but the conflict is mitigated, since the one leads naturally into the other. Although the one is ultimately inferior to the other, there is no real hostility between the two. In this of course, Philo is also diverging from Genesis. But while Philo diverges by de-escalating the conflict that lies at the heart of the Genesis account, Paul in fact goes in the other direction and escalates it. With Paul, the two sides are pitted against each other in irreconcilable conflict: the one begotten in accordance with the flesh against the one who is begotten through the promise, the present-day city of Jerusalem against the Jerusalem above,

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67 See appendix 1.
slavery against freedom, the flesh against the spirit. The multiple dynamics and
crosscurrents of the Genesis account are not reflected in Galatians at all. This seems to imply
that the originating story too is fraught with irreconcilable conflict: Ishmael against Isaac,
Hagar against Sarah.

4. Analysis of the Narrative Structure

As already noted, Paul’s discourse in Gal 4:21–5:1 offers a version of the originating story
that can be subjected to a narratological analysis similar to that which I subjected the
narrative of Genesis. In the previous chapter, I identified five features of the narrative
structure of Gen 16–21 that are particularly helpful for describing how the story is narrated.
These features function analogously in Gal 4:21–5:1. Foremost among these is the
distinction among narrative levels. On the one hand, there is the story at the level of the
diegesis (to use Genette’s term), while on the other, there is the narrating of that story that is
taking place at the level immediately below the diegesis, at the level of the narrating
instance. Whereas the narrative of Genesis is focused primarily at the level of the diegesis,
and, as a result, the narrator can be described as rather covert, the opposite is true with the
narrative structure of Gal 4:21–5:1. Paul may be making an argument, but to the extent that
he is also inadvertently telling a story through his argument (and, in fact as we have seen,
more than one story), he is functioning as a narrator, and an extremely overt one at that.69
He “tells,” rather than “shows,” the story to the narratees, and he gives them a great deal of

69 This involves making a structural distinction between Paul as the implied author and Paul
as the narrator. According to the theory, the implied author is the source of the discourse
and is therefore responsible for what the narrator says; the narrator, strictly speaking, is the
voice that is telling the story to us.
direction as to what they should think about it. This is true with regard to his telling of the originating story as well as the allegorical story. Paul’s argument at the level of the narrating instance dominates the discourse, to such a degree that both stories almost disappear.\(^{70}\)

Nevertheless Paul as a narrator does not monopolize the discourse entirely. Just as the narrator of Genesis occasionally steps aside and lets characters in the story speak with their own voices at yet higher levels of the narrative, so also Paul on occasion (but more rarely than the narrator of Genesis) steps aside to let other voices speak.\(^{71}\) He does this twice in Gal 4:21–5:1. The first instance is not all that significant from the narrative point of view. In Gal 4:26, he provides a quotation (from Isaiah, as it turns out, but again indicated as a quotation with the formula \(\gamma\varepsilon\gamma\rho\alpha\tau\tau\alpha\tau\gamma\upsilon\rho\) to the effect that the childless woman will rejoice over her many descendants. This provides additional commentary on the story but does not alter the dynamics of the narrative. However, the next instance does alter the dynamics. In Gal 4:30, he asks, “What does the Scripture say?” and then in response he quotes what are essentially Sarah’s words in the story: “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will surely not inherit along with the son of the free woman.” Strictly speaking, these words are not exactly the words of Sarah as they appear in the text of Genesis (MT or LXX), as we have already noted. Apart from the two minor divergences (the intensification of the exclusion and omission of the demonstrative adjectives), Sarah finishes her statement in Gen 21:10 with the words, “along with my son Isaac.” Paul’s statement starts off as a

\(^{70}\) In this Paul is similar to Josephus. Both make their discourse overshadow the story—see appendix 1.

\(^{71}\) Or, more precisely, Paul pretends to step aside, and speaks according to O’Neill’s ventriloquism effect.
direct quotation of the exact words of Sarah within the story, but by the end they have become a paraphrase of her words from a point of view outside the story.\(^72\) The crux is that by attributing Sarah’s statement to “the Scripture,” Paul shifts its meaning. It is no longer a statement *within* the story at the level of the *diegesis*, but a statement *about* the story at the level of the *narrating instance*. Paul is not misquoting here: these are indeed the words that “the Scripture” puts on Sarah’s lips (more or less), but he is collapsing a level of the narrative.

There is also another issue related to narrative levels. As I have already noted, Paul is telling at least two stories here: one, the originating story of Hagar and Sarah from Genesis, the other, his allegory of events in his own time. These are most clearly distinguished in Gal 4:29, where he says, “Just as at that time, the one who had been begotten in accordance with the flesh used to persecute the one who had been begotten in accordance with the spirit, so also now.” Here Paul is speaking about the parallel between the two situations: persecution of Isaac by Ishmael in the “literal” story, and persecution of Paul himself and/or the Galatian congregations by “the Teachers” in Paul’s own time (to draw on Martyn’s reconstruction).

There are three other points where Paul explicitly draws attention to the situation in his own time: in Gal 4:26 he describes the Jerusalem above as “our mother,” thus including a reference to himself; in Gal 4:28 he speaks directly to the Galatians, saying, “but you, brothers and sisters, are children of promise, like Isaac”; and in Gal 4:31 he appeals to the Galatians by saying, “therefore, brothers and sisters (ἀδελφοί), we are not children of a slave

\(^{72}\) At least from a structural point of view, Sarah, as a character within the story, would not view herself in the third person as “the free woman.” This is the perspective of the narrator, Paul, looking on Sarah from outside the story.
woman but of the free woman,” again including himself. These references indicate that Paul, at the very same time that he is narrating the originating story from the outside as an 
extradiegetic narrator, is also narrating the allegorical story from the inside as an 
intradiesgetic narrator. The diegesis of the one is actually the narrating instance of the other. Thus the two stories are intricately interconnected, not only with respect to their parallel content, but also with respect to the narrative structure.

The second feature that we looked at was focalization. As we saw, the focalization in how the story is told in Genesis is rather elaborate. To use Chatman’s terms, we see things through both the slant of the narrator and the filters of the characters. As a result, we are given a multidimensional view of the events of the story. With Paul it is much simpler. 73 With respect to his telling of the originating story, everything is told to us from outside the story through the eyes of the narrator. The only exception to this is his quotation of Sarah’s words to Abraham, which gives us a view of things through Sarah’s filter (but even this is momentary in that her words are paraphrased from the perspective of the narrator).

Moreover, Paul’s argument makes it very clear as to what we are to make of the events of the story. Paul sets up a series of binary preferences: Isaac, as one begotten “through a promise” is preferred over Ishmael, who is begotten “according to the flesh.” Sarah, who presumably bears into freedom, is preferred over Hagar, who bears “into slavery.” The Jerusalem above, which is free, is preferred over the present-day city of Jerusalem, who is a slave along with her children. As fitting as these contrasts may be to Paul’s allegory, they

73 Again, as with Josephus, the slant of the narrator consumes the filters of the characters. (See appendix 1.)
cannot help but also reflect back on the originating story, where they are not so fitting. As we already noted, although Hagar is referred to as a slave (MT: שְׂפָחָה, אָם; LXX: παῖδοςκη) in the Genesis account, her status is not dwelt upon as an issue there, and it is not contrasted with Sarah’s status as a free woman. Indeed, the term “free” (ἐλευθέρος, Hebrew equivalent ישפיח) does not even appear in the Genesis account, nor do the terms “spirit”, “promise”, or “flesh” (as we have already noted). However, these contrasts do appear elsewhere in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, where “freedom” is repeatedly contrasted with “slavery,” and “the flesh” is constantly contrasted with “the spirit.” A clear indication of the slant of Paul as a narrator is that he imposes these categories on his rendition of the originating story.

Closely related to this was naming, which was the third feature we looked at with Genesis. As we observed, the slant of the narrator of Genesis is nowhere more perceptible than when the narrator is referring to the various characters. Paul as a narrator is no different. His use of terms is rather illuminating. As we observed, the narrator of Genesis tends to use the name of a character as a base point, frequently supplemented with relational terms that draw attention to the character’s relationship with other characters. Paul, by contrast, does not do this. Although he mentions the name Hagar twice, and Isaac once, for the most part he designates the characters with terms relating to the binary categories of his argument. In my analysis of the allegorical structure I have already emphasized how Paul consistently associates Hagar and Ishmael with slavery, while associating Sarah and Isaac with freedom.

See Gal 2:4; 3:3; 5:16–26, 19–22; 6:8. Particularly illuminating for how central is the contrast between “flesh” and “spirit” in Paul’s mind is Gal 5:17: “For the flesh desires against the spirit, and the spirit (desires) against the flesh, for these things are antithetical (ἀντικατατι) to each other.”
This is expressed primarily through his use of opposing categorical terms: he refers to Hagar as “the slave woman” (ἡ παηδίσκη), to Ishmael as “the son who had been begotten in accordance with the flesh” (ὁ κατὰ σάρκα γεννηθεῖς), to Sarah as “the free woman” (ἡ ἐλευθέρα), and to Isaac as a “child of promise” (τέκνον ἐπαγγελίας). As a result, even the terms that Paul uses to refer to the characters reflect his slant, regardless of whether he is referring to the characters in the originating story or the allegorical story. This is even more pronounced when we note that Galatians lacks the relationship language that is so prominent in Genesis. Absent are the personal pronouns that indicate the relationships between the characters (“her slave woman”, “his son”, “my child”, “his mother”). Instead, what we have again is the slant of the narrator.

The fourth feature of the Genesis account that we looked at was the gaps in the narrative. If anything, this is even more prominent in Paul’s account than it is in Genesis. With respect to the account in Genesis, we distinguished two kinds of gaps. First, presupposed information, which usually operates within a narrative level, often contributes to a bond between the narrator and the narratees. This happens in Paul’s text as well. Paul, when viewed as a narrator, addresses the narratees as ἀδειθνί (“brothers and sisters”) in verses 28 and 31. He also speaks of the Jerusalem above as “our mother” (v. 26), and asserts that “we are children, not of a slave woman, but of the free woman” (v. 31). All this presupposes that Paul (as a narrator) and the Galatians (as narratees) share a common birth (even if it is only allegorical). By not making the content of this commonality explicit, Paul actually contributes to the bond he shares with those he is addressing. Secondly, in contrast to the gaps that arise from presupposed information, there are also gaps due to implicit information, which usually
operate across narrative levels, and often leads to fragmentation. This too appears in Paul’s text. The narratees, the hypothetical readers whom the narrator is addressing, may understand and go along with what Paul is saying, but the real readers may not (whether we think of them as the churches in Galatia in Paul’s time or subsequent readers of Galatians in the history of interpretation). We have access to the former through the text itself (if only indirectly), but not to the latter. With regard to Paul’s version of the originating story, for example, we are left in the dark as to how Paul thinks it ends: his last word on the subject is that the slave woman and her son are to be cast out, he does not recount what happens to them afterward. With regard to Paul’s allegorical story, we are equally in the dark: who are the ones being persecuted, and who is doing the persecuting; who is to be “cast out,” and who is to do the casting? It is not clear how the Galatians would have filled in these gaps, but, as we shall see in the next chapter, there is more than one way these questions have been answered in the subsequent history of interpretation. These gaps provide the blanks that drive the wandering viewpoint.

The final feature that we looked at was the wandering viewpoint as conceptualized by Iser. The story is told in Genesis such that any readers who read it have to work their way through the narrative on a route that is prescribed by the text. How individual readers fill in the gaps will vary from reader to reader, but they will have to do so from a standpoint already structured for them by the text itself as they read. As we saw in the last chapter, Genesis does this in a rather complicated way, primarily by leading readers through a variety of focalizations that reflect the points of view of the characters in the story. In particular, much of Gen 21 focuses on Ishmael as the key character, but we experience the conflict in
the story through the eyes, in turn, of Sarah, Abraham, the Lord, Hagar, and only then
Ishmael himself. Whatever else readers do with the story in terms of filling in the gaps, the
wandering viewpoint ensures that they do so having experienced the conflict from multiple
points of view. By contrast, in Paul’s rendering of the story, these multiple points of view are
absent. As we have seen, Paul’s argument zigzags back and forth between the various
elements of his binary structure, even as he zigzags back and forth ambiguously between his
rendition of the originating story of Hagar and Sarah and his allegorization of it. The
wandering viewpoint of Gal 4:21–5:1 is thus every bit as complicated as that of Gen 16–21
(if not more so), but without the crosscurrents and multiple perspectives that are so
important in Genesis.

Paul starts in Gal 4:21 by appealing to the Galatians, whom he addresses as those who “want
to be under law,” to pay attention to the law. He immediately invokes the originating story in
Gal 4:22 by drawing attention to the text of Genesis: “for it has been written that
Abraham
begot two sons.” At this point the story is being told with reference to Abraham. He has two
sons. Both are his. However, one has been begotten “from the slave woman,” and the other
has been begotten “from the free woman.” Although Hagar is indeed described as a “slave
woman” in the text of Genesis, and Sarah is nevertheless a free woman even if the text of
Genesis never explicitly spells this out, these distinctions are more representative of the
narrating instance of Galatians than of the original story. As the text continues in the next
verse, Paul’s narration becomes even more thickly-coated in the binary language of his
argument: one son has been begotten “in accordance with the flesh,” the other “through a
promise.” We are given access to the originating story only through the heavily-tinted slant
of the narrator. Then in Gal 4:24 Paul suddenly shifts explicitly to the allegorical level. He identifies “these things” as referring to two covenants. Again, there are resemblances to the originating story here (mothers bearing children, the making of covenants etc.), but it is Paul’s allegorical treatment of it that drives the narrative discourse. At the same time, the allegorical story remains obscure. It never “congeals” as it were, because Paul continues to make new allegorical connections. In Gal 4:25 he quickly shifts from Mount Sinai to Arabia; from the “present Jerusalem” who is “enslaved along with her children” to the “Jerusalem above” in Gal 4:26 who is “our mother”; from the “sterile” woman who is to rejoice to the “desolate” woman in Gal 4:27 who gives birth to many more children than “the one with the husband.” All these reflect the dualities of Paul’s argument and the concerns of the narrating instance.

It is only in Gal 4:28 that Paul brings his argument back into contact with the originating story: “But you, brothers and sisters, are children of promise, like Isaac.” Paul’s use of the name Isaac makes an explicit reference to the originating story, even though his focus is still on the allegory. At the level of the narrating instance, Paul as the narrator is explicitly directing the narratees to identify themselves with a character in the originating story. In Gal 4:29, Paul takes this one step further. He explicitly refers to both the originating and the allegorical story by saying: “But just as at that time, the one begotten in accordance with the flesh used to persecute the one begotten in accordance with the spirit, so also now.” Although this is heavily-tinted with the language of Paul’s interpretive slant, Paul seems to be referring here to Ishmael and Isaac in the originating story. Now the readers are being directed to identify with Isaac as one begotten in accordance with the spirit who is being
persecuted by the son begotten in accordance with the flesh. Paul then takes this one step even further in Gal 4:30: “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will surely not inherit along with the son of the free woman.” It is not at all clear how Paul intends this to be understood within his own situation. Is the “allegorical” son of the free woman being commanded to “cast out” the allegorical son of the slave woman? Paul then shifts back explicitly to the allegorical story in Gal 4:31, again addressing the Galatians directly: “Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman.” Finally he concludes with an imperative that applies squarely to the current situation, saying, “For freedom Christ set us free; stand firm, therefore, and do not get caught up again in a yoke of slavery.”

The discourse therefore dynamically bounces back and forth between the two stories as Paul makes his argument. As a matter of fact, it bounces back and forth among multiple stories and allegorical relationships, since Paul seems to be making reference to other “originating stories” as well—references to Exodus and Mount Sinai, material from Second Isaiah, and his rather strange reference to Arabia. As we have seen, these multiple allegorical relationships have implications for how we understand Paul’s version of the originating story. The connections are implicit, however, and I have tried to avoid falling into the trap of filling in the gaps. In contrast with the text of Genesis, which leads the readers through a complex wandering viewpoint that has them experiencing the events of the story through the perspectives of the various characters in the story, Paul discourse tells the originating story both explicitly (through explicit references to the originating story itself) and implicitly (through references to the allegorical story) by channelling it through the experience of
Iaac—both Isaac in the originating story as well as his allegorical counterpart. As a result, even though it lacks the crosscurrents and multiple perspectives of the Genesis account, the wandering viewpoint in Paul’s text is every bit as complex as what we find with Genesis.

5. Discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians

Now that I have described the argumentative, allegorical, and narrative aspects of Gal 4:21–5:1, I am now in a position to examine the differences between how the story is told in Genesis and how it is treated in Galatians. To some extent I have already been making comparisons between the two texts as I went along, but now I want to pick up on the divergences between Genesis and Galatians that are significant enough to be classified as outright discrepancies. The accounts that appear in the two texts are demonstrably different: one runs for as long as eighty-five verses (according to the versification in BHS), the other only eleven (according to the count in NA28); one takes the form of a linear narration of events in the third person, the other the form of an argument framed in the second person; one presents itself as a narrative, the other as an argument that includes allegory. Nevertheless, each refers to the same story, albeit in their own ways. Moreover, there is a fundamental difference between the two in that one can be described as primary and the other as secondary. This is true with respect to their content: the allegorical story that Paul tells the Galatians has meaning with reference to the originating story from Genesis that it plays on. But it is also true with respect to the two texts themselves. Paul is not only offering an alternative rendering of the *story*, he is also appealing to a previously written *text*. In this sense Gal 4:21–5:1 is quite different from some of the other versions of the story that we
could look at, such as those that appear in *Jubilees*, the writings of Josephus, and *Targum Psuedo-Jonathan*.\(^{75}\) Regardless of the degree to which these other versions of the story are dependent on the text of Genesis historically in terms of their origins, in terms of how they retell the story, they are able to stand on their own literally.\(^{76}\) Paul, however, explicitly acknowledges the authority of a previous text, even as he produces another text that does something quite different in its name. This makes the discrepancies between the two texts all the more glaring.

In the occasional references to the originating story that Paul makes as his argument runs along, he offers a simplified version of the story. Because he is simplifying, it is inevitable that he omits a great deal of the detail that appears in the Genesis account. Many of these details are not crucial to the story, but others are. One such crucial detail is that Ishmael too is a “child of promise.” In Galatians, as we have seen, Paul’s binary categories make Isaac out to be a “child of promise” (Gal 4:28) and “the son who had been begotten through a promise” (Gal 4:23), in opposition to Ishmael, who is “the son who had been begotten in accordance with the flesh” (Gal 4:23, 29). In Genesis, by contrast, while it is true that Isaac is the fulfilment of the Lord’s promise to Abraham that Sarah would give birth to a son through whom the covenant would be established (Gen 17:16–19, 21), the LORD also makes promises to Abraham regarding Ishmael, namely that he will beget twelve rulers (MT; LXX: “nations”) and will become “a great nation” (Gen 17:20). That it is Isaac who is Abraham’s heir in the end does not take away anything from these promises. Indeed, the

\(^{75}\) Again, see appendix 1.

\(^{76}\) Scholars often refer to such texts as *Rewritten Bible*, a term James Kugel attributes to Geza Vermes (*The Bible As It Was* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, 1997], 28).
LORD affirms the promises in Gen 21:13 even as Ishmael is being sent away. Nor is Ishmael entirely outside the promises made regarding Isaac. In Galatians, Paul refers to two covenants that are pitted against each other, but in Genesis there is only one. Although Ishmael is not the son through whom this covenant will be fulfilled, he is nevertheless included in the terms of the covenant through the rite of circumcision along with Abraham and all the other (male) members of Abraham’s household (Gen 17:23–27). The promises made to Ishmael may be of a lesser order, and his role in the covenant with Abraham may be quite minor when compared to Isaac, but this does not prevent him from being a “child of promise” in his own right, nor a participant in the covenant. Paul’s binary does not accommodate these nuances.

This discrepancy is just the tip of the iceberg of a whole range of nuances that are lost in Paul’s account. Gone are the crosscurrents and multiple perspectives of Genesis. Instead, what we have is Paul’s heavily-tinted slant as a narrator with its binary agenda. The details of the story are squeezed into the service of Paul’s strict binaries, and those details that do not fit are omitted. This applies even to whole episodes, the most striking of which is what happens to Hagar and Ishmael after they have been cast out. As we have already noted, as far as Paul is concerned, the final words of “the Scripture” on the subject are that the slave woman and her son are to be cast out. What happens to them afterward is irrelevant to Paul’s argument, so he simply omits it. Yet “the Scripture” in fact provides a lengthy narration of

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77 And these are later repeated to Hagar by the messenger in Gen 21:18.
78 This is a source of confusion to say the least, as we have seen.
79 Given the prominence given to the issue of circumcision in Galatians, this is also a source of confusion in Paul’s discourse.
what happens to the two of them in the desert as if it really does matter. At the level of the story, Hagar and Ishmael may be discarded by Abraham and Sarah because they are no longer of any use to them, but at the level of the narrating instance, they are not discarded by the narrator.\textsuperscript{80} The narrator even goes out of the way to tell us that after their rescue, the LORD was “with the lad” as he grew up (Gen 21:20). The fates of Hagar and Ishmael are therefore crucial to the story, as I noted in chapter two, even if their presence “complicates salvation history” (to borrow a turn of phrase from Elsa Tamez).\textsuperscript{81} This also applies to Paul’s omission of any mention of a relationship between Ishmael and Isaac later in life. Genesis itself says very little, other than that after Abraham dies, “his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Macpelah” (Gen 25:9). The reader may have doubts as to whether this is as amicable as it sounds, but it indicates that at the very least the two brothers come together for long enough to bury their father.\textsuperscript{82} Paul omits mention of this, and as we have seen, his argument implies that the interests of Isaac and Ishmael are categorically irreconcilable. Again, Paul’s binary is not able to accommodate these nuances.

Besides these discrepancies which relate primarily to the content of the story, there are other discrepancies that have more to do with how the story is told than with the content of the story as such. One of these is Paul’s use of the term “persecute” (δηώθσ) in Gal 4:29, even though the Genesis account says nothing about persecution. As we have already noted, it is


\textsuperscript{82} Compare Jubilees, where the relationship seems very amiable. (See appendix 1.)
not clear to what degree Paul is letting the conflict in his own situation colour the way he describes the conflict in the originating story. As an *intradicgetic* narrator of the allegorical story, it is perhaps inevitable that the two stories get conflated in his telling. While it is true that there is a divergence here between Genesis and Galatians at the level of the words (Genesis reads “playing”; Galatians reads “persecuting”), it should also be noted that Paul is doing nothing more than what the text of Genesis directs him to do. In jumping to the conclusion that Ishmael is persecuting Isaac here (if this is what Paul in fact is doing), Paul is merely picking up on the suggestiveness inherent in the word “play.” Moreover, the narrator of Genesis immediately follows this with Sarah’s words to Abraham, “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not inherit with my son Isaac!” (Gen 21:10) By juxtaposing what Sarah sees (Ishmael playing) with what Sarah says to Abraham (that the son of the slave woman must be cast out), without telling us what is going on in Sarah’s mind, Genesis opens up a gap in the story: readers have to figure out for themselves what is going on in Sarah’s mind such that she responds in the way that she does. Paul, as a reader, fills in this gap. That he fills it in with a perspective congruent with his own situation should not be surprising. However, this disguises that there is a more substantial discrepancy in the narrative structure itself. In Genesis, the narrator shows Ishmael’s “playing” to us through the eyes of Sarah; we have to figure out for ourselves what is going on. In Galatians, not only is the ambiguity lost by the filling in of the gap, but also by the elimination of the very structure that allows such a judgment. This is not merely a filling in of the gap (to use Iser’s terminology): it is a violation of the structure of the blank itself.
This leads to another discrepancy that also has more to do with the narrative structure than with the content of the story as such. In Genesis, it is Sarah who says that the slave woman and her son are to be cast out, but Paul quotes these words as the words of “the Scripture” (ἡ γραφή). By taking these words out of their context within the story, and attributing them to the written text itself, Paul collapses narrative levels. As we noted earlier, they are no longer words spoken within the story by one character to another at the level of the diegesis, but a statement about the story at the level of the narrating instance. This shifts the meaning. The words that Paul puts on the lips of “the Scripture” may be identical (or nearly identical) to what Sarah says, but the meaning is now different. This meaning that the words have in Genesis is difficult to tie down precisely, since it is largely shaped by the gaps. The rivalry between Hagar and Sarah, Abraham’s and Sarah’s anxiety for Isaac’s future in their old age, the history of the relationship between Abraham and Sarah, Abraham’s relationship with Hagar, Abraham’s reticence with regard to Hagar and Ishmael, Abraham’s feelings for Ishmael, are all unspoken considerations implied in the context. The text of Genesis creates opportunities for the readers to consider these factors and weigh them. Paul, however, sidesteps this entirely. By attributing the words to the level of the narrating instance rather than to a character in the story, Paul gives them the weight of the narrator’s voice. In other words, Paul replaces Sarah’s filter (with all that this implies) with the slant of the narrator.

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83 Technically, as I noted earlier, Paul is not misquoting here—these are indeed the words (or nearly the words, with minor variations) that the Scripture attributes to Sarah. As with his use of the term persecute, Paul is not violating the structure of the blank in Genesis by filling it in, but by eliminating the blank in his own text.

84 To say nothing of what the label, “the Scripture” gives it. What this means for Paul or the Galatians is, of course, a different question from what it means in the subsequent history of interpretation.
Again, this puts the story at the service of Paul’s binaries.

One final discrepancy between Genesis and Galatians is the loss of the wandering viewpoint. As we have seen, Paul’s text also has a wandering viewpoint, but it is not the wandering viewpoint that we find in Genesis. With Genesis, whatever judgments the readers make with regard to the story, they do so having experienced the events of the story through the focalizations of each of the characters. With Paul they do so having been directed to look upon the story as “children of the freewoman,” as current-day “Isaacs,” as the son who was begotten in accordance with the spirit who is being persecuted by the son who was begotten in accordance with the flesh. Because the telling of the originating story is embedded in the telling of the allegorical story, the former inevitably ends up being seen in terms of the latter. This intensifies the conflict and raises the stakes at the level of the narrating instance. Whereas the readers of Genesis are given an opportunity to see the conflict in the originating story from multiple angles, the readers of Galatians are led to see the conflict in the originating story from Isaac’s point of view. Thus the very scenario that the text of Genesis is so anxious to avoid in the originating story is played out by Paul allegorically at the level of the narrating instance. The two “sons” (whoever they are allegorically) are indeed now locked in a life-and-death struggle to claim the inheritance. Paul has raised the stakes so high that there is no alternative to one winning and the other losing. In terms of the wandering viewpoint, Paul’s text in fact accomplishes the exact opposite of the text of

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85 Or rather, it would be more precise to say, from the point of view of Isaac’s interests as defined by Sarah’s anxieties.
86 Or, in all fairness to Paul, he has been forced by the desperation of his situation to raise the stakes so high now (following Barrett’s argument that Paul has no choice).
To go back to the crucial point that I noted earlier, namely that Paul’s version of the story is simultaneously both parallel to the Genesis account as well as secondary to it, there is a strange irony in that Paul as a reader does exactly what the text of Genesis has set him up to do.87 Having experienced the interaction of the story through the various perspectives offered in the wandering viewpoint of the text, he sorts through the various possibilities, weighs the nuances, fills in the blanks, and proceeds to take sides. In the previous chapter emphasized how the text of Genesis, even while going out of its way to appear not to be doing so itself, actually encourages readers to take sides. As we saw, the history of interpretation of Genesis, in both the Jewish and Christian traditions, provides ample evidence that this is one of the effects that the text of Genesis typically has on its readers. If Paul were merely producing a parallel account here, there would be little in this that is troublesome. This is essentially what Jubilees, Josephus, Philo, and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan each do in their own ways.88 Paul, however, produces not only an account that is parallel, but also one that invokes the authority of a previously written text. As we have seen, Paul, in Galatians, even while acknowledging the priority and authority of the text of Genesis, accomplishes the exact opposite of the text of Genesis.89 In the name of “the

87 I am of course still referring to Paul as the implied author of Galatians within the Christian New Testament canon, not the historical figure who produced the text. (Paul, the implied author of Galatians, presents himself as a reader of the Scripture.)
88 As described in appendix 1, one feature that these parallel accounts have in common is that they do not reproduce the dynamic tension of the Genesis account. They either eliminate the conflict entirely (as in Jubilees or Philo), or resolve the tension by putting the blame on Hagar or Ishmael (as in Josephus or Targum Pseudo-Jonathan).
89 This is true, even if Paul is merely reacting to his opponents’ allegorization of Genesis. (In
Scripture,” Paul effectively manages to undermine the Scripture, even to “falsify” it. Paul “gets the story wrong” as it were, for putatively right reasons. Or we might even say that he is not even telling the same story. He is telling two different stories and he is getting them mixed up. As a result, even if he is getting his own story right, he ends up falsifying the story that is told in Genesis.

The text of Genesis is already something quite dangerous. As we noted in the last chapter, the story of Sarah and Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac, as it appears in the Genesis account, is filled with conflict and fraught with tension. Yet the structure of the narrative manages to hold everything in a certain balance. The wandering viewpoint provides a system of checks and balances that holds the structure in place, and keeps it from spiralling out of control. Indeed, I described the narrative in the previous chapter as “fraught with tension” precisely because when the conflict threatens to spin out of control, the narrative shifts back into balance. The way in which the narrative picks up on the story of Hagar and Ishmael after their expulsion, for example, is one illustration of this. Disaster is averted precisely in the one place where it had seemed for a moment most likely to spin out of control. By including the episode with Hagar and Ishmael, Genesis conveys that there is more to the covenant than meets the eye: it is not merely a story of the triumph of Isaac’s line. The text of Galatians, however, plays a game that is more dangerous. In so doing, it adopts the dynamics of the Genesis account, but none of its checks and balances. It sets dynamics in motion that are far more troubling than what we have with Genesis. Moreover, however justified Paul may be

such a case, Paul’s allegorization is technically not an allegorization of Genesis, but an allegorization of an allegorization of Genesis.)
in doing what he is doing within his own context, his own text then becomes something quite different in the history of interpretation. Galatians is eventually incorporated into the canon of Christian Scriptures, and thus ostensibly on a par with Genesis itself, and, as part of what becomes the New Testament, the proper guide for reading what then becomes the Old Testament. This sets in motion a dangerous dynamic, quite apart from any intentionality or foresight on the part of Paul. This troubling feature enters the canon along with Galatians. But to say this is to have moved beyond the scope of this chapter and to anticipate what we have to face in the history of interpretation in the next chapter.
Chapter Four
The Dominant Pattern

1. Preliminary Comments

As I noted in the previous chapter, there are significant discrepancies between the story of Sarah and Hagar as it is told in Genesis and how it is treated in Galatians. These discrepancies are significant in that they show that in key ways, Paul “gets the story wrong,” as it were. As I pointed out, this is neither here nor there. Paul’s context may very well explain why he handles the story in the way that he does, either because the situation is serious enough to warrant what he is doing, or perhaps because his opponents have already successfully allegorized this motif for their own purposes and Paul is forced to respond in kind by way of damage control. In any case, the very notion of allegory indicates that something “other” is being said, so it should be no surprise that Paul’s version of the story is different.

However, what the history of interpretation does with Paul’s treatment of the Genesis account is another matter. As it turns out, the significance of these divergences is rarely appreciated by most of those who pick up Paul’s allegory in the history of interpretation, and this has had serious consequences, as we shall see in chapter six. The task of the next two chapters, therefore, will be to describe the subsequent history of interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1 such that it becomes evident that time after time what Paul is doing in the passage has gone unrecognized, or at the very least, unacknowledged. This chapter will focus on what might be described as the dominant pattern of interpretation within the tradition, whereas the

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1 To be precise, this is still “Paul,” the implied author of the letter to the Galatians, not the historical Paul who produced the letter. Likewise, I am not referring, strictly speaking, to the opponents of the historical Paul, but to functions within the text.
subsequent chapter will focus on discordant voices within this tradition.

In the previous two chapters, my task in each case was to describe a text. Literary theory proved useful for this task because it provided me with tools, not only for describing what a text *says*, but also for describing what a text *does*. The strength of this approach was that it allowed me to focus exclusively on dynamics within the texts themselves, as if nothing else mattered. Although it might have sometimes sounded like I was speaking of Paul’s writing of the letter as a historically-retrievable event, what I was really focussing on was “Paul” as a function of the text itself. By definition, “extra-textual” matters were excluded.² I went along with literary theory in this regard because I was interested in the text of Galatians, not the actual person who at one point in time in the past was supposedly responsible for it, or the historical situation that first produced it.

As a result, I remained (at least in theory) within the bounds of the text. The task now requires taking this the next step. Extra-textual matters are now going to be front and centre. Whereas the task in the previous two chapters was to describe a text, the task in these next two chapters will be to describe the history of a tradition. Whereas the previous two chapters had me drawing on the resources of structural literary theory, the next two chapters will have me drawing on the resources of another branch of literary theory: reception history (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*). What I mean by “Paul” will no longer be Paul merely as a function of the text of Galatians, but Paul (still strictly speaking the *implied author* of Galatians

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² Occasionally, however, I brought in evidence from the history of interpretation as a check against my generalizations about what readers of the texts of Genesis or Galatians are supposedly doing when they are reading the text (based as it was on my own experience of reading the text, what essentially amounts to a sampling of one).
within the Christian canon) as he is constructed within the developing tradition of Pauline interpretation.

Much of what I will say in the next two chapters owes its theoretical framework to the concept of Rezeptionsgeschichte as developed by German literary critic Hans Robert Jauss in the 1960’s. Jauss developed his approach in reaction to what he saw as the weaknesses of formalist and Marxist approaches to literary texts, which reduce the meaning of a text either to the forms within it or to the social forces behind it. Both methods, complains Jauss, “conceive the literary fact within the closed circle of an aesthetics of production and representation.”

What Jauss offers instead is a Rezeptionsästhetik (“an aesthetics of reception”) that takes into account the continuity between a literary work and its audience.

“In the triangle of author, work, and public,” says Jauss, “the last is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history. . . . For it is only through the process of its mediation that the work enters into the changing horizon-of-experience of a continuity in which the perpetual inversion occurs from simple reception to critical understanding, from passive to active reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production that surpasses them.”

Central to Jauss’ formulation is the concept of a horizon of expectations (Erwartungshorizont). According to Jauss, the environment that receives a

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4 Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, 19.
5 Jauss appropriates much of his terminology from Hans Georg Gadamer, but uses it in a somewhat different sense. For Gadamer, understanding takes places through a “fusion of horizons” (Horizontverschmelzung) of the text and of the readers; whereas for Jauss the “horizon of expectations” (Erwartungshorizont) provides the framework within which a text
literary work shapes how it is read and understood. At the same time, the literary work shapes this very *horizon of expectations*. The meaning that a literary text is given in various historical circumstances is therefore fluid, but not arbitrary: it is mediated through the interaction between the work and its audience within the *horizon of expectations*. With respect to Galatians, this is most obvious in the disjunction between its reception by the churches of Galatia as a letter addressed to them by the apostle Paul, and its reception later in church tradition as a writing within the canon of the Christian Bible.\(^6\) Even if we pretend that the wording of the text was identical in both situations, Galatians is something quite different when viewed as sacred Scripture within the traditions of theological interpretation than when it is viewed as a letter offering practical instructions to wayward churches.\(^7\)

One of the implications of *Rezeptionsgeschichte* is therefore that there can be no interpretation of a text from outside the history of interpretation. One is always interpreting from within some sort of tradition. In many ways, the description of the history of interpretation that I present here is rather conventional. It breaks the history of interpretation down into a succession of several historic periods (patristic, medieval, Reformation, modern), and it distinguishes between what might be described as “critical” and “precritical”

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\(^6\) It is also quite obvious later on in the disjunction between the reception of Galatians by the church as a writing within the canon of Scripture and its reception by biblical scholars as an artifact of history.

\(^7\) Of course, Galatians is not unique in this regard: it is true of all biblical texts, some more obviously than others, as Moshe Halbertal emphasizes with regard to Ecclesiastes while reflecting on the role of the Scriptures in the Jewish tradition (*People of the Book: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 24–26.)
interpretation. Moreover, it is rather “Euro-centric,” even “Anglo-centric,” in that it starts off in the east with early Greek-speaking tradition, then moves west to trace the development of Latin exegesis, first in the patristic period and then later in medieval times, then moves north to trace developments in the Reformation period and beyond, and then concludes with a strong tilt toward English-speaking traditions of interpretation on both sides of the Atlantic. This rather conventional picture of the history of interpretation is itself an important facet of the history of interpretation, as Jauss would point out. What Rezeptionsgeschichte, as conceived by Jauss, adds to this conventional picture is that the history of reception of Galatians should not be viewed merely as the successive unfolding of various potentialities given within the text, but rather as the history of a complex interaction between the text and the environment in which it is repeatedly taken up. One reason why I am content with such a conventional framework is that I am not so much describing a history (as in tracing a series of loosely-connected historical moments) as a tradition (as in describing a contemporary phenomenon that already has a perception of its own antecedents). In other words, not only can there be no interpretation of a text from outside

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9 In this regard, Jauss’ interest in Rezeptionsgeschichte can be distinguished, both from Iser’s *Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung*, with its focus on the text itself (as we saw in chapter two), as well as Wirkungsgeschichte (“history of effects”) with its focus on the unfolding of the potentialities given in the text, as practiced, for example, by Ulrich Luz in *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). For discussion of the differences, see Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 1984); Martyn P. Thompson, “Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning,” *HistTh* 32 (1993): 248–72; Mark Knight, “Wirkungsgeschichte, Reception History, Reception Theory,” *JSNT* 33 (2010): 137–46.
the same history of interpretation, but there can be no interpretation of the history of interpretation from outside the history of interpretation.\textsuperscript{10} Again, one is always interpreting from within a tradition of some sort.

The peculiar situations of Jerome (340–420) and Martin Luther (1483–1546) provide good illustrations of this. In spite of his great ambitions, Jerome (or Hieronymus, as he is usually known) was in many ways a marginal figure in his own lifetime.\textsuperscript{11} While it is true, as J. B. Lightfoot says, that Jerome’s \textit{Commentary on Galatians} is a fine specimen of patristic exegesis in the Latin tradition, it is of interest to us in the first instance because it offers a synthesis of the previous two centuries of scholarship in the Greek-speaking east.\textsuperscript{12} The commentaries of Origen, Didymus, Apollinarius, Alexander, Eusebius of Emesa, and Theodore of Heraclea that Jerome says he uses as his sources are no longer extant except in fragments, so in fact Jerome is our primary source for this tradition. At the same time, Jerome’s prestige as a biblical scholar increased considerably long after his death. His commentary enjoyed what we might describe loosely as “canonical” status in the medieval period, and in 1295 he was recognized as one of the four great Latin doctors of the church.\textsuperscript{13}

If anything his prestige increased even more during the Reformation: Erasmus used him as

\textsuperscript{10} In other words, there is no such thing as “the text” as such (i.e., the approach that I used in the previous two chapters has its limitations).


\textsuperscript{13} Thomas P. Scheck, \textit{St. Jerome’s Commentaries on Galatians, Titus, and Philemon} (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 40.
his primary guiding light, and the Council of Trent declared him *Doctor maximus in sacris scripturis explanandis*.\(^{14}\) Even the animosity that is expressed by Luther and Calvin can be taken as an indication of his authority. Jerome is, therefore, a pivotal figure in the history of interpretation: not only is he a primary representative of the Latin patristic tradition, but he also condenses two centuries of earlier Greek interpretation, as well as stands as the epitome of authoritative biblical interpretation for the medieval period and beyond. For this reason I make use of Jerome’s commentary in this chapter as the primary representative of “precritical exegesis.” Jerome’s situation thus illustrates how interpretation gets incorporated into a tradition through an expansion of the *horizon of expectations*.

Luther’s situation illustrates the converse. On the one hand, Luther’s distinctive interpretation of Galatians as primarily about justification *sola gratia* or *sola fide* is crucial for all subsequent interpretation of the letter, especially in Protestant exegesis, but also for all subsequent exegesis in the historical-critical mode, especially in Germany.\(^ {15}\) For this reason, I include him in this chapter as a key figure in the dominant pattern of interpretation of the passage. Yet ironically, on the other hand, I also find myself including him in the next

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\(^{15}\) Luther formulates the principle in slightly different ways at various points in his *Commentary on Galatians*, but when commenting on Gal 2:19 he specifically insists that we are pronounced righteous “*sola gratia seu fide in Christum sine lege et operibus*” (*In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas commentarius ex praelectione D. Martini Lutheri collectus* (1535), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1883-2009], 40.1:274). As John Riches notes, “Such indeed is the power of Luther’s reading of Galatians, that his own commentary now becomes one of the principal channels of the letter’s influence” (*Galatians through the Centuries* [Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2008], 4).
chapter as a discordant voice as well, since he takes such a different approach in his interpretation of Genesis. It is Luther’s interpretation of Galatians that gets taken up into the tradition; his interpretation of Genesis is largely ignored.¹⁶ This reveals how tradition itself is rarely fully represented by any single interpreter. Individual interpreters are our primary witness to the traditions that they are a part of, but the traditions themselves are larger than any individual interpreter. Whereas Jerome’s situation reveals how traditions expand and transmute, Luther’s situation reveals how traditions restrict and select. Both, however, illustrate how the horizon of expectations shapes what gets incorporated into the tradition, even as this horizon of expectations is itself shaped by the developing tradition.

2. Patristic Interpretation

What immediately stands out in Jerome’s Commentary on Galatians (ca. 386) is how comfortable he is filling in the gaps. As we saw in the last chapter, Paul does not fully express what he means allegorically in Gal 4:21–5:1. Who precisely are the children “begotten in accordance with the spirit” that are being persecuted? Who precisely are the children “begotten from the slave woman” that are to be cast out? For Jerome, the answers to these questions are self-evident. Drawing on the weight of previous exegetical tradition, he declares that the explanation of “almost everyone” (paene cunctorum) concerning this passage is that the slave woman Hagar refers to the law and the Jewish people, but the free

¹⁶ Yet even for all its influence, Luther’s interpretation of Galatians is not fully taken up into the tradition, even among his Lutheran followers. See Robert Kolb, “The Influence of Luther’s Galatians Commentary of 1535 on Later Sixteenth-Century Lutheran Commentaries on Galatians,” ARG 84 (1993): 156–84.
woman Sarah refers to the church, which has been gathered from the Gentiles.\textsuperscript{17} In accordance with this interpretation, Jerome fills out the details of the allegory: “For a long time,” he says, Sarah did not give birth, since “the laughter of the world” (\textit{risus mundi}), Isaac, was not yet resounding with the voice of exalted teachings. Hagar, by contrast, immediately gives birth to Ishmael (i.e., the Jewish people), “who merely hears God’s commands and does not do them” (\textit{qui tantum audiat Dei praecepta nec faciat}).\textsuperscript{18} The persecution of which Paul speaks when he says, “so also now” is therefore the persecution of Christians by Jews: “Israel according to the flesh is lifted up (\textit{sustollitur}), inflated (\textit{inflatur}), and incited (\textit{erigitur}) against his younger brother, the Christian people from the Gentiles.”\textsuperscript{19} He even goes on to say, “Let us consider the insanity (\textit{insania}) of the Jews, who killed the Lord and persecuted the prophets and apostles and resist the will of God, and we shall see that even history teaches us that those persecutions of Christians that have been aroused by Jews are much greater than those that have been aroused by Gentiles.”\textsuperscript{20} As for those who will be “cast out,” Jerome suggests that those who are “infants” (\textit{parvuli}) in Christ and live “carnally” (\textit{carnaliter}), persecute those who have been born of water and spirit, and consequently “they will not receive the inheritance that only those who have been born of the promise will attain.”\textsuperscript{21}

By far the issue that receives the most attention from Jerome is the issue of allegory. In this

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Sancti Hieronymi presbyteri commentarii in epistulam Pauli apostoli ad Galatas} 4.24b–26 (ed. Giacomo Raspanti; Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, CCSL 77A:140).
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 141.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ad Galatas} 4.29–31 (CCSL 77A:145).
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
he is probably following Origen’s commentary. 22 Origen frequently uses this passage elsewhere in his writings to justify the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures. 23 Like Origen, Jerome also looks favourably upon Paul’s use of the term, though he acknowledges that Paul is technically using the word incorrectly (in spite of what he imagines to be the high quality of Paul’s education). 24 With this in mind, Jerome seems to think that Paul is already allegorizing in Gal 4:21: when Paul asks the Galatians if they read the law, he is asking if they understand the law spiritually, since those who “hear the law,” like Paul, look not at its “surface” (superficies), but into its “marrow” (medulla), whereas those who, like the Galatians, do not hear the law, follow only the “outer shell (exteriorem corticem).” 25 Jewish interpretation, according to Jerome, is characterized by attention to “the letter,” but to fully understand a passage of Scripture, one needs to pay attention to the deeper, spiritual meaning. Thus he says, “One is not at first born according to the promise so long as one is instructed with reference to the simple words of the Scriptures and still takes pleasure in Judaic expositions.” However, when one “has passed on to the loftier things, and understood

22 The exact degree of Jerome’s dependence on Origen is debated, but the fragments of Origen’s commentary that have survived suggest that Jerome incorporated whole sections of Origen’s commentary verbatim. See Margaret Schatkin, “The Influence of Origen upon St. Jerome’s Commentary on Galatians,” VC 24 (1970): 49–58.

23 In Contra Censum 4.44 (PG 11:1100), for example, Origen says, “It is not we who teach that brides and attendants (νύμφαι καὶ θεραπανίδες) are to be read figuratively (ανάγεσθαι ἐπί τροπολογίαν), but we have received it from the beginning from the wise,” and after quoting Gal 4:21–26, he concludes by saying, “The one who wishes to take up the epistle to the Galatians will see that the manner in which the things relating to the marriages and the mixings with the attendants have been allegorized (ἡλληγόρηται).” See also De principiis 4.2.6.13.

24 As noted in the previous chapter (n.47).

25 Ad Galatas 4.21 (CCSL 77A:136).
the spiritual law, then indeed one has been begotten from the promise.” Although Jerome seems to be slightly embarrassed with Paul’s use of the term *allegory* here, he does not seem to be troubled at all by what Paul is doing with it, and in fact seems to be wanting to take it even further.

Nevertheless, Jerome does seem to be bothered by some of the discrepancies that he sees between Genesis and Galatians. He spends a great deal of his commentary on Gal 4:22 addressing the question of how Isaac could be a “child of promise” but Ishmael not. “It is exceedingly difficult (*nimiae difficultatis*),” he says, “to show that only Isaac, who was born from Sarah, was begotten from a promise (*de repromissione*), and not also Ishmael, who had been born from Hagar, the Egyptian slave woman.” Nevertheless, Jerome makes several attempts. He starts off by acknowledging that the angel speaks to Hagar words concerning Ishmael that “surely nobody can doubt are words of promise” (*utique repromissionis verba nemo dubitarit*), but suggests the possibly that an angel’s promise is of lesser authority than a promise given directly by God. However, he immediately discards this possibility, observing that God later says to Abraham that he will bless Ishmael (Gen 17:18–21).

Jerome then tries a different possibility: since the promise of God with respect to Isaac is fulfilled in the giving of a covenant, there is a difference between the two. As a result, “just as gifts are one thing and property another, so bequests are one thing and inheritances are something else (for indeed, we read that gifts were handed down to the sons of Abraham’s

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27 Ibid. (CCSL 77A:136).
28 Ibid.
29 He adds, “it is apparent from what are even the words of God himself that Ishmael had been begotten in accordance with a promise” (ibid. [CCSL 77A:137]).
concubines, but the inheritance of the entire property was relinquished to the son of Sarah.‖

Jerome does not explicitly discard this argument, but he goes on to try a third possibility: “But it could also be said that concerning Ishmael, after his conception (post conceptum), it was either an angel or God who spoke; but concerning Isaac, even before he had been conceived in Sarah’s womb (antequam in Sarae utero cociperetur), God had made a pledge (Deumuisse pollicitum).” Jerome does not explicitly discard this possibility either, but he still does not seem to be convinced, declaring that for the time being, these explanations are as much as the “mediocrity of our intelligence” (ingenii nostri mediocritas) can allow. In this way Jerome effectively “shuts down the debate,” as it were. In a move that is typical of patristic exegesis, Jerome does not seem to be willing to entertain the notion that the discrepancy in fact might lie in Paul’s own handling of the Genesis account.

More difficult for Jerome to dismiss is the discrepancy between the Genesis account and Galatians at Gal 4:29, where Paul refers to the one son persecuting the other. Jerome acknowledges that there may be a problem here, saying, “I do not think that we can find where Ishmael had persecuted Isaac, but only this: when the son of the Egyptian woman, who had been born the elder, was playing (luderet) with Isaac, Sarah was indignant and said to Abraham, ‘Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not inherit along with my son Isaac.’” Rather than take recourse to extra-biblical traditions, as

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid. (CCSL 77A:137–38). Scheck suspects that Jerome is probably translating directly from Origen’s commentary here, since this is “the kind of expression of humility” that is frequent in Origen (St. Jerome’s Commentaries, 186 n.377).
33 Ad Galatas 4.29–31 (CCSL 77A:144).
modern interpreters are inclined to do, Jerome stays with the text of Genesis here. He admits that simple play among children does not deserve “expulsion and disinheritance” (expulsione et abdicatione), but he infers from Sarah’s words that this could not have been “simple play” (simplex lusus), regardless of what the text of Genesis says. Paul, being “a Hebrew from the Hebrews” (Hebraeus ex Hebraeis), and trained at the feet of Gamaliel, understood from Sarah’s words that “perhaps” (fortsitan) Ishmael, as the one who was the elder by birth “was claiming for himself the rights of the firstborn” (sibi primogenita vindicabat). For this reason the Scripture has called the quarrelling (jurgium) of children, “play” (lusus). As we saw in the last chapter, by attributing Sarah’s words to Abraham within the story to “the Scripture,” Paul ignores a level of the narrative. Taking his cue from Paul, Jerome does the same. Sarah’s words within the story are presented as if they were spoken from outside of it. Consequently, in league with Josephus, Pseudo-Jonathan, and much Rabbinic exegesis (as well as Paul himself), Jerome seems to draw the conclusion that Ishmael’s expulsion and disinheritance are deserved, something that is expressed in the text of Genesis only through the focalization of Sarah.

Although Jerome suggests that most interpreters preceding him in the tradition interpret Gal

34 We shall see this with Meyer, Lightfoot, and others later in this chapter (as well as in appendix 2). Jerome himself draws attention to Rabbinic explanations of Gen 21:9 in Hebraicarum quaestionum in Genesium 21.9: the Hebrews, he says, explain this verse by saying that Ishmael “as the elder by age, was trying, through a jest (jocus) and a game (ludus), to claim for himself the rights of the first-born in opposition to Isaac” (PL 23:967B).

35 Ad Galatas 4.29–31 (Raspanti, 144).

36 See appendix 1. One patristic interpreter who bucks this trend is John Chrysostom, who argues that Ishmael was not punished on account of his momentary persecution, but in order to show that “this very thing had been typified from the beginning” (τοῦτο ἐνωθεν αὐτὸ διατεταγμένον ἢν), and originated not from the persecution (ἀπὸ τοῦ διωγμοῦ), but “from the purpose (γνώμη) of God” (Commentarius in epistola ad Galatas 4.30 [PG 61:664]).
4:21–5:1 along the same lines, his expression “nearly all” indicates that there were in fact some who did not read it in this way. Before moving on to Augustine, let us step back and look at a few of these. Our textual sources are scant, but it appears that the passage was often used in the second and third centuries in polemical contexts where questions of identity were at stake.\(^{37}\) Clement of Alexandria (ca. 200), for example, reports that the Valentinian teacher Theodotus used the passage to distinguish between those whom he calls “the spiritual” (οἱ πνευματικοί) and those whom he calls “the psychic” (οἱ ψυχικοί). The “spiritual” type is saved by nature, but the “psychic” type is under its own power, and has tendencies “toward either faith and incorruption, or toward unfaith and corruption” (πρὸς τῇ πίστιν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ πρὸς ἀπιστίαν καὶ φθοράν), according to its own choice. Hence, the “psychic” person, who is the son “according to the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα) begotten “from the Egyptian slave woman” (ἐκ τῆς δούλης τῆς Αἰγυπτίας), has the possibility of transformation from slavery to freedom and being grafted onto Israel (as in Rom 11:17), but Israel is, allegorically (ἀλληλογορεῖται) the “spiritual person,” who is the legitimate son of Abraham begotten from “the free woman” (ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθερας).\(^{38}\) Here again, even in this

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rather free allegorization, the perception that Gal 4:21–5:1 refers in the first instance to the Jews as the children of the slave woman is presupposed. Other examples are reported by Hippolytus in *Refutation of all Heresies* (ca. 222–235) and Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* (ca. 180). To give one further example, Tertullian reports in *Against Marcion* that in Marcion’s text of Gal 4:24, the two women represent two “revelations” (*ostensiones*) rather than two “covenants” (*testamenta*). Presumably the Marcionites saw themselves as the children of the free woman, liberated by the true God that transcends the world while their Christian opponents were the children of the slave woman, still enslaved to the creator God of the

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39 It is hard to determine if this fits Dawson’s definition of allegory as given in the previous chapter. Because these second- and third-century treatments of the passage do not deal with the meaning of the passage as a whole, it is difficult to determine precisely what these interpreters would regard as the “literal” meaning. Moreover, it is not clear whether it is Theodotus who is bringing elements of Gal 4:21–5:1 into the allegory or Clement himself. Pagals assumes it is Theodotus (*Gnostic Paul*, 110); van Os argues that it is some other Valentinian writer (“Children of the Slave Woman,” 392 n.11); Heldt argues that it is Clement (“Constructing Christian Communal Identity,” 35–36).

40 In *Ref. 5.8.36*, for example, Hippolytus describes how the Naassenes hold that “the children of the desolate woman are many more than the children of the woman who has the husband” because “those things that have been born again” (*tὰ ἀναγεννηκαμένα*) are immortal, abide forever, and are many, though the things born are few, while “the fleshly things” (*tὰ σαρκικά*) are all perishable, though the things born may be very many (*Hippolytus Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* [ed. Miloslav Marcovich; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986], 162). Heldt takes this to mean that for the Naassenes, “not physical, but spiritual procreation secures immortality” (“Delineating Identity in the Second and Third century CE: The Case of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians 4:21–31 in the Writings of Hippolytus,” *StPat* 42 [2006]: 166). Likewise, in *Adversus haereses* 5.35.2, Irenaeus says that when Paul in Gal 4:26 speaks about “the Jerusalem above, who is our mother,” he is not speaking about “a concept of an Aeon that has gone astray,” nor about “some power separated from the Pleroma,” but about the Jerusalem delineated by God’s hands (ed. Adelin Rousseau; Paris: Cerf, 1969, SC 153:445). On the basis of this and *Ref. 6.34*, Pagals concludes that “the Valentinians, like the Naassenes, praise the pneumatic Sophia as ‘Eve,’ the mother of all living, that is, of all who belong to ‘the Jerusalem above’” (*Gnostic Paul*, 110).

Jews. These examples illustrate how the passage was used in the early centuries to construct and reinforce various identities, but also how these identities were constructed on the basis of a perception that the passage in the first place refers to Jews allegorically as “the son of the slave woman” and the followers of Christ as “the son of the free woman.”

Augustine is the other patristic interpreter who casts a long shadow into the history of interpretation. When we compare Augustine’s Commentary on Galatians (ca. 394) with Jerome’s, it is immediately apparent that Augustine is much freer in his allegorizing. As we have seen, Jerome goes well beyond Paul’s allegory, but does not seem to be aware that he is doing so. Augustine, on the other hand, is quite aware of what he is doing, and goes even further. When he turns to Gal 4:22–23, Augustine comments that what the law says concerning the two sons of Abraham is “easily understood” (facile intelligitur), since Paul

42 I say “presumably” here because we do not have the textual evidence to know precisely how Marcionite readers interpreted this text. Jerome himself argues that Marcion did not want to omit from Galatians Paul’s statement that this is an allegory because Marcion wanted to show that the law should be understood differently than it was written. However, Jerome argues, this undermines Marcion’s position, because even if the law should be accepted allegorically (as Paul teaches, and as “we also admit”), it should be construed, not “according to the will of the reader” (pro voluntate legentis), but “according to the authority of the writer” (pro scribentis auctoritate). That is, Jerome insists that the spiritual meaning that Paul finds in the law is a meaning that was intended by Moses (Ad Galatas 4.24b–26 [CCSL 77A:142]).

43 Indeed, as writers like Clement, Irenaeus, and Tertullian push back against these interpretations, they insist on what they themselves perceive to be the “literal” meaning such that their own group occupies the position of “the son of the free woman.” In Adversus haereses 1.10.3, for example, Irenaeus argues that Paul’s reference to the desolate woman in Gal 4:27 refers to the “one universal church” that Irenaeus is a part of (ed. Adelin Rousseau; Paris: Cerf, 1979, SC 264:166). As van Os notes, “Irenaeus clearly does not want his gnostic Christian opponents to designate his community as children of the slave woman.” (“Children of the Slave Woman,” 400).

44 Hence, by Dawson’s definition of allegory (which presupposes that interpreters are aware that they are allegorizing), Jerome cannot be described as allegorizing when he does this.
himself interprets this allegory. What Paul is saying, according to Augustine, is that the son of the slave woman Hagar signifies the old covenant, that is, the people of the old covenant, on account of its “slavish yoke of carnal observances” (*jugum servile carnalium observationum*), and its earthly promises, while Isaac signifies the people of the new covenant. He is thus on a par with Jerome in perceiving that Paul is referring here to Judaism and Christianity respectively. Augustine does not remain very long with Paul’s allegory, however. Swiftly in his exposition he begins to muse about the children of Abraham’s wife Keturah: “But if someone, having obtained confidence through the apostle’s presentation that these two sons should be accepted allegorically, wants also to consider the sons of Keturah as some figural representation of future things (for these events concerning such people have not been inscribed under the administration of the Holy Spirit to no purpose), he will perhaps find heresies and schisms to be signified.” He says that Keturah’s children were, of course, like Isaac, “children of a free woman,” but, like Ishmael, they were born “according to the flesh,” not “spiritually through the promise.” Augustine is quite aware that he has taken his licence to allegorize the story from Paul’s own allegorization of it. Like Jerome, Augustine seems quite content with what Paul is doing allegorically, and is happy to follow suit.

Augustine takes this one step further in *The City of God against the Pagans*, written some thirty years later. Like Origen, Augustine appeals to Gal 4:21–5:1 to justify an allegorical

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46 *Ad Galatas expositionis liber unus* 40.4–5 (Plumer, 194).
47 *Ad Galatas expositionis liber unus* 40.7 (Plumer, 194).
approach to the Scriptures. Reading allegorically, Augustine finds in the Scriptures the history of two cities, both instituted by God: “The citizens of the earthly (terrenae) city, however, are brought to birth by a nature that has been corrupted by sin, but the citizens of the heavenly (caelestis) city are brought to birth by a grace that liberates nature from sin.”

Going right back to the beginning, he identifies Cain as belonging to the human city (pertinens ad hominum civitatem), while Abel belongs to the City of God (ad civitatem Dei). He then works his way through the Scriptures, tracing the history of these two cities. Taking his cue from Paul, Augustine notes that the distinction between the two is symbolized by the two sons of Abraham: Ishmael, secundum carnem natus (“born according to the flesh”), and Isaac, secundum repromissionem natus (“born according to the promise”). Although both are sons of Abraham, the one was begotten by custom, demonstrating nature, but the other by the promise, signifying grace. Moreover, the one city is a “shadow” (umbra) and a “prophetic image” (imago prophetica) of the other, hence Paul describes it as “enslaved” (serviens). Hagar, the slave woman, is a symbol of the earthly city (“the Jerusalem now”), which in turn points to the heavenly city (“the Jerusalem above”), which is symbolized by Sarah. To some degree, this mitigates the harshness of Paul’s binary. Regarding the casting out of the slave woman and her son, for example, Augustine says that this prefigures “the passing away of the shadow with the coming of the light” (transiturae erant umbrae luce veniente). Nevertheless, this still presupposes a basic distinction between Judaism and

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49 Ibid.
50 Augustine takes this from Gal 4:21–5:1. It is not clear if he is able to detect where Paul’s allegory ends and his own begins. In any case, such a distinction is not important to him.
51 Ibid.
Christianity, with Judaism as it continued in his own day belonging to the earthly city.

Augustine also makes interesting use of this passage in his anti-Donatist writings, especially when arguing that the use of political power to suppress heretics is legitimate. In his treatise On the Correction of the Donatists (ca. 417), for example, he responds to the Donatist objection that “the true church is the one that suffers persecution, not the one that inflicts it” (illam esse veram ecclesiam, quae persecutionem patitur, non quae facit) by saying that true martyrs do not suffer persecution on account of iniquity or on account of an impious division of Christian unity, but on account of justice, “for Hagar also suffered persecution by Sarah, and the one who was inflicting it was holy (sancta), while the one who was suffering it was wicked (iniqua).” Up to this point, Augustine is appealing to the Genesis account, not necessarily to Galatians, but later on he tells the Donatists to “ask the Apostle what church Sarah was signifying when she was persecuting the slave woman.” Augustine answers, “Surely he says in that woman who was afflicting the slave woman was prefigured (fuisse figuratam) our mother the free woman, the heavenly Jerusalem, that is, the true church of God (veram Dei ecclesiam).” Sarah does this, Augustine says, for Hagar’s own good, implying that imperial persecution of the Donatists is a necessary and legitimate

52 As Wendy Elgersma Helleman notes, Augustine’s use of the image of Sarah as “Mother of the Church” appears frequently in his writings (“‘Abraham had two sons’: Augustine and the Allegory of Sarah and Hagar [Galatians 4:21–3],” CTJ 48 [2013]: 35–64).
53 De correctione Donatistarum 9 (Letter 185; ed. Al. Goldbacher; Vindobonae: F. Tempsky, 1911, CCEL 57:8). To do this, Augustine has to read Sarah’s harsh treatment of Hagar in Gen 16:6 (MT: עָנָה; LXX: κακόω; Vulg.: affligio) as “persecution” (persecutio). Ironically he also refers to Hagar’s insolence (superbiendo) towards Sarah as a form of persecution.
54 De correctione Donatistarum 11 (CCEL 57:9).
55 Ibid.
measure, since it is being done for their salvation. Augustine takes a slightly different tack in his eleventh tractate on the Gospel of John, which was written about the same time. With regard to the text of Galatians, he observes more precisely that Paul does not refer to Sarah’s harsh treatment of Hagar as “persecution” (persecutionem), but he does refer to Ishmael’s supposedly innocent “playing with Isaac” (LXX: παίζωντα μετὰ Ἰσαακ; Vulg.: ludentem cum Isaac) as “persecution.” Augustine, like Jerome, asserts that this could not have been mere playing: “Those then who deceive you by playing, persecute you all the more” (plus ergo vos persequuntur qui vos illudendo seducunt). He goes on to say that no one should be surprised when God arouses the authorities against the heretics: “God is arousing them in order that Hagar may be beaten by Sarah” (Deus concitat, ut a Sara verberetur Agar). Again, this is done for Hagar’s own good, so that her offspring may share in the inheritance. In both these arguments, Augustine allegorizes Genesis well beyond what Paul says in Galatians, but here again, he has taken his cue from Paul’s allegorization of the Genesis account in the first place.

In spite of all the different things that interpreters do with this passage in the patristic era, two patterns in the history of interpretation are already emerging. First, there is a tendency to perceive that Paul is referring here to two peoples: to the Jews and the Christians respectively. A more thorough analysis of patristic exegesis would show just how

56 Charles Scalise outlines how Augustine’s views harden on this question during the course of his controversies with the Donatists (“Exegetical Warrants for Religious Persecution: Augustine vs. the Donatists” Review and Expositor 93 [1996]: 499).
58 In Johannis evangelium tractatus 11.12 (CCSL 36:118).
59 In Johannis evangelium tractatus 11.13 (CCSL 36:118).
widespread this assumption was.\textsuperscript{60} Thus, Tertullian (ca. 200) says that when Paul says that “we are not sons of a slave woman, but of a free woman,” he “surely” (\textit{utique}) reveals that the “nobility” (\textit{generositas}) of Christianity has the mystery of an allegory (\textit{allegoriae habere sacramentum}) in the son of Abraham born from a free woman, just as the “slavish legalism” (\textit{servitutem legalem}) of Judaism has “the mystery of an allegory in the son of the slave woman.”\textsuperscript{61} Victorinus (ca. 362) says that in Gal 4:22, Paul wishes it proven, that “the Jewish law (and as it were, the whole Jewish people), is the son of the slave woman,” and moreover, the church (and Christians) is the son of the free woman, “surely signifying two peoples” (\textit{significans utique duos populus}).\textsuperscript{62} John Chrysostom (ca. 396) asks, “Who is the barren woman (\textit{στειρα})? . . . Is it not clear (\textit{εὐδηλον}) that she is the church from the Gentiles? . . . Who is the woman who has the husband? Is it not clear (\textit{εὐδηλον}) that she is the synagogue?”\textsuperscript{63} Note how these interpreters take this conclusion for granted: they seem to feel compelled to nuance their statement of it with words like \textit{utique} (“surely”) or \textit{εὐδηλον} (“it is clear”), as if to say Paul does not explicitly make these connections, but “clearly” this is what he means. This can also be seen in how interpreters read Genesis. Origen, for example, while preaching on Gen 21:19 in his seventh homily on Genesis, draws on the

\begin{itemize}
  \item In addition to the examples here, see also: Cyprian \textit{Ad Quirinum} 1.20 (CCSL 3:19–20); Ambrose \textit{De Abrahamo} 1.20–28, 1.62–65, 2.72–75 (CCEL 32.2:515–24, 543–45, 549–51); Cyril of Alexandria \textit{Glaphyrorum in Genesim} 3.9 (PG 69:133); and the commentaries of Ephraem the Syrian (\textit{S. Ephraem Syri commentarii in epistolas D. Pauli} [trans. A. Patribus Mekitharistis; Venice: Sancti Lazari, 1893], 135–6); Theodoret of Cyrus (PG 82:492); Pelagius (\textit{Pelagius’s Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul} [ed. Alexander Souter; Cambridge: At the University Press, 1922], 1:328–32); Oecumenius (PG 118:1144–1149); and John of Damascus (PG 95:803–9).
  \item \textit{Adversus Macionem} 5.4.8 (Evans, 530).
  \item \textit{Commentarius in epistola ad Galatas} 4.26 (PG 61:662–63).
\end{itemize}
terms of Paul’s allegory, to muse over Hagar’s inability to see the well: “Where,” he asks, “do we find that Hagar has closed eyes and they are afterward opened?” The spiritual and mystical understanding in these things is “clearer than light” (luce clarior), is it not? Those people who are “according to the flesh” have been “ejected” (abjectus), and they will continue to lie in hunger and thirst, “until the eyes of the synagogue are opened” (donec aperiantur oculi synagogae). Here again it is taken for granted that Paul is referring to the contrast between the church and the synagogue, between Christianity and Judaism.

At the same time, there is also another tendency, which is to allegorize the Genesis account over and above what Paul does, whether this is done explicitly, as we saw with Augustine, or implicitly (and perhaps unknowingly) as we saw with Jerome. Thus Ambrosiaster (ca. 380) extends Paul’s allegory to refer to sinners: “Therefore we were sons of the slave woman as long as we were subject to sin (dum peccatis eramus obnoxii), but having received the remission of sins, we have been set free by Christ.” This tendency need not be separate from the first tendency. Although Ambrosiaster applies the allegory to the remission of sins, he speaks of “Jews” and “sinners” in the same breath. Similarly, other interpreters use Paul’s allegory to make new allegorical connections regarding the distinction between Judaism and Christianity that go well beyond Paul’s allegory itself. Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 376), for example, follows Origen’s lead and sees in Hagar a figure of “the synagogue.”

64 This homily is extant only in Latin translation. See Hom. Gen. 7.6 (PG 12:202C).
66 “Ishmael indeed signifies the birth of the Jews, or of those who are slaves of sin, but Isaac signifies the birth of the Christians, because they are born into liberty” (In epistola ad Galatas 4.24 [CSEL 81.3:51]).
After she had been cast out, Gregory says, Hagar, “whom Paul also allegorizes while reasoning with the Galatians,” wandered in the desert and came near death, “since it was not possible for the synagogue to have the necessities of life.” Other interpreters, by contrast, allegorize in entirely different directions. John Cassian (ca. 420) uses the passage to distinguish between πράκτική (“practical knowledge”) and θεωρητική (“theoretical knowledge”), the latter of which he divides further into “historical interpretation” (historicam interpretationem) and “spiritual understanding (intellegentiam spiritalem).”

Spiritual understanding in turn, consists of allegory, anagogy, and typology—all of which he finds evidence for in Gal 4:21–31. Even Origen himself, who in one context in his seventh homily on Genesis takes Hagar as a figure of the synagogue (as we have seen), in another context takes Sarah as a figure for “virtue” (virtus). As a consequence, Origen is then able to explain Paul’s use of the term persecute in Gal 4:29 quite differently from Jerome: if “the flesh” (i.e., Ishmael) flatters and deceives “the spirit” (i.e., Isaac), if it entices with delights, “such play of the flesh with the spirit especially offends Sarah (who is virtue),” and Paul judges such flattery “a terrible persecution” (acerbissiman persecutionem). This allegorizes the Genesis account in an entirely different direction even beyond what Paul does, but again, even here, traces of Paul’s dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity (or rather the perception that Galatians expresses a dichotomy between Judaism and

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68 Conferences 14.8.1–2 (ed. E. Pichery; Paris: Cerf, 1959, SC 54:189–91). This will be important later on in the medieval period, as we shall soon see,
69 In this, of course, Origen is inspired, first by Paul’s reading of Genesis (or rather, by his own misreading of Paul’s reading of Genesis), and then by Philo’s reading of Genesis as involving the relationship between virtue and her “attendant.”
70 Hom. Gen. 7.3 (PG 12:200C).
Christianity) serves as the base.

3. Medieval Interpretation

When we compare interpretation in the medieval period with that of the patristic period, we can detect a shift in approach. Patristic commentators tend to approach a passage by commenting on what seems significant to them; medieval commentators are more systematic. First, they seem reluctant to say anything on their own authority: they are more likely to pass on comments found in the commentaries of patristic authorities, which in the case of Galatians usually means Augustine and Jerome. Moreover, they operate with the notion that every passage of Scripture (at least Old Testament Scripture) has multiple meanings, which they often expound systematically. Both these tendencies can be seen in the commentaries of Carolingian scholar Haimo of Auxere (ca. 840–860). In his Commentary on Galatians, Haimo often follows either Augustine or Jerome, sometimes even repeating what they say word-for-word, and when he comes to Gal 4:21–5:1, he systematizes Paul’s interpretation of the Genesis account, first expounding the meaning of Genesis quantum ad sensum pertinet litterae (“in so far as it pertains to the sense of the letter”), and then quantum ad spiritalem intellectum attinet (“in so far as it concerns the spiritual understanding”). In continuity with what we have seen before, Haimo sees Paul as

71 Though less well-known today, Haimo is an important figure in medieval biblical scholarship. Johannes Heil notes that Haimo’s Pauline commentaries have survived in whole or in part in approximately 180 manuscripts from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries, from which he draws the conclusion that “we have here one of the most successful medieval biblical commentaries of all time” (“Labourers in the Lord’s Quarry: Carolingian Exegetes, Patristic Authority, and Theological Innovation, a Case Study in the Representation of Jews in Commentaries on Paul,” in The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era [ed. Celia Chazelle and Burton Van Name Edwards; Turnhout: Brepols, 2003], 85).
referring here to the distinction between Judaism and Christianity. With regard to Paul’s reference to two covenants in Gal 4:24, Haimo says that, *quantum ad sensum pertinet litterae*, “Hagar and Sarah were two women, and Ishmael and Isaac were two men,” but *quantum ad spiritalem intellectum attinet*, “Hagar, the slave woman, who gave birth in slavery to a son, signifies the Law, which gave birth to, and held, the Jewish people under a yoke of slavery,” and Sarah, who gave birth to the free son, “signifies the grace of the new covenant (*novi testamenti*), which gave birth to the Christian people, who have been freed by baptism, not only from original and actual sins, but from every servitude to the Law.”

At the same time, and also in continuity with what we have seen before, Haimo extends the allegory beyond what Paul actually says, and this has the effect of reinforcing the Jewish-Christian binary. With regard to the persecution that Paul mentions in Gal 4:29, Haimo (following Jerome for the most part) comments that Paul is warning the Galatians “to guard themselves from the Jews” (*se custodiant a Judaeis*) lest they be deceived by them, meaning that just as Ishmael’s apparent playing with Isaac was “no simple game” (*ludum non simplicem*), but rather a ruse to turn Isaac into a fool and gain the inheritance for himself, so also the Jewish people persecute the Christian people and others, “when they bend them into servitude to the Law” (*ad servitutem illos legis inclinent*). When he comes to the expulsion in Gal 4:30, Haimo goes beyond even Jerome (as well as Paul) by saying that *quantum ad spiritalem intellectum attinet* “for as long as the Jews want to be sons of the slave woman and persecute the son of the free woman, that is, as long as they want to be subject to the law

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73 *In epistolam ad Galatas* 4.29 (PL 117:690A–C).
in circumcision and sacrifices of the Law, not believing that they can be delivered through Christ’s passion, and for as long as they want to persecute us, who have already been made free, they should be driven away (repellendi sunt) from the church’s inheritance.”74 Although Haimo also interprets “the son of the slave woman” as not merely Jews, but as “the son of sin and evil desire” (filius peccati et mala concupiscentiae), namely, the son of the carnal law, “who strives to observe the law carnally” (qui legem carnaliter observare nititur), here yet again the Jewish-Christian distinction nevertheless serves as the backdrop.75

This approach can be compared with that of Thomas Aquinas, whose Commentary on Galatians (based on his lectures at the University of Paris in 1273) presupposes the medieval notion of interpreting the biblical text according to a full “four senses of sacred Scripture” (quatuor sensus sacrae Scripturae).76 Thomas in fact takes advantage of the passage to expound on the four senses. “Signification is twofold,” he says, “one is through sounds (vox), the other through the things (res) that the sounds signify.” In other sciences, only words and sounds (verba et voces) can be employed for signification, but when it comes to the science of the sacred Scriptures, it is possible to have “many meanings” (plures sensus), since the author is God, “in whose power it is, not only to employ sounds for the

74 In epistolam ad Galatas 4.30 (PL 117:690D).
75 Ibid.
76 Although the notion of a four-fold sense of Scripture can be traced back to Cassian in the fifth century, it was not given systematic expression until the twelfth century in the school of St. Victor. See Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1941), 58–155; Henri de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l’Ecriture (Paris: Aubier, 1959), 1:43–118.
purpose of signifying (as human beings also can do), but also the things themselves.”

Consequently, the signification whereby sounds signify something pertains to the literal or historical sense (ad sensum litteralem seu historicum), but the signification whereby the things signified through sounds signify yet other things pertains to the mystical sense (ad sensum mysticum). The mystical (or spiritual) sense is in turn divided into three: the allegorical sense (sensus allegoricus), in which the things of the old law are a figure for the things of the new, the anagogical sense (sensus anagogicus), in which the things of new law are a figure for the glory of the future, and the moral sense (sensus moralis), in which the things of the new law are examples of what we ought to do. One implication of this is a renewed focus on the importance of the sensus litteralis. Since the spiritual meanings are not to be found in the words themselves but in the things that the words signify, the literal sense becomes the basis for the other senses. Moreover, the literal sense itself comes to include the metaphorical and parabolic meanings of the words, insofar as they pertain to the author’s meaning. For these reasons, Thomas often places greater emphasis on the literal sense than other medieval interpreters. Indeed, in his Commentary on Galatians, this section is the only place where he expounds anything except the literal sense.

This approach is much more elaborate than what we saw with Haimo. Nevertheless, Thomas offers a surprisingly similar interpretation of the passage. He too takes for granted that Paul is referring to Jews and Christians: “By Ishmael are signified the Jewish people who were born in accordance with the flesh; but by Isaac are understood the people of the nations

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77 In epistolam ad Galatas 254, in S. Thomae Aquinatis super epistolas S. Pauli lectura (ed. P. Raphaelis Cai; Turin: Marietti, 1953), 620–21.

78 Ibid.
(gens) who were born in accordance with the promise, insofar as it is Abraham’s promise that he would be the father of many nations.\textsuperscript{79} Thomas, too, like Haimo, expands the allegory beyond what Paul actually says, but he does so in a way that we have not yet come across. Haimo, as we saw, acknowledges multiple meanings (one pertaining to the letter, and the other to the spiritual understanding), but he seems to attribute both of these to Paul. Thomas, however, crosses a line. He acknowledges that by Paul’s reference to the two sons in Gal 4:29, two peoples are to be understood, but he then adds, “Note that the carnal (carnis) sons of Abraham are literally (ad litteram) the Jews, but mystically (mystice), those who come to the faith on account of carnal (carnalis) and temporal goods.”\textsuperscript{80} We have seen the content of this before (in Augustine especially), but it was attributed (if only implicitly) to Paul. Here it is identified as the mystical meaning. Thomas makes a similar shift in Gal 4:29 when he asks how it is that the sons according to the flesh “persecuted” (persecuti fuerint), and “persecute” (persequantur), the sons according to the spirit? The answer, he says, is that “from the beginning of the early church the Jews persecuted the Christians, as is manifest in the Acts of the Apostles, and they would also do now, if they could,” but then he goes on to say, “Now, also those who are carnal (carnalis)—namely, those who desire glory and temporal gain in the church—persecute the spiritual (spirituales) in the church.”\textsuperscript{81} By making a distinction between then and now, Thomas is tacitly acknowledging that he is offering an interpretation that is different from Paul’s. Unlike previous interpreters, Thomas

\textsuperscript{79} In epistolam ad Galatas 251 (Cai, 620).
\textsuperscript{80} In epistolam ad Galatas 269 (Cai, 624).
\textsuperscript{81} In epistolam ad Galatas 272 (Cai, 624).
is thereby allegorizing Paul according to Dawson’s working definition of allegory.\textsuperscript{82} Yet even while allegorizing Paul, Thomas does not seem to be troubled by what Paul is doing with Genesis. In fact, as is also the case with previous interpreters who depart from Paul in how they allegorize the Genesis account, he nevertheless seems to have been inspired to do so by Paul’s allegorization in the first place. Another example of this is the use of the passage by Pope Urban II in his promotion of the first crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095 (as I already mentioned in chapter one). Having identified the Saracens as “the son of the slave woman,” Urban exhorts the Christian nations to liberate the holy land with a paraphrase of the very words provided by Paul, “But what has been written (\textit{sed quid scriptum est})? Cast out the slave woman and her son!”\textsuperscript{83} There does not seem to be any awareness in the record of this speech provided by William of Tyre that there might be a problem here. Thomas, however, seems to be aware that this kind of exegetical manoeuvre might be problematic, and he quickly nips it in the bud: “The heretics whom we persecute (\textit{haeretici quos nos persequimur}) say that it is they who are born in accordance with the spirit, and it is in fact we who are born in accordance with the flesh.”\textsuperscript{84} In answer, Thomas (like Augustine in his disputes with the Donatists) distinguishes two kinds of persecution. On the one hand, there is good persecution, what those who are spiritual do to those who are carnal, “either to correct (\textit{corrigant}) them, if they are willing to be converted, or to destroy

\textsuperscript{82} One can also detect allegorizing in Thomas’ interpretation of the anagogical sense of Gal 4:30 (though he does not identify it as such). Thomas suggests that ultimately the slave woman—“that is, evil and sin itself” (\textit{id est militia et ipsum peccatum})—will be cast out (\textit{eijectur}) from the kingdom of God (\textit{In epistolam ad Galatas} 274 [Cai, 624]).

\textsuperscript{83} As I already noted in chapter one, n.1.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{In epistolam ad Galatas} 273 (Cai, 624).
(destruant) them, if they are obstinate in evil, lest they contaminate the Lord’s flock.”

The other kind of persecution is evil, what those who are carnal do to those who are spiritual, and it is this kind of persecution that Paul is referring to. Here, as elsewhere, Thomas goes well beyond Galatians, but by reproducing Paul’s binary in a new setting, he in fact perpetuates a pattern already established by Paul in Galatians.

With his careful reading of the passage, Thomas provides us with what might be described as the best that medieval exegesis of the passage has to offer. Equally as illuminating for our understanding of how the passage was interpreted in the medieval period, however, is the glossa ordinaria, which was produced in the twelfth century, and circulated widely in various editions for centuries afterward. It consists of the biblical text along with glosses in the margins (the glossa marginalis) and between the lines (the glossa interlinearis), which preserve in condensed form the wisdom of patristic biblical commentary as it had been received, supplemented and passed on by earlier medieval interpreters. Here again it becomes obvious how the tradition is not embodied in any single interpreter: what is preserved are excerpts from patristic interpreters that have been taken out of their original

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85 Ibid.

86 Margaret T. Gibson, describing this as a text “with a brief, intense flowering, and a long reputation thereafter,” notes that the Glossa ordinaria was the standard biblical text in use in the twelfth century and “it remained available and consulted, but essentially unchanged, until well into the fifteenth century” (“The Place of the Glossa ordinaria in Medieval Exegesis,” in Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers [ed. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery Jr.; Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992], 5, 21).

87 As we might expect, Augustine and Jerome (Hieronymus) are prominent voices in the ordinary gloss of Galatians, but so are Chrysostom and Ambrosiaster (under the name of Ambrose), and occasionally Theodoret, Gregory the Great, Theophylactus, and Haimo of Auxerre.
context. It is precisely the deeper, more carefully-expressed views of these thinkers that is not preserved. The glossa interlinearis, for example, provides the reader with short, immediate interpretations of what appears in the biblical text, usually not attributed to any particular interpreter. At Gal 4:22 the two sons of Abraham are immediately identified as “Ishmael and Isaac,” while at Gal 4:23, the son of the slave woman who was born in accordance with the flesh is immediately identified as “the Jews, and all those who are servants of sin.” In this way, the glossa interlinearis reinforces, even intensifies, the patterns we have already seen in medieval exegesis. The same pattern appears with the glossa marginalis, even though the comments are longer and the effect less immediate. Thus even while preserving patristic traditions of interpretation of this passage, the glossa ordinaria selects and shapes these traditions to such a degree that it is more accurate to say that it is really medieval traditions that we are looking at.

Just how far-reaching Paul’s allegory (as attributed to him) extended into medieval Christian society can be seen in the legal concilia of Oldradus de Ponte (1337). Oldradus, an advocate in the papal court at Avignon, appeals to Paul’s interpretation of Genesis in Gal 4:21–5:1 when offering the legal opinion that a prince cannot expel peaceful Jews, Saracens, and other pagans from his lands without legitimate cause. In his consilium 87, he reasons on the basis of Paul’s allegory that as long as Jews and others are not making trouble, they should

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not be expelled, but they should nevertheless be compelled to pay tithes, since this is “sufficiently prefigured in that slave woman from whom they descend, who conducted herself with such haughtiness and ingratitude toward the free woman (through whom the church is designated) that she was expelled (fuit expulsa).”⁹₀ At the same time, in consilium 264, he reasons on the basis of what would have been considered a “literal” reading of Gen 16 and 21, that since Hagar, the mother of the Hagarites, and her son Ishmael were expelled (expulsisunt) by Sarah because she had been persecuting her mistress, and he had been persecuting his brother Isaac, it follows that “where the Hagarites live humbly and do not deceive simple Christians to worship their foul Mohamed, they are for that reason not to be expelled (expellendi sunt), but received.”⁹¹ Although Oldradus seems to be aiming toward clemency here, there is something of a problematic “having your cake and eating it too” quality to this kind of reasoning. The Saracens are the descendants of Hagar according to the sensus literalis, while the Jewish people are the descendants of Hagar according to the sensus spiritualis, but either way, the Christian people are the children of the free woman and entitled to the inheritance. This kind of reasoning of course was no mere theoretical abstraction: it had real consequences for peoples’ lives.⁹²

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⁹₀ Norman Zacour, Jews and Saracens in the Concilia of Oldradus de Ponte (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), 84.
⁹¹ Ibid. 87. Of course this “literal” reading of Genesis is based on Paul’s reading of persecution into the Genesis account.
⁹² Another particularly poignant example of how deeply seated this understanding extended into medieval Christian culture appears in the “Maugier Bible” (St Genevieve MS 1180, fol. 545), an illustrated biblical manuscript from the thirteenth century. Here Paul himself is depicted in the illustration of the initial letter as carrying out the eviction of Hagar and her son in person (Luba Eleen, The Illustration of the Pauline Epistles in French and English Bibles of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982], 134–5).
Before moving on to the Reformation period, I want to look at Nicholas of Lyre, because of his emphasis on the *sensus literalis*. Although Nicholas also recognizes the standard four senses of the Scriptures, he insists even more strongly than Thomas that the literal sense provides the basis for all the other senses. ⁹³ One might think, therefore, that this emphasis would make him more sensitive to the divergences between Genesis and Galatians, but this does not appear to be so. In his *Commentary on Galatians* in the *Postilla litteralis* (ca. 1329), Nicholas does indeed work through Paul’s argument with closer reference to the text of Genesis than we have seen with other interpreters. ⁹⁴ Moreover, he seems to be careful to avoid explicitly identifying the two sons of Abraham as the Jewish and Christian peoples respectively. In contrast to most Christian interpreters of Genesis, who are inclined to regard Ishmael’s playing as a kind of “bodily” (*corporalis*) persecution of Isaac, Nicholas is inclined to agree with Hebrew interpreters who regard Ishmael’s playing as a kind of “spiritual” (*spiritualis*) persecution, since this accords with Paul’s interpretation, in which “false apostles were persuading the Galatians to judaize (Iudaizare), which is similar to

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⁹³ Although there can be any number of mystical senses, “they nevertheless all presuppose the literal sense as the foundation (*omnes tamen praesupponunt sensum litteralem tanquam funda mentum*). Hence, just as a building declining from the foundation is disposed to destruction, so also a mystical exposition deviating from the literal sense should be esteemed improper and silly, . . . and for that reason, it is necessary for those who want to advance in the study of sacred Scripture to begin by understanding the literal sense” (*Second Prologue*, in *Bibliorum Scriptorum Glossa ordinaria cum postilla Nicholai Lyrani*, vol. 1 [ed. Strabo Fulgensi; Venice: Juntas, 1603]).

⁹⁴ He says, for example, with regard to Paul’s use of the term παῖδισκῆ in Gal 4:22, “It should nevertheless be understood that Ḥagar, mother of Ishmael, was Abraham’s wife, as it is written in Gene. 17, yet, because Sarah was nevertheless Abraham’s first wife, therefore Ḥagar retained here the name of ancillae (‘slave woman’)” (*Postilla litteralis* Gal 4.22, in *Bibliorum Scriptorum cum Glossa ordinaria* [ed. Strabo Fulgensi; Venice: Juntas, 1601], 6:504).
idolatry itself after the Gospel has been proclaimed.“\(^95\) Yet when it comes to the expulsion in Gal 4:30, Nicholas seems to revert back to the traditional interpretation, saying, “It happened thus \textit{ad litteram} concerning Hagar and her son Ishmael through what had been prefigured, namely that, with the coming of Christ, the observation of the law, along with the observers themselves, should be cast out (\textit{abjicienda}) from the comfort of the faithful.”\(^96\)

Here Nicholas seems to avoid the trap so many other interpreters fall into, of going beyond what Paul’s text actually warrants (or rather, beyond what Nicholas perceives Paul’s text to be warranting). Unlike most other medieval interpreters, therefore, he does not construct his own allegory relating to his own time. At the same time, for all his careful attention to the biblical text, he is not any better at noticing the discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians.\(^97\)

4. Humanist and Reformation Interpretation

Turning now to Humanist and Reformation interpreters, we have another shift. As we have already seen, there is renewed interest in the \textit{sensus literalis} in later medieval exegesis, but this does not manifest itself as a rejection of the principle of “four senses.” With the emergence of biblical humanism in the fifteenth century, and the Reformation in the

\(^95\) Ibid., 508.
\(^96\) Ibid.
\(^97\) Other interpreters of Galatians from the medieval period follow similar patterns. See in particular the commentaries of Claudius of Turin (PL 104:842–912) and Raban Maur (PL 112:245–381) from the ninth century; Bruno the Carthusian (PL 153:281–316) and Theophylactus of Bulgaria (PG 124:351–54) from the eleventh century, Hugh of St. Victor (PL 175:5), Peter Lombard (PL 192:93–170), and Robert of Melun (\textit{Oeuvres de Robert de Melun} [ed. Raymond Martin; Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Louvaniense, 1032–8]) from the twelfth century; and Robert Grosseteste (\textit{Expositio in epistolam Sancti Pauli ad Galatas} [ed. James McEvoy; Turnhout: Brepols, 1995]) from the thirteenth century.
sixteenth, however, there emerges an aversion to the notion of multiple senses in principle. This can be seen in the range of reactions to Paul’s allegory. Erasmus, for example, is quite comfortable with Paul’s use of allegory, but this is because he sees any kind of figurative language as an expression of the literal sense of the text. His annotations on Gal 4:21–5:1 are essentially a philological exploration of the various meanings of the words that appear in the text. Luther tolerates Paul’s use of allegory, but he makes it clear that this is just an “adornment” (ornatus) to Paul’s argument—the substance of Paul’s argument lies elsewhere. Calvin is openly hostile to the notion that Paul is using allegory here, insisting that by his use of the word Paul is merely making a “comparison” (similitudo) between the family of Abraham and the church. Again, one might expect that this focus on a singular sense would make interpreters more sensitive to noticing discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians, but as we shall see, this does not appear to be the case. Their focus on the singular meaning of the text seems to lead them to adopt Paul’s meaning (or what they perceive to be Paul’s meaning), without regard for what actually appears in Genesis.

We have access to Erasmus’ interpretation of Galatians primarily through his Paraphrase on Galatians, published in 1519. Here Erasmus provides an extended commentary on the

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98 As Erika Rummel notes, although Erasmus “did not favour a narrow literal approach, he generally sought a ‘simple’ interpretation and warned his readers off far-fetched allegorical interpretations” (Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament: From Philologist to Theologian [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986], 62).
100 In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas commentarius (1535), in Werke 40.1:657.
102 In epistolam Pauli Apostoli ad Galatas paraphrasis, in Erasmi Roterodami paraphrasis
passage, but in a format that we have not encountered before. This shift in format itself is noteworthy: it indicates a confidence in the content of the interpretation that contrasts with the medieval period. Gone is the tendency towards cautious language of “according to Jerome” (*secundum Hieronymum*), “St. Augustine says . . .” (*dicit Augustinus*), “from this can be understood” (*hinc intelligi potest*), etc. Here Erasmus presents his interpretation of Paul’s words as if spoken by Paul himself. As a consequence, Erasmus comes across as much more forceful and univocal than previous interpreters. This format also allows Erasmus to conveniently smooth over any discrepancies that he might notice between Galatians and Genesis. As to whether Ishmael is also a “child of promise” in Gal 4:23, for example, Erasmus merely adopts Paul’s binary contrasts, making them stronger in the process. He has Paul explicitly distinguishing the two sons by saying “that first son was owing to nature” (*prior ille filius naturae debebatur*), while “this (other) one was owing to faith” (*hic fidei*). In this way Erasmus paraphrases Paul’s references to σάρξ and ἐπαγγέλια (“flesh” and “promise”) as *natura* and *fides* (“nature” and “faith”) respectively, contrasts that are more convenient to Erasmus’ perspective. Likewise, the fact that Ishmael is not described as actually persecuting Isaac in the Genesis account gets lost in the shuffle: Erasmus paraphrases Paul as saying in Gal 4:29 that formerly Ishmael persecuted Isaac, since “already at that time in the course of playing he was claiming for himself more than was fair,” so also in our time, “those who cling to the carnal law (*qui carnali legi haerent*) regard with envy those who embrace the spiritual law of the gospel (*qui spiritualem

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In both these instances, the format of the paraphrase allows Erasmus to handily pass over discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians.

When he comes to Gal 4:30, however, Erasmus does notice something that most previous interpreters miss. In Genesis, it is Sarah who demands that the son of the slave woman be cast out, but Paul presents this as a demand of “the Scripture.” Erasmus resolves this discrepancy in his paraphrase by having Paul say, “The natural mother (mater iugena) does not approve of this contact. She does not want the dissimilar sons mingling, for she immediately cries out angrily, just as the Scripture of Gen 21 relates: ‘Cast out the slave woman and her son, for I shall not endure the son of the slave woman being an heir with my son Isaac.’” Notice what Erasmus is doing here. He is paraphrasing Paul’s paraphrase of Sarah’s words in Genesis such that he restores the structure of the embedded discourse that appears in Genesis. However, as he continues, it becomes clear that it is not the literal Sarah of Genesis who is speaking, but the allegorical Sarah of Paul (or rather, the allegorical Sarah of Paul as perceived by Erasmus). “The synagogue clings too much to those who have believed the gospel,” Erasmus paraphrases her as saying, “The Jews press down too much on the Christians, whose freedom they envy. If the slave mother does not want to depart willingly, let her be cast out (pellatur), rather than corrupt my son through contact with a slave.” With this paraphrase, Erasmus makes explicit what he understands Paul to be getting at: the Jews will not inherit along with the Christians.

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104 Ibid., 86.
105 Ibid., 87.
106 Ibid.
107 Erasmus makes a similar observation on Gal 4:29 in his Annotations on Galatians.
discrepancy here between Genesis and Galatians, but his paraphrase quickly covers it over again. Paul merely collapses narrative levels; Erasmus collapses the two Sarahs, with the result that the words of the one are superimposed on the words of the other.

With Luther’s *Commentary on Galatians*, which was published in 1535, we are back to a commentary in the traditional format, but the content (and tone) is closer to what we see with Erasmus. Like Erasmus, Luther reads a singular meaning in the passage, but if anything he is even more polemical than Erasmus. Although Luther, following the pattern of medieval commentary, presents the views of previous authorities, he does so primarily to distance himself from them. For example, he praises Paul as a “perfect artisan” (*optimus artifex*) in his handling of allegories, because he relates them solely to the teachings of faith, unlike “Origen and Hieronymus,” who are to be censured, “because they transformed the simple phrases of Scripture (*simplicissimas sententias scripturae*), in which allegories have no place, into silly (*inconcinnas*) and inept (*ineptas*) allegories.” Likewise, Luther, again following the pattern of medieval commentary, provides a description of the traditional “four senses” of Scripture, but he does so only to explain why he wants nothing to do with them:

(1516): “The apostle substituted in place of the *persona* of Sarah, the *persona* of the Scripture, which is of more weight, and he assigned the meaning to the cause which conducts the opportunity (*sensumque reddidit ad causam quam tractat commodum*).” Paul manages to do this, according to Erasmus, because in following neither Hebrew authority nor the Septuagint, he was content to render “in his own words” (*suis verbis*) the meaning of the Scripture (*Opera omnia* 6.9:138). In other words, Erasmus’ excuse for Paul is that he is “paraphrasing” the Scriptures.

108 During the course of his lifetime, Luther produced two commentaries on Galatians: one based on his lectures on Galatians at the University of Wittenberg from 1516–17, which were published in 1519, and the other based on his lectures from 1531, which were prepared from his students’ notes, and published under his supervision in 1535. “It is the later lectures however which had the greatest influence” (Riches, *Galatians through the Centuries*, 28).

109 *In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas commentarius* (1535), in *Werke* 40.1:653.
“idle (otiosi) and ignorant (ineruditi) monks and scholastic doctors” passed down that there are four senses of Scripture and “in accordance with these they ineptly interpreted almost every single word of Scripture.”

Luther, however, views the passage through the lens of the principle of justification sola gratia or sola fide that he finds everywhere in Galatians. With regard to Gal 4:27, for example, he says, “By this allegory, Paul clearly (clarissime) showed the distinction between law and gospel: first when he calls Hagar the old covenant and Sarah the new, then when he names one as the slave woman and the other as the free woman, and finally, when he says that the married and fertile woman is refuted and cast out of the house with her son, but the sterile and desolate woman is rendered fertile and gives birth to infinite sons and heirs.”

By tying them into his antithesis of law and grace, Luther, like Erasmus, takes up Paul’s binaries in the passage and intensifies them.

Given that Luther is so focused on this singular meaning, it is not surprising that he is not bothered that Paul’s reworking of the Genesis account loses track of many of its nuances and cross-currents. This does not mean, however, that he does not notice them. In this regard, the shift in emphasis from his 1519 commentary to that of 1535 is illuminating. In his 1519 commentary on Gal 4:24, he follows Jerome closely, asking, “How was Ishmael not also born through a promise,” given that in Gen 16, “so many things are promised to his mother through the angel of the Lord before he was born?”

Luther notes that Jerome leaves the matter undecided (as we also noted earlier), but he himself seems to feel that the decisive difference must lie in the fact that the promises regarding Isaac were made before he was born.

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110 Ibid., 40.1:663.
111 Ibid., 40.1:668.
112 In epistolam Pauli ad Galatas M. Lutheri commentarius (1519), in Werke 2:549.
conceived, whereas the promises concerning Ishmael were made after he had been conceived. This falls off the radar screen in 1535: “It makes no difference (non facit differentiam), says Paul, that one mother was a free woman, and the other a slave (although it adds to the allegory).” What is decisive is that Ishmael had been born “apart from the promise and the word of God” (citra promissionem et verbum Dei), whereas Isaac had been born “not only from the free woman but also in accordance with a promise (non tantum ex libera, sed etiam secundum promissionem).”¹¹³ Luther acknowledges that they were both sons of the same father, but adds that even though Isaac had also been born “from the flesh” (ex carne), God’s promise and naming had preceded. He observes, “Nobody aside from Paul had ever noticed this difference, but he gathered it in this way from the text of Genesis.”¹¹⁴ With this argument, says Luther, “Paul thus blocks . . . the mouths of the proud Jews, who pride themselves on being the offspring and sons of Abraham.”¹¹⁵ Luther seems to notice here a discrepancy between Genesis and Galatians, but he dissolves it by reading Genesis through the lens of Galatians, or rather through the lens of his own interpretation of Galatians. Again, he picks up on Paul’s binary language and intensifies it.

It is no wonder, then, that Luther ends up perpetuating the pattern in his own time. Like so many others before him, Luther sees Paul as referring to the distinction between Jews and Christians, which translates for him into an antithesis between law and gospel. As he says, “Just as the people of grace do not have—nor can they have—the law, so also the people of the law do not have—nor can they have—grace, for it is impossible for law and grace to

¹¹³ Ibid., 40.1:654.
¹¹⁴ “Hanc differentiam nemo prater Paulum observasset,” ibid.
¹¹⁵ Ibid., 40.1:656.
exist together.”¹¹⁶ Luther then immediately adapts this dichotomy between Jews and Christians to his own time, developing the theme with polemically-laden language. With regard to Gal 4:30, Luther says, “Here the Ishmaelites (Ismaelitae) hear a sentence launched against them that has overthrown the Jews, Greeks, Romans, etc. who persecuted the church of Christ.” He then continues, increasing the polemical tone of his language: “In the same way it is about to overturn even the Papists (papistas),” and ultimately all those who are “self-justified” (justitiarios), who today “boast that they are the people of God and the church, certain that they will receive the inheritance, and judge us, who depend on the promises of God, not only to be sterile and abandoned, but also heretics expelled from the church (haereticos ex Ecclesia proiectos), for whom it is impossible to be sons and heirs.”¹¹⁷ By applying the dichotomy to his own situation, Luther moves beyond the Jewish-Christian binary, even while still retaining it as the reference point for other distinctions.

More disturbing (to my mind), Luther picks up on some of the same polemical rhetoric a decade later in his 1543 tract, The Jews and Their Lies.¹¹⁸ Although he does not explicitly quote this passage, he alludes to it. He starts off by describing the arrogance of the Jews in believing that because they are descended from Abraham, they can claim themselves to be the people of God. However, being descended from Abraham did nothing for Ishmael, he says: “In spite of this, he has to vacate his house and Abraham’s inheritance and leave it to his brother Isaac.”¹¹⁹ In terms that reflect Paul’s argument in Galatians (or rather, more

¹¹⁶ “Impossibile est legem et gratiam simul posse existere” (ibid., 40.1:669).
¹¹⁷ Ibid., 40.1:684.
¹¹⁹ Ibid., 53:425.
precisely, Luther’s interpretation of Paul’s argument), Luther argues that being the flesh and blood of such a holy father does not help Ishmael at all, rather it hinders him, since he does not also have God’s word, whereas Isaac’s birth is brought about “by God’s word, and not by flesh and blood” (aus gottes Wort, und nicht aus Fleisch und Blut). Elsewhere in the treatise Luther remarks that “even now they still cannot let go of their furious, nonsensical boasting that they are God’s people, though they have been cast out (vertrieben), disturbed (verstöret) and utterly rejected (verworfen) for nearly fifteen hundred years.” Finally, as he draws near to his conclusion, he asks, “What should we Christians do with these deprived and cursed people, the Jews?” Among several other recommendations, which include burning homes, confiscating property, and putting them to work, he says, “Let us then stick to the common wisdom of other nations, such as France, Spain, Bohemia, etc.,” and “eject them forever from the country (imer zum Land ausgetrieben).” Luther does not explicitly connect the expulsion of Jews in his own time with the expulsion of Ishmael by Abraham, but here again, Paul’s binary logic in Galatians is intensified far beyond what Paul actually says.

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120 Ibid. Luther may be working more from Rom 9:8 than Gal 4:23 here, but Paul himself deals with the same motif in both letters.
121 Ibid., 53:447.
122 “Was wollen wir Christen nu thun mit diesem verworffen, verdammpten Volk der Juden?” (ibid., 53:522).
123 Ibid., 53:526.
124 It should be noted that Luther’s treatise was not very influential in his own day, neither literarily (in that it was published in only two editions at Wittenberg and was not reprinted elsewhere), nor politically (in that only the Elector of Saxony responded by adopting a policy of expelling the Jews). For an assessment, see Johannes Wallmann, “The Reception of Luther’s Writings on the Jews from the Reformation to the End of the 19th Century,” LQ 1 (1987): 72–97.
The pattern is even more pronounced with John Calvin. In his *Commentary on Galatians* (1548) Calvin comes across as even more polemical than Luther (if that is possible).

Whereas Luther acknowledges Paul’s use of allegory as an ornament, Calvin denies it altogether. Calvin admits that Paul uses the term “allegorical,” but he attacks Origen and a great many others with him for having seized the opportunity of twisting the Scripture hither and thither from its “genuine” (*genuinus*) meaning.\(^{125}\) In fact, he attacks the entire medieval tradition of multiple senses, saying that without doubt it was “an invention of Satan” (*Satanae commentum*) that “for many centuries they deemed no one to be ingenious except those who knew how and dared to subtly transfigure the sacrosanct word of God.”\(^{126}\)

Against any notion of a “fecundity” (*foecunditatem*) of meanings, Calvin insists that the true meaning of Scripture is that which is “natural” (*germanus*) and “simple” (*simplex*).\(^{127}\)

According to Calvin, all that Paul is doing here is making a similitude: he sees in the two wives a “figure” (*figura*) of the two covenants, and in the two sons, a “figure” of two peoples. In this way Calvin takes for granted the usual Jewish-Christian binary. And likewise, he too, following Paul’s lead, makes comparisons with his own time. With regard to Paul’s description of the Jerusalem above in Gal 4:26, Calvin accepts in principle that “the church is the mother of us all,” but he then says, “The Papists (*papistae*) are silly, and

\(^{125}\) *Comentarii epistolam Pauli ad Galatas*, Feld, 106.

\(^{126}\) Ibid., 106.

\(^{127}\) “Sciamus ergo eum esse verum Scripturae sensum, qui germanus est ac simplex” (ibid., 107). The French version, published the same year expresses the point slightly differently: “Sçachons donc que le vray et naturel sens de l’Escripture c’est celuy qui est simple et nayf” (*Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Noveau Testament* [Paris: Meyrueis and Company, 1855], 3:722). In English, Calvin’s meaning is perhaps best expressed by saying that the true meaning of Scripture is *plain and simple*. See R. Ward Holder, *John Calvin and the Grounding of Interpretation: Calvin’s First Commentaries* (Brill: Leiden, 2006), esp. 124–32.
twice children, who stretch this out in order that we might be weighed down, for since they have an adulteress for a mother, who begets sons by the devil into death, how absurd it is to demand that the sons of God give themselves up in order that they might be cruelly slain!“

He then adds, “The Jerusalem synagogue at that time was able to boast with a much greater pretext than Rome today! Nevertheless, we see that Paul, by having her stripped of every adornment, ejects (rejiciat) her to the lot of Hagar.” Here again, Calvin, by reproducing Paul’s binary logic in a new setting, and even intensifying it, perpetuates in his own time the pattern already established by Paul in his.

Similar patterns are found among other Humanist and Reformation interpreters, both Catholic and Protestant. Although many of these are not nearly so polemical as Luther and Calvin in their tone, they nevertheless share with them a similar focus on the singular sense of the text, which to them is quite obvious and they are not afraid to promote rather vigorously. Their faith in this singular sense brings them to look for the meaning of the

128 Comentarii epistolam Pauli ad Galatas, Feld, 110–11.
129 Ibid., 111. John L. Thompson reflects that “Hagar and Ishmael never quite appear as themselves in Calvin; they are always emblematic of the self-justifying ‘papists’ who were tormenting Calvin’s evangelical brother and sisters in France and elsewhere. And although there is no evidence that Calvin drew anything from Augustine’s anti-Donatist treatises here, the exegetical logic is the same: Hagar and Ishmael are villains precisely because they are alive and well, and still persecuting the true children of Abraham today” (Writing the Wrongs, 86).
130 The possibility that this might go against the “natural and simple” meaning of the Genesis account seems to be quite lost on Calvin. Note that whatever Calvin might say he is doing, this is what we would probably call “typology.” Genesis has established the type: it reappears in Paul’s time, and reappears again in Calvin’s. Paul’s time, however, has almost dropped out of the picture: “the Papists” and the Roman church have in fact been inserted into the “Ishmaelite” position in place of the Jews and the Jerusalem synagogue.
131 These patterns appear among interpreters from early in the sixteenth century and continue well into the seventeenth. See, for example, Jacques Lefèvre d’Étapes (Jacobus Faber
text in the words themselves and not some supposed “spiritual” meaning beyond. As a result, they tend to be very close readers of the biblical text, seeking to understand the mind of the biblical author through a close analysis of the grammatical, philological, and rhetorical aspects of the words on the page. Yet in spite of this, for all their close reading of the texts, they do not notice that what Paul says (or assumes) about the Genesis account does not line up with what Genesis actually says. Whereas medieval interpreters seem to lose sight of this because they are dealing with multiple senses that are fluid and unstable, Humanist and Reformation interpreters seem to lose sight of it precisely because they are so focused on Paul’s supposedly singular, simple meaning. Although Humanist and Reformation interpreters are such careful readers of the biblical text in other respects, at least in this respect, they are remarkably similar to their patristic and medieval predecessors. The tendency here, as we saw in the patristic and medieval periods, is simply to not see it, or if they do see it to some degree, they immediately discount it. This tendency persists into the modern period, as we shall now see.

5. Historical-Critical Interpretation

Just as Jerome conveniently serves as our primary example of what might be described as “precritical” exegesis, Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer can serve as our primary example of modern historical-critical interpretation. In his 1841 commentary on Galatians, Meyer, like Jerome, condenses and digests previous interpretations of the passage (both ancient and

Stapulensis, 1512), Thomas de Vio (Cardinal Cajetan, 1531), Heinrich Bullinger (1535), Erasmus Sarcerius (1542), Johannes Brenz (1565), Caspar Olevianus (1578), John Prime (1587), Guiliemi Estii (1614), William Perkins (1617), Cornelii A. Lapide (1614), Hugo Grotius (1644), and David Dickson (1659).
modern), and also (like Jerome) sets the tone for much of the exegetical work that follows him.\textsuperscript{132} When we compare Meyer with Jerome, what stands out, not surprisingly, is Meyer’s attention to philological and historical detail. It is not that Jerome is not interested in such details, but he does not expound them systematically, and he is in a hurry to get beyond the historical details to reach what he sees as the deeper spiritual truths that are buried in the text. Meyer, by contrast, methodically examines Paul’s statements word for word in an effort to explicate precisely what Paul means to say with them.\textsuperscript{133} For example, in his commentary on Gal 4:21, Meyer insists on a straight-forward understanding of Paul’s question, “τόν νόμον οὐκ ἀκούστε;” as “wird euch denn das Gesetz nicht vorgelesen?” (“is the law not read out loud to you?”)\textsuperscript{134} Meyer emphasizes here that “the law” would have been read aloud to the Galatian congregations in their public assemblies as the revelation of God. This detail regarding the historical background is decisive for Meyer in that it allows him to critically evaluate the conclusions of other interpreters who have gone before him. Paul therefore does not mean \textit{audisse} (“to have heard”), as in \textit{to have known} or \textit{to have a recognition}, which is what Winer (1821) proposes; nor does he mean “to understand” in a spiritual sense, which is what Jerome and his modern followers propose: Marus (1795), Borger (1807), Flatt (1828),

\textsuperscript{132} Meyer’s commentaries on the books of the New Testament, first published in the 1830’s and 1840’s, then revised through several editions into the 1870’s, and known today by the abbreviation KEK, provided the standard for critical New Testament commentary series in Germany in the nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{133} Werner Georg Kümmel draws attention to Meyer’s insistence elsewhere in his writings: “Den Sinn, wie ihn der Schriftsteller bei seinen Worten gedacht hat, ganz unpartheiish, historisch grammatisch, zu eruiren,—das ist die Pflicht des Exegeten” (“to investigate the meaning as the author intended it, completely without partiality, historically, grammatically—that is the task of the exegete” \textit{Das Neue Testament: Geschichte der Erforschung seiner Probleme} [Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1958], 132).

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Kritisch exegetisches Handbuch über den Brief an die Galater} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1841), 162.
Schott (1834), Olshausen (1840), and others.\textsuperscript{135} “Rather,” says Meyer, “this hearing of the law must have inevitably taught the Judaically-minded Galatians how much they were in error. Hence this question of displeasure, which is all the stronger, and is therefore all the more appropriate, the simpler ἀκούετε is allowed to retain its primary meaning.”\textsuperscript{136} Meyer’s systematic attention to detail, his close reference to the arguments of others, his introduction of historical background as evidence, reveal a style of interpretation that is quite different from what we have seen up until now.

Nevertheless, for all his careful attention to critical detail, Meyer is little better than previous interpreters at noticing what Paul does with the Genesis account. When he comes to Gal 4:23, for example, Meyer observes that both Isaac and Ishmael were born κατὰ σάρκα in that their births were the outcome of a “natural fleshly intermingling” (\textit{natürlichen fleischlichen Vermischung}), while Isaac was also born διὰ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, which means “by power of the promise” (“\textit{durch Kraft der Verheissung}”), so that, at Isaac’s conception, the “supernatural” (\textit{übertüchtliche}) power of God’s promise was the mediator of the effect.\textsuperscript{137} Despite his close attention to the text of Genesis here, Meyer makes no mention of promises related to Ishmael, in fact no mention at all of how the complexity of relationships that appear in Genesis are reduced by Paul into a single, one-dimensional binary in Galatians. It

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 162–63.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 162.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 163. Meyer rejects here the explanation (which he attributes to Grotius and Rosenmüller) that Paul means “\textit{per eam vim extraordinarium, quam Deus promiserat}” (“through that extraordinary power that God had promised”), since this goes against the narrative of Genesis. According to Meyer, Paul’s meaning is that Isaac’s conception could not have taken place without the influence of the divine power of the promise, but this does not mean that he was not also begotten in accordance with the flesh.
is the same with the word of διώκω ("persecute") in Gal 4:29. Meyer acknowledges that Ishmael is described only as a “mocker” (Spötter) in Gen 21:9, not as a persecutor, but he invokes Rabbinic material as evidence to suggest that Ishmael had been shooting arrows at Isaac, seeking to harm him in the guise of game. This tidily dismisses the discrepancy between Genesis and Galatians.138 In a similar manner, Meyer also observes that the words Paul uses to command the slave woman and her son to be cast out are “the words of Sarah to Abraham, demanding the expulsion (Verstossung) of Hagar and her son from the house,” but he adds that they are “confirmed by God” (von Gott bestätiget) in Gen 21:12, which seems to imply that it does not really matter to whom Paul attributes them.139 Meyer does not seem to notice that in doing this, Paul not only collapses the narrative levels, but also ignores that in the story Sarah and the Lord are operating from different motives.

Like most interpreters of the passage, Meyer is anxious to figure out what Paul’s allegorical references mean, and, as we have seen before, Meyer assumes that Paul is referring to the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Regarding the persecution of Gal 4:29 “οὕτως καὶ νῦν,” for example, he says, “So also now it is the biological (leiblichen) offspring of Abraham (the Jews) who are persecuting those who are the offspring of Abraham κατὰ πνεῦμα (the Christians).”140 According to Meyer, this includes all the kinds of persecution that the Jews were at that time inflicting on Christians, but he acknowledges

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138 Ibid., 171. Compare this with Jerome and most other precritical interpreters, who are familiar with some of these traditions, but prefer to make an argument from what they can infer from the text of Genesis itself.
139 Ibid., 172.
140 Ibid.
that Paul might also have in mind here the presumptuousness of the false apostles.\textsuperscript{141} When it comes to the casting out of the slave woman and her son in Gal 4:30, Meyer says that the Galatians should recognize in this type “the exclusion (\textit{Ausschliessung}) of the unconverted Jews, who are under slavery to the law, from the messianic kingdom.”\textsuperscript{142} As we have seen with previous interpreters, it is often at this point—when they start referring to somebody being cast out—that it becomes clear just how much interpreters have missed what Paul is doing. Here Meyer does not try to construct an allegory of his own (or even make a comparison with the “Ishmaelites” of his own day), so it is not quite so obvious: he has his eye on Paul’s context alone. Nevertheless, by interpreting Paul’s allegory as referring to two peoples, one of whom is the child of promise who will inherit the kingdom, and the other excluded from salvation entirely, Meyer intensifies Paul’s binary even beyond what Paul does.

A similar pattern appears in the Lightfoot’s commentary of 1865. Like Meyer, Lightfoot has little appreciation for the significance of the discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians, even though he sometimes notices the existence of such discrepancies at the level of the words. For example, with regard to Ishmael having been begotten κατὰ σάρκα in Gal 4:23, Lightfoot, following Jerome, says, “In some sense Ishmael was also a child of promise (Gen 16:10), but in his case the course of nature was not suspended, as the promise was made after his conception.”\textsuperscript{143} Lightfoot does not seem to be any more satisfied with this explanation than Jerome, because he adds, “It must be remembered however that in his

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians}, 178.
choice of words here St. Paul regards not only the original history, but the typical application, the Jews being the children of Abraham after the flesh, the Christians his children by the promise.”144 In saying this, Lightfoot acknowledges the discrepancy between Genesis and Galatians even while dismissing it as insignificant in the same breath. Likewise, he dismisses the discrepancy regarding the persecution of the son in Gal 4:29. He paraphrases Paul as saying that Ishmael “insulted” Isaac, and, like Meyer, he bases this on Paul’s supposed use of later tradition: “This incident which is so lightly sketched in the original narrative had been drawn out in detail in later traditions, and thus a prominence given to it, which would add force to the Apostle’s allusion, without his endorsing these traditions himself.”145 Lightfoot does the same with the words of Sarah in Gal 4:30. Like Meyer, he observes that the words are spoken by Sarah to Abraham, “but her demand is confirmed by the express command of God,” remarking also that the later Targum adds, “for she is a prophetess.”146 Again, for all of Lightfoot’s careful attention to philological and historical detail, he does not notice the significance of these differences between Genesis and Galatians.

Lightfoot is also similar to Meyer in that he directs most of his attention to specifying what is going on in Paul’s situation. With regard to those who are to be cast out in Gal 4:30, for example, Lightfoot is somewhat ambiguous as to whether he thinks Paul is referring to Jews in general or merely to his Jewish Christian opponents in Galatia: “St. Paul’s persecutors were at first Jews, afterwards Judaizers; but both alike were ‘born after the flesh,’ for both

144 Ibid.
145 Ibid, 182.
146 Ibid. See also appendix 1.
alike claimed to inherit the covenant by the performance of certain material carnal ordinances.” Lightfoot however is also interested in going beyond Paul’s specific situation to drawing out the historical implications. Thus he says, with regard to the son of the slave woman not inheriting: “The Law and the Gospel cannot coexist; the Law must disappear before the Gospel. It is scarcely possible to estimate the strength of conviction and depth of prophetic insight which this declaration implies.” Lightfoot almost seems to be saying here that Paul scarcely knows the significance of what he is saying. Nevertheless, “the Apostle thus confidently sounds the death-knell of Judaism at a time when one half of Christendom clung to the Mosaic law with a jealous affection little short of a frenzy; and while the Judaic party seemed to be growing in influence and was strong enough, even in the Gentile churches of his own founding, to undermine his influence and endanger his life.”

Lightfoot is not allegorizing here, as in making up his own allegory of Genesis under Paul’s inspiration (as we saw with Augustine, for example), nor is he making a comparison with his own time (as we saw with Calvin), but this still goes well beyond what Paul says. There is a good deal of Luther here in this dichotomy between law and gospel, but this goes well beyond even Luther. What Lightfoot says next is quite revealing of how self-evident all this is to him: “The truth which to us appears a truism must then have been regarded as a paradox.” With this as his focus, it is not surprising that Lightfoot misses the significance of discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians.

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147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
149 Riches in particular emphasizes the extent of Luther’s influence throughout Lightfoot’s commentary on Galatians (Galatians through the Centuries, 58).
150 St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 182.
Other historical-critical interpreters of the nineteenth century reveal similar patterns. Like their precritical predecessors, they tend to see here, at the birth of Christianity, a clash between two religions in the making. At the same time, unlike their precritical predecessors, they avoid making explicit references that apply the binary to their own time. Nevertheless, these interpreters too lose sight of the differences between Genesis and Galatians. Their very focus on the historical background seems to distract them from noticing what Paul is doing. In this regard, F. C. Baur’s comment on the passage in his 1842 *Life and Work of Paul* is illuminating: “Christianity is the absolute religion, the religion of the spirit and freedom (die Religion des Geistes und der Freiheit), against which even Judaism belongs only to that subordinated standpoint upon which it is to be reckoned together with paganism.” Paul demonstrates this, he says, “from the Old Testament, through an allegorical use of the two sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael.” The binary is no longer strictly speaking Judaism-Christianity, but Judaism still serves as the reference point: it represents particularist religion, from which true, “absolute” religion springs. This is a replication of a pattern we observed first in patristic exegesis: on the one hand, interpreters take Paul to be referring to Judaism and Christianity respectively, while on the other, they “allegorize” the Genesis account in other ways, but with the Jewish-Christian binary serving as a referential base.

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151 In addition to the interpreters that I cite here, see the commentaries of Beet (1885), Borger (1807), Eadie (1869), Ellicott (1854, 1876), Flatt (1828), Haldane (18480, Hilgenfeld (1852), Jowett (1859), Kelly (1869), Lipsius (1892), Olshausen (1858), Philippi (1884), Siefert (1899), Usteri (1833), and others.


153 In some ways, this is similar to Augustine’s use of the passage to illustrate the dynamic
For Baur and many other nineteenth-century historical-critical interpreters, what is decisive is Paul’s context, from which they then proceed to derive universal implications. The 1863 commentary of German Catholic scholar August Bisping furnishes another example: “The fleshly Jews (fleischlichen Juden) persecute the Christians who have been begotten through the Holy Spirit, and as it was in the beginning of the church, as Christ our Lord was himself mocked by the Jews . . . , so it still is, and will be to the end of days (so ist es noch immer und so wird es sein bis zum Ende der Tage).”¹⁵⁴ This is not as sweeping a generalization as Lightfoot’s (“the Apostle sounding the death-knell of Judaism”) or Baur’s (“Christianity as the absolute religion, the religion of the spirit and freedom”), but it still interprets what is going on in Paul’s specific historical context in universal terms.¹⁵⁵

This pattern continues with critical interpreters in the twentieth century. While many of these interpreters are more precise in their handling of the historical details, as well as more modest in drawing out the implications, they are nevertheless just as oblivious to the discrepancies. Theodore Zahn (1922), for example, even while acknowledging that the quotation in Gal 4:30 consists of the words of Sarah, argues in a convoluted way that because the message is confirmed by God in Gen 21:12, Paul is able to assert it as the command of Scripture, “that is, as the speaking of God to the Christian community through tension of sacred and profane history in De civitate Dei, except that here the reference point is Paul’s own situation rather than the originating story in Genesis.


¹⁵⁵ See Benjamin Jowett: “The law and the Gospel cannot dwell together; the Gospel must drive out the law” (The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, 2nd ed. [London: John Murray, 1859], 1:349).
the Scripture” (d.h. des durch die Schrift zur christlichen Gemeinde redenden Gottes), and to subtly alter the purpose of the citation accordingly, “that is, strip off its individual form (d.h. der individuellen Form entkleiden), which was appropriate only in the mouth of Sarah.”\textsuperscript{156} A similar pattern appears in the commentary of M. J. Lagrange (1926), who argues that in his use of terms, Paul is already thinking of the persecution in his own context.\textsuperscript{157} Hence, even while acknowledging that the text of Genesis does not say that Ishmael persecuted Isaac, he argues that “since the anxious jealousy of Sarah was approved by God,” Paul is able to characterize the play of Ishmael as a persecution, “a term that answers well to the conduct of the Jews vis-à-vis the Christians” (terme qui répondait bien à la conduite des Juifs vis-à-vis des chrétiens). He dismisses any remaining discrepancy by adding, “It should be noted that Paul, in order to justify the force of his expression, refrains from relying on such verbal subtleties.”\textsuperscript{158} Likewise, Ernest de Witt Burton (1921) suggests that by “the persecution of Isaac” Paul is probably referring to Gen 21:9, but he may also have in mind “the mutual hostility of the nations supposed to have descended from the two brothers.”\textsuperscript{159} In the antagonism between the two sons or their descendants, therefore, Paul “finds a parallel to the persecution to which the Gentile Christians have been subjected at the hands of the

\textsuperscript{156} Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater in Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1922), 9:245.

\textsuperscript{157} Like Lightfoot, Lagrange is undecided as to whether this is persecution of the Christians by non-Christian Jews or by Judaizing Christians: “The opposition between the children is without doubt coloured by that which exists between the Christians and the Jews, or the Judaizers” (Saint Paul épître aux Galates, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. [Paris: J. Gabalda, 1926], 131).

\textsuperscript{158} “On remarquera que Paul s’abstient, pour justifier la force de son expression, de s’appuyer sur de pareilles subtilités verbales,” ibid.

\textsuperscript{159} A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), 266.
Jewish Christians, and cites scripture to show that the former are rejected by God.”

Burton is quite oblivious to the observation that in the Genesis account, Ishmael is most certainly not “rejected by God.” By alluding to these other traditions, he handily skirts the discrepancy between Galatians and Genesis, since Paul is supposedly no longer referring to Ishmael and Isaac themselves, but their descendants.

Similar sorts of patterns appear later on in the twentieth century with interpreters like Heinrich Schlier (1962), Herman N. Ridderbos (1953), F. F. Bruce (1975, 1982), and Hans Dieter Betz (1979). Schlier, for example, while puzzling over Paul’s oppositions, reflects, “When regarded from the outside (that is, from the human point of view), both sons were equal to one another, but when regarded with respect to the source of their existence, they were qualitatively different from each other.” This seems to suggest that he is aware that Paul is imposing these categories on the Genesis story, but he does not follow this up, observing only that “these findings are, however, in the context not important for their own

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160 Ibid., 251. Burton, more strongly than Lagrange, insists that although it is possible that Paul is referring to the “more violent” persecutions at the hands of Jews, Paul probably has in mind chiefly “the persistent efforts of the judaizers to induce the Galatians to take on the burden of the law” (ibid., 266).


162 *Galater*, 218.
sake, but for the sake of the details of Paul’s allegory.”163 Ridderbos, like Lagrange and Burton, understands Paul as referring to the actions of the Judaizers against believers. Although he notices that Paul imposes the idea of persecution on the Genesis story, he discounts its significance by saying, “In this that old principle manifests itself, which throughout the ages has operated also among the people of God. That which is fleshly lays snares for that which is spiritual.”164 Bruce (along with Meyer, Lightfoot, Zahn) notices that in Gal 4:30 Paul attributes the words of Sarah to the Scripture: Sarah’s uncharitable demand “is treated here not simply as something which Scripture records but as something which Scripture says.”165 While many others dismiss this merely by observing that in Genesis Sarah’s words are confirmed by God, Bruce says, “Whatever moral or legal issues might be raised by Sarah’s demand in its historical setting, Paul treats it as the word of scripture—in effect, as the word of God.” Bruce seems to recognize the discrepancy, but he dismisses its significance by observing that these words “enshrine the basic gospel truth: legal bondage and spiritual freedom cannot coexist.”166

Finally, to turn to one final interpreter, Betz classifies Galatians as judicial rhetoric that follows the conventions of a Hellenistic diatribe, with Gal 4:21–31 constituting the final conclusion of Paul’s whole argument. When he comes to the first part of the quotation in Gal

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163 “Diese Feststellungen sind aber im Zusammenhang nicht um ihrer selbst willen wichtig, sondern um der Tatsachen willen, die darin zum Ausdruck kommen” (ibid.).
164 Churches of Galatia, 181.
166 Galatians, 225.
4:30, Betz says, “The term ‘exclude’ (ἐθβᾶιισ) must be taken seriously; Paul does the same with the Jews as his Jewish-Christian opponents want to do with him.” Yet Betz puts the accent on the second half of the quotation and the exclusion from inheritance: “If God has given the inheritance to the Gentile Christians (c.f. 3:14, 29, 4:1.7), the Jews are excluded from it, and the Christians constitute ‘the Israel of God’ (6:16).” Betz, therefore, like Lightfoot and others, is somewhat ambiguous over who is to be cast out, but his emphasis on the larger, historical picture is clear: “According to Galatians, Judaism is excluded from salvation altogether, so that the Galatians have to choose between Paul and Judaism.”

Here again, Paul’s binaries are intensified even more than in Galatians itself. As for discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians, Betz, like most of his historical-critical predecessors, handily dismisses them. For example, he acknowledges that “Paul is not interested in giving an historically accurate account of the Genesis narratives.” Although the concepts κατὰ σάρκα and διὰ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας are no doubt Paul’s, Betz asserts that they “also fit the Genesis narratives.” When he comes to Gal 4:29, Betz observes that Paul no longer uses the names Isaac and Ishmael, but refers to the “types” they represent: “These types constitute the dualism of flesh and Spirit as it pertains to the two kinds of people, those who are ‘according to [the] flesh’ (κατὰ σάρκα) and those who are ‘according to [the] Spirit’ (κατὰ πνεῦμα).” Moreover, Betz asserts, “Because this dualism underlies the whole of

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167 Galatians, 250–51.
168 Ibid., 250.
169 Ibid., 251.
170 Ibid., 241–2.
171 Ibid., 242.
172 Ibid., 249.
Galatians it must be Paul’s goal to arrive at this polarity here too."173

As we have seen, modern historical-critical interpretation of this passage differs from previous interpretation primarily by focusing itself exclusively on Paul’s original context. Nineteenth century interpretation may be more interested in grasping the grand sweeps of history set in motion by this context, whereas more recent interpretation may be more content with the historical reconstruction of Paul’s specific context and his intentions in writing the letter, but in both cases, the focus is on what they see as Paul’s context.

Nevertheless, many of the same patterns that we noted in precritical exegesis of the passage appear again in critical exegesis of the passage from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Just as Jerome describes the exegetical tradition that went before him by saying that the explanation of almost everyone concerning this passage is this: “they interpret Hagar the slave woman as the law and the Jewish people, but Sarah the free woman as the church,” so also the same could be said of modern interpretation of the passage (at least until about the mid-1980’s).174 The dominant pattern is to see Paul as referring to two existent peoples,

173 Ibid.
174 J. Louis Martyn is a transitional figure in this shift. Illuminating is his assessment of the dominant history of interpretation of this passage up to his time as a history of misinterpretation: “No passage in the letter has had a more interesting—and a more misleading—history of interpretation than 4:21–5:1. Although there have been some variations and a few reservations, one reading has dominated through the centuries, and it can be summarized in six points: (a) The pattern of two oppositional columns is accented. (b) The prepositional phrases by which this polar opposition is largely expressed—‘according to the flesh’ versus ‘according to the Spirit’ etc.—are taken to be adjectival identity markers, differentiating from one another two existent peoples. There is a people ‘according to the flesh,’ and there is a people ‘according to the Spirit.’ (c) These two existent peoples are understood to be respectively the Jews and the Christians; the polarity of the passage is thus focused specifically on Judaism and Christianity. (d) Judaism is consequently characterized as the religion of slavery and Christianity as the religion of
the Jews and the Christians, even though this is largely anachronistic. By the same token, modern critical exegesis is also just as oblivious to the discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians that we identified in the last chapter. As we have seen, modern critical interpreters, adept as they are at detecting certain kinds of details, are equally as adept at discounting their significance. Again, it is only since about the mid-1980’s that something else seems to kick in and interpreters start appreciating the significance of what Paul is doing with the Genesis account in Galatians. This will of course be a shift that receives a great deal of attention in the next chapter.

6. Concluding Thoughts

In chapter three I identified several important discrepancies between how the story is told in Genesis and how it is taken up by Paul in Galatians. Some of these discrepancies have more to do with the story itself, such as the fact that Ishmael too, in his own way, is a “child of promise”; others have more to do with how the story is told, such as the fact that it is Sarah, within the story, who demands that Hagar and Ishmael be cast out. As we saw, however, both types of discrepancies are crucial to the Genesis account. In this chapter I have tracked how rarely either of these types of discrepancies is even noticed within the history of interpretation. It makes little difference whether interpreters are focusing on the passage in

freedom. (e) Verse 29 is taken to be a reference to the synagogue’s mid-first-century persecution of the church. (f) Verse 30 is then read as an affirmation of the resulting supersession—according to God’s will—of the synagogue by the church. Henceforth Christians are God’s people; Jews are not” (Galatians, 450 n.168; see also “The Covenants of Hagar and Sarah,” in Faith and History: Essays in Honour of Paul W. Meyer [ed. J. T. Carroll, Charles H. Cosgrove, E. Elizabeth Johnson; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990], 160–92).
the context of a line-by-line commentary on Galatians, or drawing upon the passage in the context of commenting on Genesis, or employing the passage in a (more explicitly) polemical context where questions of identity are (more obviously) at stake. Nor does it matter much which era we are talking about: patristic interpreters doing allegorical interpretation notice them about as well as nineteenth-century historical critics; medieval exegetes focusing on the four senses of the Scripture are as oblivious as Reformation interpreters focusing on a singular, spiritual, literal sense. As we worked our way through the history of interpretation, I emphasized that this pattern is pervasive: it appears time and time again in every era, regardless of the differences in interpretive methods, historical conditions, priorities, or perspectives.

Occasionally sensitive interpreters stumble over one or another of these discrepancies in the course of their reading, but as we have seen, they usually explain it away as quickly and as expeditiously as possible. This reminds me of a quotation about Stanley Baldwin attributed to Winston Churchill: “Occasionally he stumbled over the truth, but hastily picked himself up and hurried on as if nothing had happened.”175 We observed this first with Jerome, but it is a pattern repeated throughout the history of interpretation. As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, Jerome stumbles upon several of these points, only to drop them as soon as they seem to be a problem. We might say that he sees them, but he is blind to their significance. How are we to describe this pattern of interpreters seeing and yet not seeing, of “seeing and not perceiving,” of noticing but not recognizing the significance of what they are looking at?

It is not that interpreters cannot actually see, but it is as if they wilfully refuse to acknowledge what they are looking at, what we might call a *blind spot* in the history of interpretation, to use a metaphor. Calling it a “blind spot” acknowledges the pattern but does not necessarily commit us to attributing a psychological cause to it. Regardless of what is going on in the brains of interpreters as they read, this pattern of not noticing the discrepancies, or at least of not appreciating their gravity, can therefore be described as a blind spot in the history of interpretation.\(^{176}\)

This blind spot consists, not only of what interpreters fail to see, but also of what they do see (or what they think they see). As we have discovered, the attention of most interpreters is not on what Paul is doing with the Genesis account, but on how he sees the Genesis account relating to his own time. The two patterns that we first identified in patristic interpretation consistently reappear throughout the history of interpretation. First, there is the overwhelming tendency (at least until very recently) for interpreters to understand Paul to be referring to two existent peoples, the Jews and the Christians. In this regard, it does not make much difference whether interpreters regard Paul as doing “allegory” or something else, the result is the same. The second tendency is to “allegorize” (or whatever they want to call it) by inserting their own category of person into the positions of “son begotten in accordance with the flesh” and “son begotten in accordance with the spirit.” Potentially this could work to subvert the first tendency, but more often than not it still retains the

\(^{176}\) This idea of *blind spot* also implies that our own point of view is itself a *perspective*. From our vantage point in time, these things may be obvious to us now, but to interpreters in other times, they were not. Within our range of vision is both what others could not see but also the others not seeing. This does not preclude of course the possibility that we have our own blind spots—that the others can see things that we cannot.
Jewish/Christian binary as a referential base. It is precisely when interpreters come to Gal 4:30 that this becomes most obvious: who is being addressed, who is to be cast out, who is to do the casting out? When interpreters start answering these questions, it becomes obvious just how much they are not cluing into what Paul is doing here.

Given the way that interpreters are shaped by the “horizon of expectations” and the ways in which their own interpretations in turn affect the horizon of expectations for subsequent interpreters, we might say that interpreters, just by participating in the blind spot, end up perpetuating it in their own time. Merely by failing to notice, they contribute to the blind spot’s continuation within the history of interpretation. Another way that they perpetuate it—and this is potentially more fatal—is when they start acting upon it. As I mentioned in chapter one, the invocation of the passage by Urban II in promoting the first crusade (at least as remembered by William of Tyre) furnishes a poignant example. As I noted along the way, various groups of people have been identified as the “Ishmaelites” in their own time: the Donatists (Augustine), present-day Jews (Aquinas), “the carnal in the church” (Jerome, Haimo, Aquinas), the “papists” (Luther, Calvin). Modern critical interpreters are not so inclined to do this, at least not explicitly, but as we have seen, they have their own way of doing it (particularist versus absolute religion, etc.). This danger will be taken up in more detail in chapter six, but suffice it to say at this point that if both sides are going to be doing this in a polemical situation, the stakes are going to be high. Genesis creates the possibility of this happening all on its own without any help from Paul, as we saw in chapter two, but Genesis also contains checks and balances to mitigate the dangers. Paul, however, sets different dynamics in motion. By “allegorizing” Genesis in the way that he does, he invites
others to follow in his tracks, whether it be called “allegory”, “typology”, “comparison”, or “exegesis.” And interpreters over the long history of interpretation of this passage have been more than happy to accept his invitation.
Chapter Five
Discordant Voices

1. Preliminary Comments

In the previous chapter I traced the dominant lines of interpretation of this particular passage to show that there is a pattern that I characterized from my perspective as a “blind spot” in the history of interpretation. We have seen how this “blind spot” is passed along within tradition as different lines of interpretation influence each other through an expanding horizon of expectation (to pick up again on this term introduced by Jauss). Occasionally in the history of interpretation, however, there have been interpreters who do not fit this pattern. They manage to see through the blind spot, at least to some extent. It is therefore not accurate to characterize the blind spot as absolute throughout the history of interpretation, nor to assert that clarity suddenly appears on the scene in the 1990’s with a flash. Here and there throughout the history of interpretation there are interpreters who I might be tempted to say were well “ahead of their time.”1 At the same time, these interpreters do not seem to be drawing from a common tradition or connecting with each other in any way. For whatever reason, their insights into what is going on in this passage are rarely taken up into later traditions of interpretation. Yet in specific times and places, conditions seem to have made it possible for these interpreters to see what others around them could not (or would not) see, what may now seem to us rather obvious. As a consequence, these exceptions to the pattern constitute what might be described as “discordant voices” within the tradition.

Examining some of these discordant voices is the task of this chapter.

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1 But if I say this at all, I say it with caution, since it might sound as though I were implying that our own time does not have blind spots of its own. To reiterate: to speak about blind spots at all presupposes that all interpretations are perspectival, including the vision that allows us to see the blind spots of others.
Here I will not even pretend to be exhaustive. In the previous chapter I selected interpreters who are usually seen from within the tradition as significant, either because they have been very influential, or because they are representative of specific traditions of interpretation. The interpretations of the passage that I examine here in this chapter are ones that I have come across through the course of my investigation and have singled out as particularly illustrative of how discordant voices occasionally offer something different from the usual pattern. They are not necessarily the most erudite, the most astute, the most influential, or the most representative of their times. Rather, they are of interest precisely because they are not particularly representative or influential. I have selected them because they illustrate, largely in a negative way, various aspects of what I call the blind spot in the history of interpretation. Moreover, I am not interested in these interpretations on their own terms: what is of interest to me are those aspects of their interpretations that run counter to the dominant grain. By including these “discordant voices,” I am able to give a fuller description of the history of interpretation than I was able to provide in the previous chapter.

In this chapter I will also describe the shift that has occurred since the mid-1980’s. Throughout the long history of interpretation of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, this passage has rarely been seen as particularly important or problematic, as we have seen. I get the impression that commentators include it in their commentaries only because it is their practice to cover the letter verse by verse. In more general discussions of Paul, it is conspicuously absent. To use a rather remarkable example, Rudolf Bultmann says nothing
about it at all in his *Theology of the New Testament*—even in his section on allegory.\(^2\) This all changes in the mid-eighties. Suddenly the passage starts receiving attention like never before. In the thirty-year period between 1955 and 1984, only a handful of articles relating to this passage appear in academic journals, and these focus mostly on text critical issues, obscurities in the background, or the problem of allegory. In the thirty-year period since 1984, there has been a noticeable increase in attention.\(^3\) Much of this recent interest in the passage goes along with the explosion of interest in Hagar and Sarah that I mentioned in chapter two, but this does not account for all of it. These studies cover a diverse range of issues, but what they collectively reveal is that this passage has now become problematic in a way that it had not been previously. My distinction between “dominant lines of interpretation” and “discordant voices” thus starts breaking down. In one sense, the “discordant voices” have now become dominant, yet it is not quite as simple as this, because the dominant voices are still present. Rather the terms of the discussion have shifted and it now no longer makes sense to make such distinctions. In fact, in the grand picture of the history of interpretation of this passage, this shift thus constitutes a “discordant voice” to the previously dominant patterns of interpretation.

\(^2\) *Theologie des Neues Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1948).

\(^3\) I have in my bibliography twelve studies on this passage appearing in the period 1955–1984, and at least sixty appearing in the period between 1985–2014. One might ask whether this trend will continue. Given the particularly troublesome aspects of the passage, and the ways it touches on relationships among Jews, Christians and Muslims, my guess is that it will continue to receive this kind of attention, but who knows?
2. Discordant Voices in the Patristic Period

The first interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1 that I want to look at appears in Tyconius’ *Book of Rules (Liberum regularum)*, written about 382. Tyconius is a bit of an enigma in that he was a Donatist who had been excommunicated from the Donatist church. This in itself does not seem to have been unusual: the Donatist movement originated in North Africa among those who had not given in during Diocletian’s persecution of 300–01, and throughout the course of the fourth century, it was continuously rocked with controversies and schisms. As we saw in the last chapter, the Donatists saw themselves as the true church, in opposition to the Catholic church, which they saw as tainted by cooperation with the powers of the world. In spite of decades of intermittent persecution by imperial and Catholic authorities, often working in tandem with each other, the Donatists remained the majority church in North Africa, and, as might be imagined, the polemics between Donatists and Catholics were often quite bitter. Of the seven rules that Tyconius expounds in the *Book of Rules*, the third rule deals with the differences between “the son begotten in accordance with the flesh” and “the son begotten through the promise,” as developed by Paul in Gal 4:21–5:1. As we saw with Augustine in the last chapter, the Catholic side made use of this passage in their polemics against the Donatists. From their side, the Donatists probably did the same in their polemics against the Catholics. Tyconius, however, takes up the passage in quite a different way.

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5 Direct evidence for this is scant. Nevertheless, from her reading of Donatist literature Tilley concludes that the Donatists saw themselves as a type of the “true Israel” and looked to biblical figures as their models, including Isaac (ibid., 75). Moreover, since Augustine frequently uses the motif in his polemics against the Donatists, it is likely that when they
In the *Book of Rules*, Tyconius attempts to explain the presence of evil within the church.\(^6\)

This was a particular problem for the Donatists, since their emphasis was on the purity of the church in the midst of an evil world. Tyconius’ solution is to understand the church through a system of typologies that he derived from the biblical text. There are certain mystic rules (*quaedem regulae mysticae*), he says, hidden in the recesses of the entire law (i.e., both the New and Old Testaments) that make the treasure of the truth invisible to some, but “if the reasoning of the rules (*ratio regularum*) as we communicate them be accepted without envy, then the things that have been closed will be opened, and the things that have been obscure will be brought to light, so that anyone walking through the immense forest of prophecy may be guarded from error, having been led by these rules, as it were, as by paths of light.”\(^7\)

The first rule relates to the *Lord and his body*. When the Scripture uses the term “son of God,” sometimes this refers to Christ himself, but sometimes to Christ’s body, the church.\(^8\)

The second rule is that the Lord’s body is “bipartite” (*bipertitus*). Sometimes the Scripture speaks of the body as good, sometimes as evil, and sometimes as both, as can be seen in Rom 11:28, when Paul refers to the body of Israel as descended from Abraham as “enemies

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\(^6\) As Tilley describes it, accounting for the presence of evil in the church is a “leitmotif” of the entire text (ibid., 116).

\(^7\) *The Book of Rules of Tyconius* (ed. F. C. Burkitt; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894), 1.

\(^8\) Ibid., 5.
for your sakes” (*inimici propter vos*), but as “beloved for the sake of the ancestors” (*dilecti propter patres*).⁹

This leads to the third rule, *the promises and the law*. The church, as the body of Abraham’s descendants that goes back in an unbroken line to Isaac, depends on the promise, not the law, but there is also a line of Abraham’s seed represented by Ishmael that depends on the law, not the promise. “The seed from Abraham has thus been shown to be *bipartite*,“ says Tyconius: “One had been born from a slave woman in a figure, so that it might be shown that future slaves would be from Abraham,” and “this one departed with his mother.”¹⁰ So far this interpretation is not all that different from what we saw in the last chapter, but then Tyconius goes on to say, “But after he departed, he was found in the other seed, which was from the free woman.”¹¹ That is, both types are to be found among Isaac’s descendants. Tyconius uses Esau and Jacob as examples of the two types, but even Jacob himself is *bipartite*: on account of free will, Jacob is not all the good seed, nor is Esau all the evil, but “each is from both” (*ex utroque utrumquae*).¹² Although each covenant had been there from the beginning, “the one has been concealed for the time being—and continues to be concealed—under the name of the other, since the old does not cease bearing now that the new has been revealed.”¹³ Ultimately Tyconius argues that the body of the devil also lies hidden in the body of the Lord, which is how he finally resolves the issue of evil within the church. When Christ comes, the two parts of the body will be separated, but in the meantime,

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⁹ Ibid., 11.
¹⁰ Ibid., 29.
¹¹ Ibid.
¹² Ibid.
¹³ Ibid.
the two lines remain intermingled: both “grow together until the harvest” as it says in Matthew.\(^{14}\)

Tyconius’ interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1 stands out from that of other patristic interpreters in that it mitigates the polarity of Paul’s binary. As we saw in the last chapter, the overwhelming tendency is to intensify Paul’s binary, especially when interpreters take their cue from Paul and start applying the motif to their own time. Tyconius is just as “allegorical” as the others, but the effect of his treatment is to \textit{weaken}, rather than \textit{strengthen}, the intensity of the binary.\(^{15}\) Whereas Tertullian, Origen, Victorinus, Jerome, Chrysostom, and others see Paul as referring statically to two existant peoples, Tyconius interprets Galatians much more dynamically. For him, the allegorical “Ishmael” is always to be found in the midst of the allegorical “Isaac”—the more one tries to separate the two, the more the one will appear in the midst of the other.\(^{16}\) Until Christ returns as judge, according to Tyconius, the body of Christ must of necessity contain both. Tyconius is doing something rather interesting here: he is drawing on the book of Genesis to interpret Paul’s binary rather than the other way around. Whereas Paul uses Genesis to argue for an absolute separation between the two “sons” at the allegorical level, Tyconius shows from Genesis that such a separation cannot be possible, at least not for the time being. At the explicit level, Tyconius is no better than other patristic interpreters at recognizing the discrepancies between Galatians and Genesis. Like Jerome and Augustine, for example, he explains away the discrepancy between

\(^{14}\) Mt 13:30 (the parable of the weeds).
\(^{15}\) According to Dawson’s definition of allegory, Tyconius’ use of typology here is just a specific form of allegory.
\(^{16}\) For Tyconius, this process does not work in reverse: “Isaac” is not to be found in the midst of “Ishmael.” Only the line of Isaac is \textit{bipertus}.\
“persecution” and “play” by suggesting that the brothers preaching circumcision in Galatia must have been persecuting the Galatians by feigning to play with them.17 Thus Tyconius does not challenge the problematic nature of Paul’s binary itself. Nevertheless, he offers a discordant voice to the dominant pattern by interpreting Paul’s binary in the light of Genesis, and not just Genesis in the light of Paul’s binary.

A comparison with Augustine is in order here, especially since Tyconius’ influence can be detected in Augustine’s later writings.18 In the City of God, Augustine, like Tyconius, is able to entertain the possibility of the existence of evil within the church. By emphasizing that the people of both the celestial and earthly cities will continue to live side by side until the last judgment, Augustine too mitigates the harshness of Paul’s binary, as noted in the last chapter. Yet Augustine also makes a distinction between the body of Christ and the church: for Augustine, the church is made up of both good and evil, while the invisible “body of Christ” remains pure. This distinction reasserts the polarity of Paul’s binary. Moreover, even in the City of God, the “carnal Jews” (Iudaei carnales) still stand for Augustine as the primary representatives of the earthly city, even as the “present Jerusalem” serves as the shadow and image of the “Jerusalem above.”19 For Tyconius the relationships are much more unstable: the people of Israel are of the line of Isaac, and therefore “sons of the free woman,” but “sons of the slave woman” will always be found among them, just as the church is also of the line of Isaac, and “sons of the slave woman will also be found in its

17 Ibid. 30.
18 In particular, Augustine’s De doctrina Christiana is derived directly from the Book of Rules, but with some notable alterations. See Maureen Tilley, “Understanding Augustine Misunderstanding Tyconius,” StPat 27 (1993): 405–8.
19 Sancti Aurelii Augustini de civitatae Dei 16.34 (CCSL 48:539).
midst."\textsuperscript{20} This difference is even more evident in Augustine’s writings against the Donatists. Tyconius, in the highly-polemical situation of two churches claiming to be the true church, offers something distinctive. Augustine, by contrast, takes up Tyconius’ interpretation and uses it as polemical ammunition against the Donatists, thus perpetuating the pattern of Paul’s binary in his own time.\textsuperscript{21}

Another interpreter from the patristic period worth looking at is Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia from 392 to 428. Here is an interpreter who cannot be said to be particularly influential within the history of interpretation. Although he was highly regarded in his own time, his reputation declined soon after his death.\textsuperscript{22} During the Nestorian controversy of the mid-fifth century, his orthodoxy was called into question and his writings were eventually condemned at the second Council of Constantinople in 553.\textsuperscript{23} As a result, his \textit{Commentary on Galatians} (which was produced around 420) has not been preserved in Greek except in fragments. A Latin translation surfaced in the nineteenth century, and it is from this that we have access to his interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1. Along with John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrus, Theodore was a leading representative of the Antiochene school of interpretation.

\textsuperscript{20} For Tyconius, the line of faith between law-obedient Israel and the law-free church is continuous: “The righteous of Israel were called from faith (\textit{ex fide}) to the same faith (\textit{in eandem fidem})” (ibid., 18).

\textsuperscript{21} As I noted in the last chapter, Augustine, like Tyconius, adopts Paul’s binary, but rather than mitigating the polarity, as Tyconius does, he intensifies it. When Augustine argues that Sarah represents the true church when she is persecuting Hagar, for example, he too is reading Galatians in light of Genesis, but with a result that intensifies Paul’s binary.

\textsuperscript{22} J. B. Lightfoot says of him that “among his contemporaries he had a vast reputation and was called by the Nestorian Christians ‘the Interpreter’ \textit{par excellence},” but this just underscores the degree to which he was ultimately discarded within the dominant tradition (\textit{St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians} [London: Macmillan, 1865], 220).

exegesis. The exegetical approach of this school arose in the fourth century as a reaction to the Alexandrian approach of the previous century as represented by Origen. The primary point of contention between the two schools was the very issue of allegory—thus a passage like Gal 4:21–5:1 was a key battleground between them. As we noted in the previous chapter, this passage was frequently cited by Origen as justification for his use of allegorical method. In his commentary, Theodore vehemently objects to the use of this passage to justify an allegorical approach. Theodore insists that when Paul refers to allegory in Gal 4:24, he is “calling a comparison (comparatio), whereby events that had previously taken place are compared with events now present, an allegory (allegoria).” It is therefore inappropriate, he charges, for those whom he calls the “allegorists” (allegoristas) to take this as license for their own allegorizing.

Although Theodore does not mention anyone by name, much of his commentary on this passage reads like polemics against the Alexandrian approach to interpretation. For example, he declares that those who exert themselves to “overturn” (inverto) the meanings of the


26 To use modern terminology, Theodore might say that Paul is doing typology, not allegory. Again, according to Dawson’s definition of allegory, this is polemical hair-splitting: Theodore allegorizes as much as those whom he is opposing.
divine Scriptures, and “hijack” (intercipio) everything that has been set down there, are fashioning “silly stories” (ineptas fabulas) for themselves, and name their folly “allegory” (allegoria). What Theodore objects to most is the loss of the historia. By arbitrarily allegorizing elements of the historia, the allegorists lose sight of the underlying meaning of the story. When they start explicating the scriptures “spiritually” (spiritaliter), which is what they call their folly, “they say that Adam is in fact not Adam, neither is paradise paradise, nor is the serpent a serpent.” He complains, “I would like to say this to them: by hijacking the historia, they will ultimately have no historia left!” Theodore points to the very fact that Paul describes Ishmael’s treatment of Isaac as a persecution, even though Genesis does not do so, as evidence that Paul is not allegorizing (that is, “allegorizing” in the sense that Theodore charges the allegorists with doing). Paul, according to Theodore, draws things out (deduco) from the historia as if they had actually happened (quasi vere factorum negotiorum) in order to show from the historia a similarity with what the Galatians themselves are experiencing. Paul would not have been able to make this comparison if he

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27 In epistolam ad Galatas 4.24 (Swete, 1:73).
28 This is not to be confused with “history” as we understand it. Both the Latin term historia that appears in the translation and the Greek term ἱστορία (which is probably the word Theodore originally employed) can refer to any narration of events.
29 Challenging the way in which Antiochene interpreters are often portrayed as rejecting allegory for the same reasons as modern interpreters, Francis Young emphasizes that the Antiochene reaction against Alexandrian allegory was driven more by a concern for “the narrative logic” of the biblical text as a whole than for historicity or literalism (“The Fourth Century Reaction against Allegory,” StPat 30 [1997]: 125). As she says elsewhere (paraphrasing Northrop Frye), “History is irrelevant, the story is not” (“Typology,” in Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder [ed. Stanley E. Porter, Paul Joyce, and David E. Orton; Leiden: Brill, 1994], 47).
30 In epistolam ad Galatas 4.24 (Swete, 1:74).
31 Ibid. (Swete, 1:75).
32 In epistolam ad Galatas 4.30 (Swete, 1:86).
were “allegorizing” the Genesis account. Hence Theodore says that in Gal 4:29 Paul uses the expressions “just as” (sicut) and “at that time” (tunc) to point out the similarity, but he could not have drawn the similarity, “had the things not been there (rebus non stantibus),” nor would it have been necessary to specify an interval of time, “if the event had not happened (si non fuerit factum).”

Like Tyconius, Theodore is oblivious to most of the discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians, but he inadvertently puts his finger on something that other interpreters miss. Paul, says Theodore, by introducing the idea of Ishmael persecuting Isaac, demonstrates just how seriously he takes the historia. To put it in Iser’s terms, Paul is merely “filling in a gap” in the Genesis account. By contrast, (Theodore claims), the allegorists, by not understanding the difference between what they are doing and what Paul does here, “seem, as it were, to have laid claim to the power to abolish (extermino) all understanding of divine Scripture.”

The apostle, he continues, “did not do away with” (intermino) the historia, nor did he “roll away” (evolvo) events that had happened previously, but he “set them down as they had been at that time.” To some degree, however, as we saw in chapter three, this is precisely what Paul does in fact do. Theodore is able to see the principle, but he places Paul on the wrong side of the equation. In emphasizing the differences between “the allegorists” and Paul, Theodore is not attentive to what they have in common. Like the allegorists, Paul picks up on the resemblances between the originating story and his own time, and ignores the

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33 *In epistolam ad Galatas* 4.24 (Swete, 1:74).
34 Ibid. (Swete, 1:73).
differences, and as we have seen, some of these differences are crucial to the story.  

Theodore, in line with the prevailing pattern of patristic interpretation of this passage, does not notice this, and so could be said to be perpetuating the pattern of blind spot in his own time, but to the extent he is pointing in the right direction, he could be said to be offering a discordant voice.

Finally, the third patristic interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1 that I want to look at appears in the commentary on Genesis produced by Procopius of Gaza (ca. 465–530). As a commentary in the Greek *catenae* tradition, Procopius’ commentary consists primarily of quotations from previous interpreters, but he also provides his own reactions to some of these views. When he comes to his own interpretation of Gen 21:10, Procopius makes explicit reference to Paul’s allegorical interpretation in Gal 4:29. “It seems to some,” says Procopius, “that since Ishmael was evil (*πονηρόν ὄντα*), he had been cast out by the judgment of God, and on this account had not received anything from his father.”

He acknowledges that Paul himself can be called upon to support this view because it says in Galatians that “at that time” (*tunc*) the one son “had persecuted” (*persecutus est*) the other. Likewise, some testify that Abraham had banished Hagar because he recognized that she was “infected with malice”

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36 And as a result (as I noted at the end of chapter three), Paul does not get the story quite right. Ishmael’s “playing” might quite reasonably be understood as “persecution,” but the Genesis account does not exactly say that Ishmael was playing. Rather, it says that “Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing.” This focalization is crucial to the story. In not noticing this, Theodore reveals that he too does not get the story quite right.

37 *Commentarii in Genesin* 21.10 (PG 87:383).

38 Procopius’ commentary is preserved partially in Greek and partially in Latin.
In reaction to these views, Procopius comes to Hagar’s and Ishmael’s defence. He points out that Abraham gave gifts to his other sons through Ketura, but he “completely disowned” (prorsus abdicavit) Ishmael because he believed in the divine promise that Ishmael would become a great nation. It was not an act of cruelty on Abraham’s part to send the two of them away with such a meager supply of provisions, since at God’s command, “he was entrusting them to the care of God.” At no point does Procopius explicitly acknowledge that he is challenging Paul’s interpretation of Hagar and Ishmael on the basis of the story in Genesis itself, yet by taking such pains to present Hagar and Ishmael in a positive light, he is thwarting the logic of Paul’s binary. Unlike Paul, who ignores the promises concerning Ishmael, Procopius sees the banishment of Hagar and her son as the command of God anticipating the fulfilment of these very promises.

At the same time, Procopius also seems to take the usual patristic understanding of Paul’s allegory for granted. Further on, he describes Hagar as “the rejected mother of the Jews,” wandering for a long time in the desert. As we saw in the last chapter with Origen’s interpretation of Genesis, both Hagar and Ishmael represent the “unbelieving Jews” who have their eyes opened when they perceive “the fountain of the living Christ.” Yet even with Paul’s allegory in the background (or rather, Paul’s allegory as it is interpreted by Origen and others as referring to Jews and Christians), Procopius shifts the emphasis, and he actually invokes Paul in doing so. Just as God relinquished to Israel “the tiny seed of the law

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39 Ibid. (PG 87:385).
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
of righteousness,” so that the people of Israel might themselves be “a small blessing in the lands among which they were dispersed,” so also Abraham disowns (abdicat) both Hagar and Ishmael at God’s command, providing them with a small amount of provisions to ensure that they would not die on the journey. In an exegetical maneuver that is worthy of Paul himself, Procopius likens Paul’s distress over the plight of Israel (Rom 9:2) to Abraham’s distress at sending off Hagar and Ishmael: “But because Israel was cut down (exciderunt), the Apostle felt not a little grief, just as the exile of Hagar and Ishmael tortured the mind of Abraham.”44 By emphasizing Abraham’s sympathy with the plight of Hagar and Ishmael, and by drawing parallels between it and Paul’s distress for the existing people of Israel, the Genesis story is given a very different twist than we see in Galatians, even though the structure of Paul’s allegory remains intact.

In this way, Procopius, like Tyconius and Theodore before him, provides a discordant voice to the patterns of interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1 that we explored in the last chapter. Whether he intends it or not, Procopius offers a correction to Paul’s interpretation that reveals once again that in key ways, Paul “gets the story wrong.” By emphasizing that Ishmael too is a “child of promise” (even if he does not use the words), Procopius returns to one of the crosscurrents of the originating story that is lost in Paul’s rendition. This is essentially what Tyconius does as well. By asserting that “Ishmael” is always to be found in the midst of “Isaac,” Tyconius recognizes the complexity of the relationships in the Genesis account in a way that Paul does not, even as he continues within the framework of Paul’s binary.

Theodore’s contribution, by contrast, is somewhat different. By insisting on the integrity of

44 Ibid.
the *historia*, he opens up the possibility of returning to the crosscurrents of the Genesis account, even if he does not actually do so himself. Where he goes wrong—or rather, where he succumbs to the usual pattern—is in also insisting that despite appearances to the contrary, Paul is somehow faithfully representing the originating story. As a result, Theodore himself does not get the story quite right. To a degree, this is true of all three interpreters. None of them break with the dominant patterns entirely: Procopius is still locked in the typical Jewish-Christian binary, Tyconius breaks out of this but still adheres to Paul’s binarian structure, and Theodore cannot see the ways in which Paul’s treatment ultimately falsifies the Genesis account. To the extent that these interpreters follow the usual patterns, they could be said to be perpetuating the blind spot, but to the extent that they contribute elements of clarity, they are sounding discordant notes.

3. Discordant Voices in the Medieval Period

The first medieval interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1 that I want to look at comes down to us from the Northumbrian monk known as the Venerable Bede, who is generally regarded as the most important Latin interpreter of the eighth century. Bede explicitly refers to Gal 4:21–5:1 in his *Commentary on Genesis* (ca. 720). Unlike Theodore, who has qualms about allegory, Bede is an avowed allegorist. He suggests, for example, that Isaac and Ishmael receive the names that they do in the Genesis account precisely because “the heirs of both the old covenant, which is signified by Ishmael, and the new, which is signified by Isaac, had been known in advance (praecognosco) in the divine election before their times through

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45 Depending on where one draws the lines, Bede is sometimes classified among late patristic interpreters and sometimes among early medieval interpreters.
the predetermined grace of a mystery."\(^{46}\)

Here it can be seen that Bede, like Procopius, takes Paul’s allegory (or what he perceives to be Paul’s allegory) of Jews and Christians for granted when he reads Genesis. When introducing his commentary on Gen 16, Bede begins by remarking, “Concerning Hagar and Ishmael, the Apostle has expounded most plentifully to the Galatians how they signify (designo) the synagogue and the old covenant, just as Sarah and her son Isaac signify the church and the new covenant.”\(^{47}\) At the same time, he also provides what may be described as a literal reading of the passage. The predictions concerning Ishmael in Gen 16:12, according to Bede (following Jerome), refer to Ishmael’s descendants, the nomadic Saracens who have no fixed abode, and are always at war with the nations who border the desert. To this he adds, with reference to the Muslim conquests of his own time: “This was long ago, but now ‘his hand is against everyone and everyone’s hand is against him’ to such an extent that they oppress the whole length of Africa with their dominion, and they also hold the greater part of Asia and some of Europe, hated and contrary to all.”\(^{48}\)

For the most part, Bede falls into the dominant pattern as much as any of the interpreters in the previous chapter. However, as he proceeds, even while adopting the Pauline allegory (or again, what is generally understood in the dominant line of tradition as Paul’s allegory), like

\(^{46}\) Commentarii in principium Genesis 16, in Venerabilis Bede opera quae supersunt omnia (ed. J. A. Giles; London: Whittaker, 1844), 7:184–85. This implies that for Bede the events in the originating story take place for no other purpose than to prefigure events later in history.

\(^{47}\) Ibid. (Whitaker, 7:184).

\(^{48}\) Ibid. (Whittaker, 7:185). This is the “literal” meaning according to Dawson’s working definition of allegory: the meaning that is conventionally assigned to a text as its “literal sense.” To our ears, however, it might seem more like an allegorical (or typological) meaning.
Procopius, he also subtly thwarts it. Whereas other interpreters of the passage intensify Paul’s allegory by *expanding* on it, Bede proceeds much more cautiously by *limiting* it.

While discussing the prediction of Isaac’s birth in Gen 17, for example, he cautions, “By no means should the fact that after Isaac has grown, Ishmael was cast out with his mother at the command of Sarah . . . be supposed to signify the abolishing of the old covenant through the succession of the new.”49 Rather, he says, it signifies that “the carnal observation of the law, along with those who contend that it should be observed carnally in spite of the gleaming grace of the gospel, should be expelled from the boundary of the church.”50 This is remarkably close to the position adopted by many recent interpreters of Galatians (as we shall see when we examine recent interpretation of this passage, in particular Martyn).

Elsewhere, such as when Bede applies the allegory to his own time, stating the necessity of expelling heretics and schismatics from the church, he falls back into the usual pattern of thinking in terms of the usual Jewish-Christian dichotomy. But here, and in a few other points when he is being more careful, he seems to be thinking that Paul is referring, not to “the exclusion of the Jews from salvation for all time” (as in Betz), but to the specific expulsion of certain troublemakers in the church at this particular point in time (as in Martyn).51 Just by paying closer attention to what Paul is actually saying, Bede offers a discordant voice to the dominant pattern of interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1.

The second medieval interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1 that I want to draw attention to is preserved for us by Raban Maur (780–856), a contemporary of Haimo of Auxerre.

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50 Ibid. (Whittaker, 7:193).
51 See also appendix 2.
Following Bede, Raban Maur himself reads Genesis at what he would probably call the *literal* level (though he does not explicitly say so) as referring to the “nomadic Saracens, of uncertain habitation, who fight against all the nations that are on the border of the desert, and are attacked by all.”

52 *Spiritually* (*mystice*), however, “it is clear” (*videlicet*) that these two women signify the two covenants, “as in the interpretation of the Apostle.”

53 Hagar signifies the Old Law, which “suckled the Jewish people in the synagogue for obedient service”; Sarah, “the grace of the gospel, which gave birth to the Christian people in liberty.”

So far, this is business as usual. However, Raban Maur then presents an alternate view, which he does not attribute to any interpreter in particular: “In a certain tract I have read Sarai, the wife of Abraham, interpreted as the first-born church (*ecclesiam primitivam*), but the Egyptian slave woman interpreted as the church of the Gentiles (*ecclesiam ex gentibus*), who, after she conceived the word of faith, looked down upon the sterile, sacrificed synagogue.”

54 This turns the Pauline allegory on its head, even while adopting its structure: Sarah now represents the Jewish people, while Hagar represents the Gentile church. Raban Maur then goes on to say that the angel admonishing Hagar to return to her mistress and be humbled under her hand signifies the apostolic teaching (as we find it in Rom 11:18–21) that admonishes the Gentile Christians not to be haughty against the Jewish people. As we saw repeatedly in the last chapter, Paul’s allegory typically inspires further allegorization of the Genesis account, but here the allegorization that is inspired runs counter to what we have in Gal 4:21–5:1. At the same time, as we saw with Procopius, Paul’s authority is invoked in

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52 *Commentaria in Genesim* 4.18 (PL 107:544A).
53 Ibid. (PL 107:544B).
54 Ibid. (PL 107:544C).
order to do so. Raban Maur does not pronounce judgment on this interpretation one way or another, saying merely, “we leave this to the reader’s judgment” (*haec lectoris judicio relinquimus*), but the very fact that he passes such an unusual interpretation along seems to indicate that he is favourably disposed towards it. In any case, what we have here is another interpretation of the passage that offers a discordant voice.

One final medieval interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1 that I want to look at is the one attributed to Bruno the Carthusian, the head of the cathedral school at Rheims and the founder of the Carthusian order, whose *Commentary on Galatians* was probably written shortly after he entered the monastic life in 1084. For the most part, Bruno adopts the standard interpretation given this passage in medieval exegesis, drawing heavily on the interpretations of Jerome and Augustine, without mentioning them by name. As we might expect, he takes the usual Jewish-Christian dichotomy for granted, but at the same time, just as we saw Bede placing limits on the binary, Bruno goes one step further and softens it. He qualifies the rigidity of the standard interpretation by saying that Abraham’s two sons signify that “God has two sons, namely the Gentiles and the Jews.” Nevertheless, he observes, “not all individuals from among them are sons of God, except for those from both

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55 Interestingly, it is in his commentary on Genesis rather than Galatians that he mentions this interpretation, even though it presupposes Paul’s allegorical framework.

56 Ibid. (PL 107:544D).

57 Ian Christopher Levy records that there is some dispute over whether Bruno himself actually wrote the Pauline commentaries attributed to him or whether they should be attributed to his pupils (*The Bible in Medieval Tradition: The Letter to the Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011], 47). Incidentally, Pope Urban II had also at one time been a pupil of Bruno. Note however that the reference to Gal 4:30 in Urban’s speech at the Council of Clarendon reported by William of Tyre in the twelfth century is not corroborated by contemporary witnesses, and is therefore probably not historical.
people who will have been found worthy.”⁵⁸ When he comes to Gal 4:29, he goes along with Paul’s assumption that Ishmael persecuted Isaac in the originating story, even saying that Ishmael “used to beat (\textit{verberabat}) Isaac, whom he saw as the future heir and master for himself, while he was still young.”⁵⁹ However, Bruno softens this on the allegorical plane by paraphrasing Paul as interposing, “those who are according to the flesh persecute us, but it should be of no concern, for they themselves will be cast out (\textit{ejicientur}), and we will enter into the inheritance.”⁶⁰ The grammar is interesting here. Paul expresses the casting out as an imperative (\textit{ejice} in Latin, in the singular, following Genesis); Bruno softens it by paraphrasing it in the future tense, passive voice, third-person plural, thus making it an affirmation to those who are being persecuted.

Bruno makes a similar substitution in Gal 4:30, when he paraphrases Paul’s quotation itself. He starts off by saying, “Thus he says (\textit{sic ait}), ‘What does the Scripture say?’ (\textit{quid dicit Scriptura?})” He then explains that “in the same place in Moses it is found that when Sarah had seen Hagar and her boy behaving insolently against her and Isaac, she said to Abraham (\textit{ait ad Abraham}), ‘Cast out the slave woman and her son.’ (\textit{Ejice ancillam et filium ejus})”⁶¹ Bruno is recognizing here the discrepancy between Genesis and Galatians whereby Paul quotes the words of Sarah as the words of Scripture. What Paul means, according to Bruno, is that the Scripture says that Sarah said these words. Bruno then takes this one step further.

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⁵⁹ Ibid. (PL 153:308C).
⁶⁰ Ibid. (PL 153:308D).
⁶¹ “Quod sic ait: \textit{Quid dicit Scriptura?} In eodem Moyse invenitur quia, cum Sara vidisset Agar et puerum ejus superbientes contra se et Isaac, ait ad Abraham: \textit{Ejice ancillam et filium ejus}” (ibid.).
He says, “In the same way, the sons of grace say, ‘O Lord, cast out the slave woman’ (Domine, ejice ancillam)—that is, the law, ‘and her son’ (et filium ejus)—that is, the Jewish people.”

This takes for granted the (supposed) Pauline allegory referring to Hagar as a symbol of the synagogue and Sarah as a symbol of the church, but now it is no longer the Scripture ordering the slave woman and her son to be cast out, but the church imploring that the law and her children, the Jewish people, be cast out. Again, this shifts the terms of the allegory. Usually the imperative is taken as God’s command of God to the church; here it becomes a request of the church to God. Recall that Erasmus in his paraphrase also observes this discrepancy between Genesis and Galatians, but resolves it by conflating Sarah in the originating story with her allegorical counterpart. Bruno, by contrast, shifts the terms of the allegory itself, bringing them more closely in line with Genesis. Bruno does not take this any further. It is not even clear that he is aware of what he is doing. He does not openly contradict Paul; he subtly “corrects” him, and softens the binary in the same move. On other scores, Bruno’s treatment of Gal 4:21–5:1 is little different from some of the other medieval interpreters we have seen (if not more so), but on this one point, he offers a discordant voice.

Among these three medieval interpretations, the pattern is to accept Paul’s allegory without question, but then to resist it, seemingly inadvertently. I have characterized the interpretation that we find in Bede as putting limits on it, the one that we find in Raban Maur as actually reversing it, and the one that we find in Bruno as shifting its terms. As we saw in the previous chapter, interpreters freely take advantage of Paul’s allegorization of the Genesis account to come up with allegorical treatments of their own, even if they think that all they

62 Ibid.
are doing is expounding on Paul’s allegory. Usually this means intensifying the allegory, but in each of these cases, however, Paul’s allegory is toned down. Such is the power of allegory that it allows these interpreters to do this so readily. These interpretations have the appearance of faithfully following Paul, even as they subtly thwart him. The drawback, however, is that they seem stuck at the “allegorical” level. They manage to take the harsh edge off Paul’s binarian reasoning, but they do not openly question Paul’s treatment of Genesis, or even make their way back to the originating story. As a result, they too, like Tyconius, Theodore, and Procopius, end up perpetuating the pattern to some degree in their own time. Nevertheless, in going against the grain of the dominant pattern of medieval exegesis, these interpretations also sound distinctive “discordant voices” in the history of interpretation.

4. Discordant Voices in the Reformation Period

At the beginning of chapter four I mentioned that Luther is a particularly complicated figure within the tradition. On the one hand, his interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1 as it appears in his commentaries on Galatians contributes to the dominant line of interpretation, yet he also does something quite different with the passage in his *Commentary on Genesis* (which was published in 1539). For the most part, Luther is every bit as polemical in his *Commentary on Genesis* as he had been earlier in his *Commentary on Galatians* (1535). For example, in discussing Hagar’s weeping in the desert in Gen 21:16, he starts off by saying that on account of our hardness, God can effect nothing among us through grace “unless he has first
broken and bruised our adamantine hearts by means of the law.” He then specifically draws attention to Gal 4, where Paul expounds the present passage “according to the literal sense” (*ad literam*): “‘Everyone,’ he says, ‘who is of the synagogue is of this sort.’” Here Luther, as in his commentaries on Galatians, assumes the usual understanding of the passage as relating to the difference between Christians and Jews. He even describes this as the “literal sense” of Genesis. Then, having established the Jewish people as the primary referents, Luther universalizes the point, saying it applies to all who are haughty and trust in their own righteousness. As in his *Commentary on Galatians* (1535), he relates this to his own time: “We know from experience that all human beings are of this sort, not just the Jews,” but also the Turks, “who presume themselves to be the people of God because they are decorated with victories,” as well as the Pope and his church, “who usurp the name of the church because they are in the dignity and the office.”

Yet Luther also does something that is rather remarkable in his commentary as he begins to discuss the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael in Gen 21:10. He starts off by observing that “a more cruel account (*historia*) could not have been written.” However, “even though Ishmael was being cast out of the home and church of Abraham,” nevertheless, “I do not doubt that Ishmael and many of his descendants turned back to the true church of Abraham,”

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64 “Omnes, inquit, tales sunt, qui sunt de Synagoga.” Paul of course says no such thing, though he may have implied it. Luther is paraphrasing Paul here, if not outright misquoting him.
65 Here again Luther’s antithesis between law and gospel comes to the fore, as we saw in the last chapter.
66 Ibid., 43:172.
67 Ibid., 43:164.
since he had been cast out, “not simply so that he might be excluded from the kingdom of
God, but so that he might understand that the Kingdom of God is not owed to him by natural
right, but springs from mere grace.” Luther even notices that Paul describes the words of
Sarah commanding that the slave woman be cast out as the words of “the Law.”
This is no
accident: the first function of the Law is to make people aware of their own presumption. We
must be “cast out” before we can experience grace. Ishmael and Hagar thus come to
represent, according to Luther, repentant sinners. He says that after Hagar heard the voice of
the angel, she was “illuminated with a new light of the Holy Spirit, and from a slave woman
she herself was also made a mother of the church (mater ecclesiae), who afterwards
instructed her grandsons and warned them by her example not to be haughty.” As we saw
with Procopius, Bede, and Bruno, this adopts the structure of Paul’s binary while
simultaneously thwarting it. Luther may be thinking that he is giving a thoroughly Pauline
explanation of the passage, but if this is so, then he is being more “Pauline” than even Paul
in Gal 4:21–5:1. As I noted in chapter three, all Paul’s effort in this passage is directed
toward persuading his readers to identify with Isaac rather than Ishmael; Luther thwarts this
by making Hagar and Ishmael the role models. Again, at this one point, Luther provides a
discordant voice to the dominant line of interpretation, and one that is quite at odds with
what he provides in his Commentary on Galatians (1535).

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68 Ibid., 43:165.
69 “Itaque Paulus hanc Sarae vocam ‘ejice ancillam’ vocat vocem legis: Non dicit, ‘quid dicit
70 Ibid., 43:177. Note that Luther refers to Hagar here as a “mother of the church,” which
picks up on Paul’s language from Gal 4:26, but applies it to the other side of Paul’s binary.
71 It is not remarkable that Luther, while commenting on Genesis, interprets the story
differently than he does while commenting on Galatians. In fact, most interpreters in the
Another Reformation interpretation that is worth looking at appears in the commentary on Galatians published by Wolfgang Musculus in 1561. Musculus had been a Reformer and biblical scholar at Augsburg from 1531 to 1548, but when the terms of the Augsburg Interim were adopted by the city in 1548, he was forced to flee to Switzerland. From 1548 to 1563 he served as professor of Bible at Berne, during which time he produced numerous biblical commentaries. As we saw with other Reformation interpretations in the last chapter, the polemical content of Musculus’ commentary is high. He too takes it for granted that Paul is speaking specifically of the Jewish people when he refers to “the son of the slave woman,” but he quickly (like other Protestant interpreters) transfers this to the Roman Church of his own day. With regard to the one son persecuting the other, for example, he remarks that because the Jews were sons of the kingdom “in accordance with the flesh only” (secundum carnem tantum), they persecuted those who had been born in accordance with the spirit. However, they persecuted the prophets, Christ himself, and Christians, “with the most bitter hatred of all” (odio omnium acerbissimo). Yet elsewhere he speaks of “the earthly church of the sons of the flesh” (terrena filiorum carnis ecclesia), which has nothing of the truth, Christian tradition who comment on both writings usually end up doing this—especially when they come to sections of Genesis that Paul ignores. What is remarkable is that Luther, while commenting on Genesis, adopts Paul’s allegory, even while turning it on its head, and then, even more remarkably, without acknowledging that he is doing so, or even that his interpretation of Galatians in his Commentary on Genesis is so different from his Commentary on Galatians (1535). In this sense too, he participates in the blind spot.

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73 In epistolas apostoli Pauli ad Galatas et Ephesios commentarii (Basel: Officina Hervagiana, 1569), 162.
but simulates a zeal that “froths with the blood of the true believers and sons of the spirit.”

For Musculus, the mark of the “true church” is that it is perpetually persecuted by “the church of the wicked” (*ecclesia malignantium*). In this way, Musculus, like the interpreters that we examined in the previous chapter, reproduces Paul’s binary and even (to some extent) intensifies it.

At the same time, although Musculus gets wrapped up in polemics like other Reformation interpreters, he stands out in that he also notices some of the discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians. When he comes to Gal 4:30, for example, he immediately remarks, “This is not the word of Scripture, but of Sarah.” He then conducts a close reading of Genesis to show that this is so, and decides that when Paul says, “What does the Scripture say?” (*at quid dicit Scriptura*), this amounts to the same thing as if he had said, “But what does the Scripture remember Sarah saying to Abraham?” (*at quid Scriptura Saram ad Abrahamum dixisse commemorat*). He then articulates the principle behind this: “There is a great distinction between the words of Scripture and the words that are remembered in them to have been spoken by human beings, both the good and the bad.” Here at last is an interpreter who seems to appreciate the difference between the words that a character speaks within a story and the words of a narrator telling the story. However, Musculus

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74 Ibid., 161.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 In my analysis of the narrative structure of the Genesis account in chapter two, I emphasized how important this distinction between narrative levels is. In my analysis of Paul’s treatment of the Genesis in chapter three, I observed that Paul does not recognize this distinction and collapses the narrative levels. While it may not be fully correct to equate “the
immediately discounts the application of the principle in this case. “Nevertheless,” he says, “because it concerns the present passage, it is simpler to accept these words of Sarah . . . as the words of Scripture.”\footnote{Ibid.} He does not explain his reason for saying this, other than to observe that they follow the statement about Sarah seeing Ishmael playing with her son Isaac. He admits that she said it with a woman’s zeal, but this is “not apart from the will of God and the inspiration of the holy spirit,” since it is necessary for Isaac to be separated from Ishmael.\footnote{Ibid.} Here again we see an interpreter noticing the discrepancy and then immediately discounting it. Once again, we might characterize this as Musculus “stumbling upon the truth, only to pick himself up and hurry on as if nothing happened.”

Fortunately Musculus returns to this issue later on when he conducts a closer word-for-word analysis of the verse, and here he takes the discrepancy more seriously. “Observe whose voice this is,” he says. It is Sarah who is speaking, and Sarah (according to Paul) is a type of the “true and heavenly” church of God. Here again we see Musculus raising the polemical temperature. He goes on to declare that “the church of the wicked” claims this role for herself and casts out whomever she wants.\footnote{Ibid.} However, just as Sarah in the Genesis account does not cast out the slave woman, but appeals to Abraham her husband, the head of the household, to bring it about, so also the “true church” does not cast out, but entreats God, that “he himself might finally cast out the degenerate church and her son.”\footnote{“At illa non ejicit, sed Deum orat, ut ipse degenerem ecclesiam cum filiis tandem ejiciat”} This may be

Scripture” with the narrator, Musculus at least recognizes the significance of embedded discourse.
true (in a sense) to the Genesis account, but it is not what Paul says. As we saw with Bruno, Musculus is softening Paul’s rhetoric here, bringing it closer into line with the Genesis account (or more precisely, into line with Musculus’ reading of the Genesis account), but he takes it one step further than Bruno. He continues, pointing out that Sarah does not say, “Slaughter! Slay! Burn!” (macta, occide, combure) but “Cast out!” (eijce); “it was enough for her that the slave woman be cast out with her son.” Here it is not so much Paul’s rhetoric that Musculus is qualifying, but rather the intensification of Paul’s rhetoric that seems to come so easily to so many interpreters. Musculus is limiting the degree to which Paul’s allegorical interpretation can be used to justify persecution. At the same time, however, Musculus does not seem to recognize that he is actually challenging Paul in his interpretation of Genesis. Rather, what he is doing can better be described as reading (even misreading) Galatians in the light of Genesis, as opposed to reading Genesis in the light of Galatians.

Musculus is thus doing something similar here to what we saw with Tyconius. Although he takes the usual reading of Paul’s allegory for granted, he also seems to be somewhat uncomfortable with it. Unlike other Reformation interpreters, who take up Paul’s binary

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83 “Satis illi erat, si ejiceretur ancilla cum filio ipsius” (ibid.).
84 One can speculate as to whether Musculus’ own experience of persecution at the hands of the Catholic authorities is what makes him so sensitive to this issue. As Gerald L. Bray notes, the 1550’s was a difficult time for Protestantism. Charles V had succeeded in re-Catholicizing large parts of Germany and “when Protestant commentaries on Galatians started appearing again there was a new atmosphere born of religious persecution and the suffering which that entailed.” (Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Galatians, Ephesians [Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011], xlix).
85 This raises the question of whether a misreading of a misreading can amount to a “faithful” reading. This is a question that will come up again in chapter six.
rhetoric and apply it to their own time without careful qualification, Musculus is much more cautious. The casting out that Paul speaks of has to be done by God, else the church that does the casting out loses its claim to be the true church. This can be seen even more clearly as Musculus continues his analysis of the verse. Although he acknowledges that in the originating story, it was necessary for Isaac’s safety that Ishmael be sent away, he qualifies the interpretation of this at the allegorical level by remarking that even in the case of the expulsion of the sons of the slave woman, to which the Apostle applies this type, “the reason would not be enough to presently expel all of them from the house of God.” Rather, he says (referring to the parable of the weeds from Matthew, as we saw earlier with Tyconius), we must await the time of the judgment and the harvest, when angels will be sent to pluck up the weeds and separate the wicked from the midst of the just. Musculus is attentive here to the differences between the two situations in a way that Paul (and other interpreters) is not. Again, he does not openly challenge Paul, but he mollifies his interpretation of Galatians in the light of Genesis, softening, rather than intensifying, Paul’s binary rhetoric. Yet in other ways, Musculus is just as blind as other interpreters to the discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians, and intensifies Paul’s binary rhetoric as much as other Reformation interpreters.

Both Luther in his *Commentary on Genesis*, and Musculus in his *Commentary on Galatians*, each in his own way, offer discordant voices to the dominant patterns of interpretation of Gal

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86 Musculus quotes Jerome with approval here, as saying that the spiritual (*spiritualis*) son never persecutes the carnal (*carnalem*) son, but “he forgives him as a rustic brother,” since he knows that “he is able to make progress in time” (*In epistolas apostoli Pauli ad Galatas et Ephesios commentarii*, 161).

87 Ibid., 162.
4:21–5:1. To make comparisons with what we have seen before, Luther, like Procopius and the medieval interpreters we looked at, also inadvertently thwarts Paul’s binary. In his efforts to demonstrate the incompatibility between law and grace, he ends up following one of the cross-currents of Genesis, namely that Ishmael too is a child of promise and has a destiny to fulfill. Yet at the same time, Luther’s depiction of Hagar and Ishmael as repentant sinners presupposes their earlier arrogance and haughtiness. He is, of course, merely “filling in the gaps” (both of Genesis and Galatians) when he does this, but with the effect of perpetuating Paul’s binary. As a result, even though he thwarts Paul’s binary, he does not challenge its structure, nor does he even seem to be bothered by it at all. Musculus, by contrast, does seem to be bothered by it. As a careful reader of Scripture, he notices some of the divergences between Genesis and Galatians, some of which he casually dismisses, but others, as we have seen, he manages to bring into partial clarity. To compare Musculus with some of the other discordant voices that we have introduced in this chapter, with Musculus it is not so much that he is bringing one aspect of the blind spot into focus, but that he seems to have a sense that not everything lines up, and so he vaguely, and somewhat inconsistently, moves towards a clearer picture on more than one front, but without making any real breakthroughs at any particular point.

5. Discordant Voices in the Nineteenth Century and Beyond

As I observed in the last chapter, historical-critical commentators from the nineteenth century who comment on this passage tend to be curiously inattentive to the discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians in their commentary on this passage. Being avid readers of
the texts of both Genesis and Galatians, they indeed notice the discrepancies (most of the
time), but they are equally as adept at discounting their significance. One exception to this
rule, at least to some degree, is the German biblical scholar Johann Christian Konrad von
Hofmann, who was professor of theology at Erlangen from 1845 to 1877.88 Although in
many ways he is no better than his contemporaries at appreciating the significance of the
discrepancies, he stands out in that he puts an effort into limiting Paul’s binary rather than
intensifying it, much as we saw with Bede in the eighth century. Like most other nineteenth-
century interpreters, (but in contrast to most precritical interpreters), von Hofmann avoids
applying Paul’s allegory (or what he sees as Paul’s allegory) to his own time, either
allegorically or typologically, nor does he take his cue from Paul and start developing
allegories of his own. However, in contrast to many nineteenth-century interpreters, who
seem bent on universalizing Paul’s principles or applying what they see as his insights to the
grand sweep of history, when it comes to his interpretation of this passage, von Hofmann
seems content to limit Paul’s comments to their local historical context as much as possible.
In this way, he offers a discordant voice to the dominant patterns of interpretation of this
passage in the nineteenth-century, just as Bede offers a discordant voice to the dominant
patterns of interpretation in the medieval period.

This can be seen most clearly in what he does with verses 29 and 30. On the one hand, von

88 Von Hofmann, as a leading representative of the nineteenth-century Erlangen tradition of
German Protestant theology, is often identified as one of the founders of the *Heilsgeschichte*
tradition of biblical interpretation, with its emphasis on the history of salvation as a frame of
reference. See Matthew L. Becker, *The Self-Giving God and Salvation History: The
Trinitarian Theology of Johannes von Hofmann* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 9; R. A
Hofmann seems to accept the usual interpretation of Paul’s allegory of two covenants as a reference to Judaism and Christianity. In commenting on Gal 4:29, for example, he identifies the contrast between Hagar and Sarah, and between Ishmael and Isaac, as corresponding to the contrast between “law-abiding Israel” (dem gesetzlichen Israel) and “Christianity” (der Christenheit), a contrast which is marked by the “unseemly conduct” (ungebührlichen Verhalten) of the former towards the latter.89 On the other hand, he also seems to resist this interpretation in that he identifies “the son begotten in accordance with the flesh” who “used to persecute the son begotten in accordance with the spirit,” not with the Jewish people in general, but more specifically with the Jewish Christians who were troubling the churches in Galatia. As a result, in contrast to most other nineteenth-century interpreters, von Hoffman does not turn to Jewish traditions about Ishmael mistreating Isaac as the key to understanding Paul’s reference to persecution. Although he acknowledges that such traditions are consistent with what it says in Genesis, especially the Septuagint, which says that the boy Ishmael “ridiculed” (spottete) the infant Isaac, such a connection does not fit well with what Paul says elsewhere in Galatians about the situation in his own time. It is more likely, says Hofmann, that Paul has in mind a secondary meaning of persecution here, a “chasing after” (Nachlaufen) through which “Ishmael maliciously put Sarah’s child in a state of unrest.”90 For so also “the law-minded people” (die gesetzlich Gesinnten) were behind the believing Gentiles, so as to “unsettle” (beunruhigen) them.91 It is therefore Paul’s

89 Der Brief Pauli an die Galater, in Die Heilige Schrift Neuen Testaments, 2nd Theil, 1st Abtheilung (Nördlichen: C. H. Beck, 1863), 158.
90 “Ismael das Kind Sara’s muthwillig in Unruhe versezte” (ibid.).
91 Von Hofmann notes that elsewhere in Galatians Paul refers to the conduct of the troublemakers as a ταράσσειν (“disturbing”) and a ἀναστασεῖν (“unsettling”). See Gal 2:4;
own situation that is colouring his description of the originating story and determines his use of the word “persecution.”

Along the same lines, when he comes to Gal 4:30, von Hofmann stands out in that he insists on taking the imperative to refer to an actual “casting out.” Against most other interpreters, who understand the imperative as offering a “consolation” (Trost) to the Galatians for the persecution they have experienced (von Hoffman singles out Bisping in particular as holding this position), or an “assurance” (Versicherung) that those others will not have a share in the messianic kingdom (he mentions Meyer in this regard), von Hofmann understands Gal 4:30 as a direct command to the Galatians to cast out the proponents of the law.92 What Paul calls a “word of Scripture” (Schriftwort) is a command which Sarah, led by Ishmael’s conduct, addressed to Abraham, but it was corroborated by God. Von Hofmann sees Paul as redirecting this command to the readers of Galatians: “As Abraham did afterwards, so should the readers do also: they should likewise eject (weisen) from amongst themselves, as not participating in their inheritance, those who want to impose upon them their own zeal for the law (Gesetzlichkeit).”93 As I mentioned in the last chapter with regard to Meyer, it is precisely when interpreters start speaking about “casting out” that they reveal just how much they are misunderstanding Paul. We are not in a position to say to what precise degree von Hofmann understands Paul correctly, but in adhering very closely the wording of Galatians,

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92 Ibid., 159.
93 “Wie Abraham hienach gethan hat, so sollen entsprechend auch die Leser thun, sollen ebenfalls dijenigen als unbetheiligt an ihrem Erbe von ich weisen, welche ihnen die eigene gesetzlichkeit aufbringen wollen” (ibid.).
he seems to be on the right track.\footnote{As I emphasized in chapter three, one has to “fill in the gaps” to figure out exactly whom Paul is referring to when he says that the slave woman and her son are to be cast out. (See also appendix 2.) Nevertheless, compared with most nineteenth-century interpreters, von Hofmann seems to be following the right lines.} In any case, by restricting Paul’s words as referring very specifically to the context of the conflict in the Galatian churches and not to the conflict between nascent Christianity and Judaism, he avoids the pitfall of intensifying Paul’s binary. This will be a thread that gets picked up again later in the twentieth century as the blind spot begins to come into focus.

At the same time, von Hofmann does not address the issue of Paul’s treatment of Genesis. His interpretation sheds light on how the usual nineteenth-century interpretations of Gal 4:21–5:1 are often misrepresentations of Paul, but it does not shed much light on how Paul’s handling of the Genesis account is itself a misrepresentation. For this we have to go outside the guild of biblical scholars, for it happens that there are nineteenth century interpreters of the passage who notice these things. One of these is Josephine E. Butler (1829–1906), an English social reformer who campaigned tirelessly throughout her life for the rights of women, particularly women who had been forced by circumstances into making their living through prostitution.\footnote{Butler is particularly well-known for having been instrumental in the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886. These acts were aimed at regulating prostitution, and Butler’s opposition to them was based on her conviction that they embedded into law a “double standard,” whereby men were able to exploit women for their own use, but it was women who paid the price, economically, socially, and legally. See Amanda W. Benckhuysen, “Reading between the Lines: Josephine Butler’s Socially Conscious Commentary on Hagar,” in Recovering Nineteenth-Century Women Interpreters of the Bible (ed. Christiana de Groot and Marion Ann Taylor; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 135–148.} As an evangelical Anglican, Butler was influenced in her activism by her faith, and she looked to the Bible for inspiration. In this vein she published The Lady of
Shunem in 1884, a book aimed at inspiring both men and women (but especially mothers) in the cause of social reform. “I wish to try to show forth,” she says in the introduction to the book, “the attitude of our God towards parents and towards families, and especially to remind mothers of what the Saviour is, what he has shown himself in the Scriptures to be, and what he ever will be, to Mothers.”96 In the fourth chapter, she focuses on Hagar, whom Butler describes as the bar sinister, “the typical outcast.” Although Butler was well-educated, she was neither a biblical scholar nor a theologian. She was, however, well-informed concerning developments in biblical scholarship, as can be seen in her correspondence with Benjamin Jowett.97 As an outsider to biblical scholarship, Butler offers what might be described as a rather naïve reading of the biblical text, yet one that breaks out of the usual pattern to a degree that we have not hitherto seen.98

In chapter four of The Lady of Shunem, Butler begins by observing that Paul makes use of the story of Sarah and Hagar in his letter to the Galatians to represent the “two covenants,” by which he means “the two Dispensations, the Jewish and the Christian, the Law and the Gospel.”99 Like other interpreters, Butler gets caught up in the usual interpretation of Paul’s

98 Yet Butler continues to participate in the blind spot in her own way. This stands out when she notes that in Gen 21:17 the text says that “God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is,” and she asks, “Was it the voice of childish weeping only which God heard, or was it the voice of prayer?” but then declares, “It matters not” (Lady of Shunem, 89). For many recent interpreters of the story (Phylis Trible, for one), however, it matters very much whether God is responding to the lad’s cries or to Hagar’s prayer. What Butler seems to be unwilling to consider is the possibility that the God of Sarah and Abraham is also complicit in Hagar’s oppression.
99 Lady of Shunem, 70.
binary as referring to Judaism and Christianity: “That unworthy page in Abraham’s history was typical of the discord between the two principles—that of the old and that of the new Dispensation. The earlier, the imperfect, must needs be expelled before the latter born and perfect could have full and free scope.” However, this is not Butler’s primary focus. She regards the story as “typical” in another sense. She goes on to explain that this is “the earliest recorded embodiment in practice of a humanly decreed injustice which has prevailed ever since in society, more or less, in different times and in different lands, poisoning the sources of human life, and bearing disastrous fruits for the world.”

A woman who is not the lawful wife is misused for sexual purposes, and then discarded; while the “respectable” wife plays her part by having the other cast out. “This has been the verdict of countless generations,” says Butler: “Cast her out with her unlawful offspring. Get rid of her, keep her out of sight. Set up a barrier between these and those. Mark, strong and dark, the bar Sinister athwart her destiny, so that the legitimate wife may never hear or dare to speak of the existence of the outcast, who shall be for ever accursed.” Thus for Butler, Hagar represents the typical outcast.

However, in contrast to so many interpreters of the passage, Butler not only notices some of the discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians, but she also draws out their implications. She suggests, for example, that when the text says that Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian “mocking” (KJV) this could mean mere “playing” or even “dancing gracefully.” Against the standard interpretation of her time she muses, “Perhaps we are mistaken in

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100 Ibid. In fact, this is Paul’s binary tempered with Philo’s. See appendix 1.
101 Ibid., 71.
102 Ibid., 72.
imputing spite or rudeness to Ishmael.”"103 Noting Sarah’s words in Gen 21:10, Butler reasons that if Sarah had seen Ishmael insulting or mistreating Isaac, she would probably have used more denunciatory language: here she is merely repudiating “the dreaded idea of any equality between the two boys.”"104 She admits that Sarah acted cruelly, but asserts that God overruled this action for good: “God allowed the rejection of Hagar and her son, not that they should remain to the end forsaken,” but so that God’s “own tender pity and grace might be extended to and manifested in them.”105 She does not explicitly criticize Paul’s interpretation of the story here, but she offers what she describes as “the other side of the picture.” As we saw in chapters 2 and 3, there are crosscurrents in the Genesis account that Paul’s binary ignores, and one of them is that Hagar and Ishmael are not rejected by God. Butler goes on to fill in the missing picture and concludes, “The God who had twice in these thirteen years spoken to her [Hagar] words of sweet and holy comfort, and twice granted to her just what she needed at the moment—guidance and sustenance—continued to support and lead her; and the wilderness which became their home was no longer a wilderness to them, and Ishmael prospered, for God had given him his blessing.”106

What Butler brings to the table, which we have not heard from any of the other discordant voices, is a willingness to criticize Paul for contributing to Hagar’s oppression as an outcast.107 To be sure, Butler goes rather easy on Paul. She says that he is merely making use

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103 Ibid., 76.
104 Ibid., 77.
105 Ibid., 78.
106 Ibid., 90–91.
107 In her introduction to Woman’s Work and Women’s Culture, Butler is more explicit in her criticism of Paul: she praises the writer of a contemporary piece entitled “Ecce Homo” for
of this incident “in his passionate desire to clear away the mist of doctrinal error from the minds of his lapsed Galatian converts.”\textsuperscript{108} Her critique falls more heavily on Paul’s interpreters: “I am perplexed, in reading certain commentators, in noting a certain degree of—shall I call it complacency?—in their judgment of this story of Hagar, as if God himself had ordained each step of it, and Sarah had done well.”\textsuperscript{109} Nevertheless she acknowledges that “it may well be that an excessive dwelling on the allegorical use made by St. Paul of the facts has encouraged this complacency.”\textsuperscript{110} Although she says that her own reading of the story “may only be a motherly, a womanly reading of it, and theologically worthless,” she nevertheless confidently asserts her own response: “Paul was not a father, nor was the human heart of the man stirring in him—at the moment when he wrote to the Galatians—in the direction of pity for the outcast woman.”\textsuperscript{111} She asserts, on the contrary, that the facts of the story are plainly to be seen, and she is merely presenting the “other side of the picture.” Here again we have an interpreter reading the Genesis account closely and finding Paul’s rendition of it wanting, but what makes Butler’s interpretation stand out is that she is not afraid to put the finger on Paul himself as part of the problem.

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“venturing straight into the presence of Christ for an answer to every question, and of silencing the voice of all theologians from St. Paul to this day, until we have heard what the Master says” (ed. Josephine E. Butler; London: Macmillan and Co., 1869, lvi–lvii).
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\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 73. Although she is restrained at the explicit level, there is a fairly harsh criticism of Paul implied in the phrasing of her words: “Because the apostle made use of this incident in his passionate desire to clear away the mist of doctrinal error from the minds of his lapsed Galatian converts, and by familiar illustration to set forth the development of the purpose of God in the substitution of the covenant of Grace for the Law, shall we, therefore, speak softly of the conduct of Sarai and Abraham in this matter? I prefer to express frankly my disgust. To abstain from condemnation of their action would be to seem to charge God with approval of heartlessness and cruelty.”
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 73–74.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
In her willingness to criticize Paul, Butler is not inventing something new, even if it is unusual. This is a kind of thinking that goes back to the eighteenth century. Thomas Paine, for example, writing in 1794, calls Paul a “manufacturer of quibbles” and argues that “whether the fourteen epistles ascribed to Paul were written by him or not, is a matter of indifference; they are either argumentative or dogmatical; and as the argument is defective and the dogmatical part is merely presumptive, it signifies not who wrote them.”\textsuperscript{112} Writing in 1881, Friedrich Nietzsche draws on this tradition when heaping scorn on the practices of Christian interpretation initiated by Paul in his letters: “What can one expect from the aftereffects of a religion, which, in the centuries of its establishment performed that outrageous philological farce (unerhörte philologische Possenspiel) regarding the Old Testament: I mean the attempt to pull the Old Testament from under the Jews with the assertion that it contains nothing other than Christian truths and belongs to the Christians as the true people of Israel, whereas the Jews only presume it of themselves.”\textsuperscript{113}

Although these kinds of views criticizing Paul may have been in the air in the nineteenth century, they do not seem to have been taken up into biblical scholarship, at least not directly. Again, Benjamin Jowett offers an illuminating example in his commentary of the passage from 1859. Paul’s allegory, he says, is “neither an argument nor an illustration, but an interpretation of the Old Testament Scripture after the manner of the age in which St. Paul lived.” He then goes on to say, rather apologetically, “Strange as it may at first appear,

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology} (Paris: Barrois, 1794), 18, 134.

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Morgenröte: Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurteile}, rev. ed. (Leipzig: Fritzsch, 1887), 74.
that his mode of interpreting the Old Testament Scriptures should not conform to our laws of logic or language, it would be far stranger if it had not conformed with the natural modes of thought and association in his own day.” Jowett’s comment seems to presuppose that he knows of readers of Paul in his own day who were reacting negatively to the logic that they were finding. Jowett does not name who these readers are—he may even be talking about his own initial reactions. In any case, he dismisses these reactions as anachronistic judgmentalism. This pattern continues into the twentieth century. For example, the comments of Percy Gardner, written in 1913, seem now just as naïve as those of Jowett:

“When the great apostle proceeds to throw the result of spiritual experience into intellectual form, all sorts of possibilities of error come in. The great source of these errors is his use of the Old Testament, which he interprets in the manner of the rabbis of his time, and therefore, it is needless to say, not in accordance with true critical methods.” Again, Gardner, like Jowett, seems to perceive that Paul is speaking nonsense in passages like this one, but he dismisses this as an incoherence that arises from Paul’s Jewish background. E. Earle Ellis makes a similar comment in 1957: “If Paul’s presuppositions as to the nature of the OT and of its history are accepted, little fault can be found with his handling of the individual texts.” Again, this seems to imply that there are readers in Ellis’ time who are indeed finding fault with Paul’s quotations, precisely because they do not share Paul’s

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presuppositions. All three of these interpreters bear witness to discordant voices speaking in the background: the voices are there and they are making themselves felt, but they are not being given direct expression in biblical scholarship.

It is not until after the second world war that these vague “discordant voices” start making direct impact on Pauline scholarship, and then only slowly. One of the earliest of these is that of Hans-Joachim Schoeps, a Pauline scholar of Jewish background, writing in 1959. He declares that this passage, which makes Isaac, as the promised son of Sarah, symbolize the new covenant, and Ishmael, as the son of the slave woman Hagar, symbolize the Jews and the old covenant, “with its arbitrary reassignment of the lines of descent (willkürlichen Umwertung der Stammutterschaft), is wild Hellenistic speculative midrash (wüster hellenistischer Spekulationsmidrasch), upon a not-at-all clear apocalyptic background.”

He acknowledges that Sarah and Hagar are common symbolic figures that also appear in Philo, but Gal 4:21–31 is a “classic example of the violation (Musterbeispiel für den Verstoss) of the fundamental rule of rabbinical hermeneutics: ‘No word of Scripture can ever forsake its original meaning’ (Sabb. 63a).” Similarly, Günter Klein, a Protestant New Testament scholar, writing on Romans in 1963, remarks that in Gal 4:21 and the following verses, “a more brutal paganizing” (brutalere Paganisierung) of so-called salvation history

117 Ellis specifically mentions the “notable weakness” of nineteenth century criticism of the Pauline quotations to recognize this (again, without mentioning names), but he also seems to be alluding to interpretation in his own time.
119 Ibid.
(vorgeblicher Heilsgeschichte) can be imagined only with difficulty. Discordant voices of these kinds become more common into the 1970’s and beyond. Schalom Ben-Chorin, another Jewish scholar, complains in 1970 that in this passage, Paul “forms a midrash, in which a complete overturning of the patriarchal stories takes place.” Rosemary Radford Ruether, writing from a feminist Roman Catholic theological perspective in 1974, declares that in this passage, “Those who believe in Christ are the offspring of the free woman, while those still under the Mosaic covenant are the offspring of the slave woman,” and as a result, Paul’s position here is “unquestionably that of anti-Judaism.” As we move into the 1970’s and 80’s, these perspectives increasingly make themselves felt in biblical scholarship. This brings us at last into recent interpretation of the passage.

6. Recent Interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1

As I said at the outset of the chapter, there has been a sharp increase in the attention given to Gal 4:21–5:1 by biblical scholars within the past thirty years. It is beyond my scope here to provide a detailed examination of each of them, but a partial list includes: Cosgrove (1987), Bouwman (1987), Hays (1989), Martyn (1990), Janzen (1991), Wagner (1991), Malan (1992), Jobes (1993), Perriman (1993), Broer (1994), Castelli (1994), Borgen (1995).

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120 “Römer 4 und die Idee der Heilsgeschichte,” EvT 23 [1963]: 445. Klein is not necessarily intending to be particularly critical of Paul here when he says this; nonetheless there is an accuracy to his words.
123 Franz Mussner is worth mentioning in this regard (Der Galaterbrief [HTKNT 9; Freiburg: Herder, 1974]).
Bachmann (1999), Elliott (1999), Sellin (1999), Löstedt (2000), O’Neill (2000), Standhartinger (2002), Gerber (2002), de Boer (2004), Davis (2004), Willits (2005), Eastman (2006), di Mattei (2006), Punt (2006), Russell (2006), Juncker (2007), Söding (2007), Gignilliat (2008), Wolter (2010), Sänger (2011), Emerson (2013), Byrne (2014), Carlson (2014), to say nothing of the treatment of the passage in the commentaries of Fung (1988), Longenecker (1990), Matera (1992), Dunn (1993), George (1994), Hansen (1994), Tarazi (1994), Martyn (1997), Williams (1997), Esler (1998), Vouga (1998), Witherington (1998), Jervis (1999), Hays (2000), Légasse (2000), Buscemi (2004), Fee (2007), Lémonon (2008), Schreiner (2010), de Boer (2011), Moo (2013), Das (2014). As can be seen in appendix two, where I draw attention to some of the ways that these interpreters fill in the gaps in Paul’s argument, these studies are quite diverse in terms of their concerns, approaches, and conclusions. For some, the issue is still Paul’s exegetical procedure—is he doing “allegory” or “typology”? (e.g. Perriman, Davis), others are attempting to figure out the rhetorical function of Paul’s argument within the letter as a whole (e.g. Malan, Fowl), still others are attempting to reconstruct the historical context (e.g. Martyn, Elliott), and still others have their eyes on pressing questions of anti-Judaism (e.g. Broer, Bachmann) or the implications for today (e.g. Castelli, Russell). As Jeremy Punt notes, “The well-known allegory that Paul construes in Gal 4:21–5:1 has often been discussed, but the rich variety of different readings of his allegorical interpretation of the Sarah-Hagar and Isaac-Ishmael stories is indicative of a largely unresolved matter in Pauline studies.”

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124 A more thorough listing appears in the bibliography. Moreover, this of course does not take into account interest in this passage in more general studies.
What these interpreters have in common, however, despite all their diversity, is that they are bothered by this passage in ways that interpreters in previous times were not. This shift itself constitutes a discordant voice to the dominant pattern in the history of interpretation. Not all of these interpreters are bothered by the same things, but the passage itself has become problematic in ways that it was not before. We are past the stage when interpreters could just snooze their way through their treatment of it: it can no longer be “business as usual” as it was for interpreters in the past. For example, James D. G. Dunn remarks in his commentary on Galatians in 1993 (albeit reluctantly) that “the subsequent irresponsibility (as it may seem to us now) of the method of allegorical interpretation, as we find it particularly in Alexandrian Christianity and thereafter should not prevent us from recognizing something of the technique in Paul.”

This is true even of those interpreters who spend a great deal of energy insisting that Paul is not doing anything out of the ordinary in this passage. At the very least, they are forced to address the issue that Paul seems to be doing something problematic here, and this in itself reveals that they see a problem. Matthew Y. Emerson, for instance, argues at length in 2013 that Paul is engaged in a kind of “intertextual” reading of Exodus and Numbers here. The promises made to Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis are connected to the covenant made to Israel at Sinai: both are essentially promises made in the desert to Egyptian slaves fleeing from a master who cast them out. Paul is therefore not “arbitrarily allegorizing” or “reverting to a-textual typology” (as most interpreters since the time of Calvin have concluded) and it is about time that we “put down the hatchet of our

88. This is, of course, exactly where this thesis enters the discussion, and I locate myself among these “discordant voices” of recent times.

126 The Epistle to the Galatians (BNTC; London: A & C Black, 1993), 248. Given the past history of interpretation of this passage, this is a rather remarkable statement.
own hermeneutical law which we raise against Paul’s interpretation in Gal 4:21–31 and give him grace instead.”

As I said earlier, this is now the dominant pattern: it is no longer particularly useful to distinguish between “discordant voices” and “dominant patterns” within the tradition.

In various ways, and to various degrees, these interpreters notice the discrepancies between Genesis and Galatians, and appreciate their significance. Indeed, this may be part of why they find this passage to be so troublesome. For example, Susan G. Eastman (2006) observes that the command to cast out the slave woman and her son in Gal 4:30 takes the form of an imperative in the second person singular, a form that Paul never uses elsewhere in Galatians when addressing his audience. She argues that Paul is not issuing a command here but allowing the Galatians to “overhear” what the Scripture is saying to Abraham in order to warn them what their destiny will be “if they persist in their reliance on the destructive nexus of the law and the flesh.”

She objects to both what she describes as the traditional view (that Gal 4:30 “announces the exclusion for all time of a specific group of people from salvation”), as well as what she labels “the new consensus” (that it “commands the

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128 It is not the case that there are no longer any discordant voices, but the dynamics are different.


130 Ibid., 314.
expulsion at a particular point in time of a specific group of people from within the Galatians congregations”). In fact, the new consensus even intensifies the exclusive effect of the verse, she says, because it presents Paul as exercising his authority to evict those who pose a threat to his leadership. Rather, Paul is warning the Galatians of the dire consequences of attempting to live by the power of the law, and in the following verse (Gal 5:1), he implores them to stand firm. Eastman is thus the first interpreter I have come across who fully recognizes that when Paul frames his quotation of Sarah’s words from Gen 21:10 in Gal 4:30 as the words of “the Scripture,” what he is in fact doing is collapsing narrative levels. Other interpreters in this period also notice other aspects of the passage that have hitherto gone underappreciated.

We might be tempted to say that since these discordant voices now form the dominant pattern, the blind spot has been cleared up in our own time. This may be true to a certain extent, but it is not quite as simple as this. Many of the earlier patterns still persist. Interpreters may be noticing the discrepancies to a degree that they were not previously, but they are still just as adept at dismissing them. I might even venture to say that whereas previous interpreters tend to miss the discrepancies because they are busy filling in the gaps,

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131 Ibid., 312. Eastman focuses on Martyn as a proponent of “the new consensus,” but she also names Hays, Longenecker, and Witherington (ibid., 311 n.7).
132 Ibid., 329.
contemporary interpreters are equally busy—or even busier—filling in the gaps that open up when they notice the discrepancies (as can also be seen in appendix 2). Again, Eastman serves as an example. When taking issue with both the “traditional reading” and “the new consensus,” she observes that “wherever one turns one finds interpreters wrestling with, or simply reinscribing, the dynamic of exclusion that seems implicit in the passage itself.” It is this emphasis on exclusion that she finds problematic, and she deftly produces a solution that solves the problem. Although I do not dispute the solution that she proposes, I also observe that it conveniently lets Paul off the hook, a pattern I am now very familiar with. When it comes to recent interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1, the discordant voices have now become part of the prevailing tradition, breaking out of the pattern in some ways, and continuing to perpetuate it in others. Although I might part company with this or that feature of their interpretations, I am of course one of them in that I also find this passage troublesome.

7. Concluding Thoughts

We discovered in chapter four that interpreters rarely make note of the discrepancies

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134 Ibid., 313.
135 Janzen and Kahl display similar patterns. Janzen makes the interesting reflection: “Without in any way wishing to edge Sarah from the scene—for she too has her own story to tell—I would like to think that when his writing days were over, Paul belatedly entertained the possibility that those who at his urging claim to be Abraham’s offspring might also be glad to call Hagar a spiritual mother” (“Hagar in Paul’s Eyes,” 16). Similarly, Kahl argues that for Paul “drive out the slave” refers to the whole hierarchical division of humanity into superior and inferior, excluded and included, which shapes the present world order, and therefore, “Paul’s claim to drive out and disinherit the slave would not mean driving out the socially weak, the black, the foreigner, the woman, the single mother, the abused slave, the Jew, the Muslim, the ‘other’” (“Hagar between Genesis and Galatians,” 229).
between Genesis and Galatians that I identified in chapter three, or if they do happen to make note of them, they rarely appreciate their significance. This constitutes what I described as a blind spot within the dominant pattern in the history of interpretation. The discrepancies that I identified as the most obvious in chapter three do not even appear on the radar screen in chapter four, or if they do appear, they are immediately dismissed as unworthy of attention. In this chapter I have expanded my description by including “discordant voices” within the tradition. These are interpreters who do indeed make note of at least some of the discrepancies. They rarely name them as discrepancies, however. For the most part they are content to challenge Paul’s version of the story only implicitly. For some, the issue relates to Paul’s version of the story itself. Procopius, for instance, returns to one of the crosscurrents that is missing in Paul’s account by emphasizing that Ishmael too is a child of promise, even while adhering to the usual interpretation of Paul’s allegorical binaries. For others, the issue relates to how Paul tells the story. Tyconius, for instance, by asserting that “Ishmael” is always to be found in “Isaac” destabilizes the wandering viewpoint of Paul’s binary, even while adopting Paul’s frame of reference. Luther does this as well, by asserting in effect the opposite: that “Isaac” is to be found in the midst of “Ishmael.” Other interpreters make note of other elements: Theodore does not question Paul’s treatment at all but insists on the integrity of the historia in principle, Bede and von Hofmann place limits on Paul’s binaries, Butler implicitly acknowledges that Paul himself might be part of the problem, Musculus displays a simmering uneasiness with the passage. It is only in more recent interpretation, when the discordant voices become part of the prevailing tradition, that these elements get explicit attention as discrepancies.
And yet, at the same time, these discordant voices do not break with the dominant patterns entirely. For most of them, it is only one element of the blind spot that they manage to bring into clarity, and then often only inadvertently. While they may offer something different, their insights are rarely, if ever, taken up into the tradition. It could therefore be said that these discordant voices serve as exceptions that prove the rule. For this reason I describe them as discordant voices within the dominant patterns of interpretation. For the most part, they carry on as usual, raising a single voice of objection here or there, but ultimately contributing to the continuation of the dominant patterns that I observed in chapter four.

These discordant voices also serve to help me refine my description of the blind spot in the history of interpretation. As I noted, there are interpreters in every era of the history of interpretation who see through one aspect or another of the blind spot. This suggests that the blind spot is not like a defect in physical vision that renders something invisible, but rather more precisely like a kind of defect in “moral” vision that prevents it from being processed. Things can still be seen, but they do not register. Again, I am not interested here in the psychological processes of individual interpreters, but in the history of interpretation. Regardless of what is going on in the minds of interpreters, these things are not being taken up in the history of interpretation. We already saw this in fact in chapter four. Sometimes interpreters seem to acknowledge the discrepancies yet seem incapable of taking them seriously. These discordant voices that we have heard in this chapter just confirm this pattern. By seeing through aspects of the blind spot in their own time, these discordant voices just confirm the patterns I identified in chapter four, of interpreters seeing and yet not seeing, of noticing yet not recognizing the significance of what they are looking at.
Chapter Six
Concluding Reflections

1. Preliminary Comments

In chapter two I produced a description of the complicated story of Abraham’s family as it is narrated in Genesis. This involved not only describing the content of the story, but also analysing the distinctive way that the story is told. In chapter three I produced a similar description of Paul’s treatment of the story in his letter to the Galatians. Again, this involved not only describing the content of what Paul says, but also analysing the distinctive way that he says it. From this I was able to identify a number of crucial discrepancies between the two accounts such that it could be said that in Gal 4:21–5:1, Paul (strictly speaking, the implied author, not necessarily the historical Paul) “gets the story wrong,” as it were. This was a purely synchronic exercise: I was not interested in the historical origins of the two texts, but in their literary structure and content as they stand together within the Christian Scriptures as I know them. With chapter four, however, I switched gears to a diachronic approach. Now I was exploring the history of interpretation of Gal 4:21–5:1 to see how these discrepancies have been taken up within the traditions of Christian interpretation. What I discovered was a consistent pattern that I cautiously described as a “blind spot.” I continued this exploration in chapter five, this time focusing on “discordant voices” within the tradition, and discovered that at least some of these discrepancies have been at least partially appreciated by at least some interpreters in every era of the history of interpretation. Finally, I completed chapter five noting some of the ways in which the blind spot has been partially brought into focus in our own time, and some of the ways in which it continues to be perpetuated.
The task that remains is to pull these threads together into what I describe in chapter one as a “faithful reading” of the passage. What I mean by this is a reading that is conscious of itself as a reading from within a specific theological tradition, one that not only takes seriously the wording of the biblical text itself, but also takes into account everything (at least in theory) that we can know about the historical context in which the passage was produced, the canonical context in which it now appears, and, most importantly from the vantage point of this investigation, the history of interpretation with all that it can teach us.¹ As John L. Thompson suggests, there are things to be learned from the history of exegesis that cannot be learned from exegesis alone, both Rezeptionsgeschichte in the proper sense as the reception history of a passage, as well as Wirkungsgeschichte as the history of effects of a passage apart from the intentions of interpreters. Here I return to the personal tone that I adopted in chapter one but let slide by in the rest of the investigation. Now I speak more explicitly as an interpreter trying to make sense of what I have experienced in the course of my reading of the passage in the history of interpretation.

From this it follows, first, that such a faithful reading of the passage cannot be anything except provisional. At the practical level, there is the consideration that if I am now standing at the unfolding of the passage’s history of interpretation (as I emphasized in chapter one), this is only momentary. Even as I write this, for example, the bibliography is already starting to be dated, and will become so within months if I do not keep updating it. At a more

¹ In theory, all these elements are important, but for practical reasons in this investigation I have emphasized the history of interpretation to the exclusion of the others. While I have made an effort to take seriously the wording of the biblical text itself, I have almost completely neglected paying attention to the original historical context, and even the canonical context has received very little attention.
theoretical level, there is the consideration that if there are things to be learned about a passage from its history of interpretation that we cannot get from the passage alone, then it follows that we still have much to learn from interpretations that have yet to come into existence. In fact, the full meaning—if it even makes sense to talk about such a thing—will come to light only at the end of time. At the very least, there will always be something new to be learned from the passage’s unfolding history of effects. This is very close to what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is describing when she refers to the Bible in some of her earlier writings as prototype rather than archetype. As Schüssler Fiorenza formulates it, a feminist critical hermeneutic cannot be derived from the biblical text as though it were an “archetype” of normative authority, but rather from what she describes as “the experience of wo/men in the struggle for liberation.” The vision of salvation and liberation that animates feminist critical hermeneutics, she insists, is informed by the biblical prototype, but it is not derived from it: the critical edge is to be found outside the biblical text as such. Likewise, the kind of faithful reading I am describing can only be a prototype, a work in progress, because the full meaning of the text is not somehow given in advance, but is still unfolding.

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3 Schüssler Fiorenza uses the terms wo/man and wo/men “to avoid an essentialist depiction of ‘woman’ and to stress the instability of the term” (*Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999], ix).
4 There is, of course, a difference in emphasis here between the biblical text itself as prototype and a reading of it as prototype. Chapters 2 and 3 were premised on this distinction, but even there I identified the biblical texts that I was working with as “the condition for the possibility of the history of interpretation,” and not as something prior and fixed. Whatever it is that we are referring to when we talk about “the biblical text,” it is as much a function of the history of interpretation as the history of interpretation is a function of it. As I stated before, the “biblical text” as such is a moving target: we have no access to it except through the process of our reading.
Secondly, it also follows that such a faithful reading also includes the making of critical theological or ethical judgements (or, at the very least, theological and ethical reflection that includes critical clarification). In the previous chapters my language has been for the most part descriptive; as much as possible I have tried to avoid language that seemed expressly evaluative. But there are now a number of questions that present themselves. To what extent can I hold Paul responsible for “misreading” Genesis? To what extent can I hold later interpreters responsible for “misreading” Paul? These in turn raise other questions. Am I back to talking about the historical Paul who wrote the letter, or am I still referring to the *implied author* of the canonical text of Galatians (or Paul, the implied author of the canonical text of Galatians as he has been constructed by the history of interpretation?) Or can I sidestep talking about Paul entirely by referring to the text of Galatians as something quite independent of any conception of a figure named Paul? Here I come into double jeopardy. The focus of attention in this investigation has not been on Paul as the historical author or on the text of Galatians in and of itself, but on the hosts of interpreters of Galatians over the centuries, but can I thus let Paul or Galatians off the hook entirely? More problematically, if the blind spot that I have identified in the history of interpretation is historically-conditioned, how can I hold individual interpreters responsible for not being able to see what was closed to them? If Luther, for example, could have foreseen the fruits of his polemics against “the Jews and their lies” as these fruits unfolded in the twentieth century, would he have written any differently? And what about more recent interpreters who I think now ought to know better but continue to participate in perpetuating the blind spot? This investigation opens up innumerable questions of this sort, and I am not going to
be able to address more than a few of them here (and even then, ever so briefly).

What makes Gal 4:21–5:1 interesting is the intersection of two seemingly unrelated sets of issues that keep rubbing against each other. On the one hand there are the internal dynamics pertaining to the relationship between Genesis and Galatians, what we might broadly describe as issues regarding *canonical incoherence*. As I pointed out in chapter four, interpreters do not see, or they ignore, or they dismiss as unimportant, the ways in which this one part of Scripture (Galatians), in the name of “the Scripture,” seems to falsify another part of Scripture (Genesis). On the other hand, there are the external dynamics pertaining to the relationship between Galatians and the world in which it is interpreted, what we might broadly describe as issues regarding *social effects*. Again, as I emphasized in chapter four, Gal 4:21–5:1 has had an afterlife that includes some disastrous consequences. Other biblical texts may be better at putting issues of canonical incoherence on display, and still others may be even more disastrous in terms of their effects, but what makes this particular passage distinctive is that it brings together both these sets of issues. As we have seen time and time again in the history of interpretation, the refusal (or is it an inability?) on the part of interpreters to pay attention to how Paul handles Genesis in Gal 4:21–5:1 goes hand in hand with a similar refusal (inability?) to pay attention to the implications of their interpretations in terms of their social and political effects. Augustine is one of the more obvious examples of this. The ease with which he replicates the binary structure of Paul’s arguments coincides with a similar lack of attention to the details of Paul’s treatment of Genesis in Galatians. Jerome and Chrysostom might be less obvious about it, but they are essentially doing the same thing, as are Meyer and Lightfoot in the nineteenth century, and Burton, Betz and
Bruce in their own time.

I shall begin the process of unravelling these two issues by initially dealing with them one at a time, but ultimately it is the way that they are intertwined in the history of interpretation that will be of interest. To do this, I will take a closer look at the treatments of the passage by several recent interpreters who deal with the ethical or theological implications in one way or another: Daniel Gerber, Richard B. Hays, and Brevard S. Childs with respect to the internal dynamics, and Elsa Tamez, Elizabeth A. Castelli, and Charles T. Davis with respect to the external dynamics. Engaging with these interpreters will help to clarify some aspects of how these issues interrelate.

2. Issues Related to Canonical Incoherence

At the heart of the issues related to canonical incoherence lies the issue of misreading. The issue of misreading has cropped up several times in this investigation, first in connection with Paul’s treatment of Genesis in chapter three, and then later in our exploration of the history of interpretation of Galatians in chapter four. To some degree, as I have repeatedly emphasized, all reading is a form of misreading in that there is no reading independent of a reader’s context. One way of approaching the history of interpretation, as I noted in chapter one, is to forget about the notion of misreading altogether and celebrate all the dazzling ways in which a text can be misread. At the other end of the spectrum is the notion that a text contains a single fixed meaning and any failure to appropriate this meaning constitutes a misreading of the text. In between these two extremes can be found any number of complex permutations. As Wayne C. Booth and other literary critics insist, there are times when it is
entirely appropriate for a reader to “read against the grain” of the text, or, to use terms from chapter two, for the real reader to read in defiance of the directions that the implied author has laid down for the implied reader. We encountered this with Paul in chapter three. At those points where Paul seems to be diverging from Genesis, we discovered that what he is often doing, as a reader, is merely filling in the blanks that have been left for him by the text of Genesis, but we also discovered that he is sometimes also violating “the structure of the blank” itself. Moreover, to complicate it further, Paul is not merely a reader of a text, he is also the writer of another text. There are points where Paul, as the “writer” (or “producer”) of the text, fails to reproduce the structure of the blank that he finds in Genesis, with the result that he “gets the story wrong,” essentially ending up telling a different story. And to complicate it even further, Paul, by a twist of fate (if I can call it that), is not just the writer of any text, but the writer of a text that also eventually ends up being treated equally as Scripture. But we do not even have to take it this far: Genesis itself complicates the notion of misreading. What are we to do with a text like Genesis, which, as we saw in chapter two, in spite of its checks and balances, can be so easily misread? Here it will be helpful to bring in Gerber, Hays, and Childs.

Writing on the passage in 2002, Daniel Gerber focuses on the internal dynamics of the

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5 Booth makes a distinction between misunderstanding and misreading, He suggests that one has a license to “misread” only after one has fully and properly understood (Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], 242).

6 To say nothing of Galatians, which does not have the checks and balances. As Martyn acknowledges, even as he explicates how Gal 4:21–5:1 has been misinterpreted over the centuries, the passage with its binary structure lends itself to such misinterpretation (“Covenants of Hagar and Sarah,” 169).
passage so as to grasp the allegorical structure of Paul’s argument. In this Gerber stands out from interpreters who seem to be troubled by Paul’s method of interpretation in Gal 4:21–5:1 and seek to solve the problem by comparing Paul with other interpreters in his own time, either Jewish or pagan. Although the title of Gerber’s article suggests that ultimately Paul’s method may be “undefinable,” he settles in the end on describing the hermeneutical approach that Paul brings into play in this passage as “une construction typologique sur un arbitraire allégorique.” Paul’s argument, according to Gerber, makes use of what would now probably be called typology, in that it makes correspondences between two separate stories, one related to Paul’s situation, and the other to the life situation of the patriarch. In this way, the present situation of the church in Paul’s time is linked to the biblical past. This typology, however, is built upon a random allegorical element, which “once admitted, allows the production of correspondences.” Paul is able to make these connections only because he has already recognized in advance (particularly at v. 24) the possibility of doing so: it is not something that follows from the scriptural data alone. Hence Gerber describes Paul as executing an exegetical “tour de force” that is “certainly attributable more to anger (colère) than to reason (raison).”

Gerber does not explicitly pass judgment on Paul’s handling of Genesis. Indeed, by attributing it more to “anger” than “reason,” he seems to be wanting to let Paul off the hook.

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8 See, for example, many of the interpreters mentioned in appendix 2.
9 Ibid., 176.
10 Ibid., 175–76.
11 Ibid., 175.
Gerber is among those interpreters of Galatians who seem to be slightly embarrassed by what Paul is doing here, and he is quick to mount a defence. Nevertheless, Gerber acknowledges that Paul’s reading of Genesis works only because Paul has injected his own situation into his telling of the story. The edifice hangs on this arbitrary element: without it, the whole argument collapses. Gerber muses that all typologies may suffer from this Achilles’ heel. He asks whether it may be “possible to imagine a parallel between two historical situations with a view to clarifying contemporary events through other previous events without at least one feature of the source (that is, the preceding event), first having been interpreted more or less arbitrarily from its obvious meaning?” Gerber does not actually use the word misread, but in Paul’s case, this is exactly what is going on: Paul’s reading of Scripture is possible only because it is, in a sense, a contextualized misreading.

To take this one step further, Richard B. Hays, writing in 1989, poses the question of whether Paul’s approach to the interpretation of Scripture offers a normative model for the church. Hays acknowledges that this will not matter to many of his readers, but for those like himself who belong to communities of faith for whom Paul’s readings of Scripture are either “gospel or anathema,” this is an important question. Hays takes it for granted that Paul’s distinctive way of reading Scripture is essentially a misreading. Paul characteristically treats “the Scripture” as a living voice that speaks to the people of God in the present, and as a result he consistently disregards the meaning of Old Testament texts in their original

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12 Ibid., 176.
14 Ibid., 179.
contexts in favour of meanings relevant to the present situations that Paul’s churches are experiencing. Specifically, Paul misreads Genesis in Gal 4:21–31 to show that “Gentile believers in Jesus need not—indeed, must not—become Torah observers.”\(^{15}\) For this reason, Hays describes Paul as practicing “hermeneutical jujitsu” in his argument: “The claim that Torah, rightly read, warrants the rejection of lawkeeping is, on its face, outrageous. No sane reader could appeal, without some flicker of irony, to the Law in order to nullify circumcision as the definitive sign of covenant relation with God. Unless we suppose that Paul was an insane (or duplicitous) reader, we must credit him with some ironic sensibility as he flips the story on its back.”\(^{16}\) Nevertheless Hays wants to argue, not only that Paul’s specific interpretations of Scripture are “materially normative,” but also that his “interpretive methods” are also formally exemplary.\(^{17}\)

Hays therefore feels it important to identify the constraints that Paul recognized when exercising his “exegetical freedom,” because, as he says, “In order to carry to completion my proposal that Paul’s own hermeneutical practice be taken as paradigmatic for ours, I would suggest that we acknowledge the same constraints that he acknowledged.”\(^{18}\) As a consequence, Hays is not interested in evaluating whether Paul’s misreading of Scripture is legitimate, he simply takes it for granted that it is. This becomes clear when he adds, “That, I

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 105.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 112. (I am not sure why Hays is so quick to dismiss the other two possibilities, nor am I sure that he has posed all the alternatives.)

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 180–83. Here Hays is arguing in particular against Richard Longenecker, who argues that “our commitment as Christians is to the reproduction of the apostolic faith and doctrine, and not necessarily to the specific apostolic exegetical practices” (Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 219).

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 190.
take it, is part of what it means to recognize his writings as Scripture.”19 The constraints on Paul’s hermeneutical approach that Hays finds in Paul’s letters are conventionally theological (e.g. God’s faithfulness to the promises, the death and resurrection of Jesus as the climactic manifestation of God’s righteousness, the Scripture needs to be read by a community that embodies the love of God as shown forth in Christ), but he does not inquire into the principles of theological evaluation by which one might judge whether these constraints were appropriate to Paul in his own time, let alone for us in our time.20 Rather, his emphasis is on showing that these constraints are not provided by historical criticism. However useful historical criticism may be for other purposes, he says, it “should not be burdened with theological responsibility for screening the uses of Scripture in Christian proclamation.”21 He goes on to say, “If it were entrusted with such a normative task, many of Paul’s readings would fail the test.”22 In other words, Paul’s readings may be a violation of the rules of historical exegesis, but they are legitimate on other grounds.

To bring in yet another voice, Brevard S. Childs provides a response to Hays’ proposals in

19 Ibid. With regard to the same question, Hays also says, “Do we then overthrow the canon by this hermeneutic? On the contrary, we uphold the canon. Will the imaginative freedom of Paul’s example ultimately destroy the Scripture’s authority if we dare to read the text as freely as he did? On the contrary, only when our interpreters and preachers read with an imaginative freedom analogous to Paul’s will Scripture’s voice be heard in the church. We are children of the Word, not prisoners” (ibid., 188–89).

20 Hays says that these hermeneutical constraints are “substantive” rather than “methodological,” that is, they relate to the content of Paul’s theological understandings, not to his exegetical method (ibid., 190). It is not clear to me what Hays means by this. He seems to be saying in effect that a “faithful” reading (to use my category for it) ought to replicate what it finds in the text. This is, in fact, precisely what I have found troubling in the history of interpretation of this passage.

21 Ibid., 190.

22 Ibid. Hays belabours this point in particular: “Let us not deceive ourselves about this: Paul would flunk our introductory exegesis courses” (Hays, Echoes, 181).
2008 in a monograph on reading Paul canonically.²³ His primary reservation is with Hays’ contention that Paul’s figurative interpretation serves as a hermeneutical model for modern interpreters of the New Testament.²⁴ Although Hays insists that his hermeneutical proposal “does not overthrow the canon,” but rather upholds it, Childs objects that this “completely disregards the issue of canon.”²⁵ In Childs’ words, “The assigning by the church of a privileged status to the apostolic witness as the primary testimony to the incarnation of Jesus Christ served to draw a line between Scripture and all subsequent church traditions.”²⁶ Moreover, we have two testaments, “both of which bear faithful testimony,” whereas Paul had just one, the Scriptures of Israel.²⁷ Childs therefore argues that the canon (which of course also includes the writings of Paul) puts constraints on the church’s interpretation of biblical texts that do not come into play when we consider Paul’s hermeneutical methods on their own terms in his own time. Childs does not directly address the legitimacy of Paul’s (mis)reading of Genesis in Gal 4:21–5:1 any more than does Hays, but he does not just assume it either. The presence of Gal 4:21–5:1 in the canon means that it cannot be dismissed, but this does not in itself make it “substantively normative.” In fact, its canonical context limits its impact since it is tempered by the presence of other Scriptural writings. Childs emphasizes that Galatians needs to be understood in the light of Paul’s other letters (especially Romans, which according to Childs, has a privileged place in the canon, but also the Pastoral epistles, whatever we might think of their authenticity), as well as Acts; while at

²⁴ Ibid., 35.
²⁵ Ibid., 34, 36.
²⁶ Ibid., 36.
²⁷ Ibid.
the same time, these other writings need to be understood in the light of Galatians.\textsuperscript{28}

Neither Gerber nor Hays nor Childs is particularly interested in asking whether Paul’s misreading of Genesis in Gal 4:21–5:1 is a legitimate misreading. To pose it as a question in Booth’s terms, does Paul understand Genesis well enough so that we can let him get away with defying what the implied author of Genesis seems to be demanding of him, violate the structure of the blanks of Genesis, and produce his own reading, all in the name of some higher principle? In a later work, The Company We Keep, Booth poses the question somewhat differently. He suggests that in order to engage in any kind of ethical criticism of a written work, it is necessary to bring to bear external criteria from our own experience. “We arrive at our sense of value in narratives,” he says, “in precisely the way we arrive at our sense of value in persons: by experiencing them in an immeasurably rich context of others that are both like and unlike them,” a process Booth describes as coduction (from co, “together,” and ducere, “to lead”).\textsuperscript{29} If we are to “keep company” with a work, we have to strike up a relationship with the implied author, but we honour that relationship best, not by always being compliant, but by bringing our experiences to bear in the relationship (though Booth also admits that at the end of our time together, we may end up choosing to part company). This applies both to Paul’s reading of Genesis and our reading of Paul’s reading

\textsuperscript{28} To say nothing of how the book of Genesis itself also tempers how we are to read Galatians. Childs invokes Augustine’s classic formulation of the rule in Quaestiones in Heptateuchum 2.73: “et in vetere novum lateat, et in novo vetus pateat” (“the New Testament is hidden in the Old, and Old is laid open in the New”).

\textsuperscript{29} The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 70–72.
of Genesis. The challenge lies, not merely in Paul’s method (Gerber), nor merely in Paul’s (mis)appropriation of Genesis (Hays), nor merely in the issue of canon (Childs), but also outside in the world where the texts are read. Hence we must turn from issues of canonical incoherence to issues of social effects.

3. Issues Related to Social Effects

To return again to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, one of her contentions is that biblical scholarship as it is usually practiced often contributes to the perpetuation of structures and practices of oppression. In the first chapter of her book, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (1999), she advocates for a paradigm shift in biblical studies: “If scriptural texts have served—and still do—not only to support noble causes, but also to legitimate war, to nurture anti-Judaism and misogyny, to justify the exploitation of slavery, and to promote colonial dehumanization, then biblical scholarship must take responsibility not only to interpret biblical texts in their historic contexts but also to evaluate the construction of their historical worlds and symbolic universes in terms of a religious scale of values.”

It is not enough for biblical scholarship to uncover what the text meant in its original context, but “it must also include the elucidation of the ethical consequences and political functions of biblical texts and their interpretations in their historical as well as their contemporary

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30 To recast Hays’ question, is this what it means to honour certain writings as Scripture? We have a commitment to “keep company” with them? (That is, whether or not we fully like what they have to say to us, we have a commitment to be in relationship with them.)

31 *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 28. This chapter is essentially a re-working of her 1988 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature.
sociopolitical contexts.”

This involves what Schüssler Fiorenza describes as an “ethics of accountability” that not only holds interpreters responsible for their interpretations, but also encourages scholarship that is aware of its implications and claims responsibility for its consequences. This brings us into an entirely different world of biblical scholarship. With regard to the social effects of Gal 4:21–5:1, let us now turn to Tamez, Castelli, and Davis.

To start off the discussion, Elsa Tamez, writing in 2000, adopts an approach to the passage that reflects the concerns of Latin American liberation theology. She starts off by drawing heavily on traditional scholarship on Galatians, particularly Betz and Barrett, insisting that the passage needs to be understood in the context of Paul’s argument in the letter as a whole. Against his opponents who use the story to show the necessity of observing the Jewish law, Paul uses the story to show that those who adhere to the law, even though they may say that they are free, are in fact slaves. She suggests that Paul’s metaphor of slavery would have been well known to his readers because “they lived in the economic system of Rome that was built on slavery, and Galatia itself had a well-known slave market.”

Although she notes that in Abraham’s time a child of a free man and a slave woman was considered free, and therefore “Ishmael and Isaac are both free,” she adds that “this fact is

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32 Ibid., 28.
33 This idea is also developed in more detail by Daniel Patte in Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: A Reevaluation (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1995), as well as by others.
36 Tamez, “Hagar and Sarah,” 266.
not important to Paul’s reading, because his argument is not based on the historical events but on the typology represented.” 37 In her reading, the logical conclusion to be drawn from this typology is that Sarah’s descendants according to the flesh are the true descendants of the slave Hagar, and the descendants of Hagar according to the flesh are the true descendants of the free Sarah. This inversion is not made explicit, however, because, as she says, “Paul is against any exclusion.” 38 She therefore insists that the casting out of the slave woman and her son in Gal 4:30 needs to be interpreted to mean that “the new life in Christ leaves no room for slavery.” 39

This constitutes the first half of her article: Tamez is much more interested here in what is going on in her world than she is in Paul’s text. She emphasizes that one needs to understand Paul’s rhetorical style so that one does not fall into an anti-Jewish ideology. Paul’s criticism of the law and circumcision has to be understood as self-criticism: “he is critical of his own culture, as we all should be.” 40 In the second half of the article Tamez does just this: she examines today’s world in terms of Paul’s categories (or rather, her interpretation of Paul’s categories), and she observes that although slavery has supposedly been abolished, many people exist in a state of slavery under the law of the free market. Despite the ideology of freedom, millions do not enjoy freedom in any meaningful sense, and even those who are well-off under the system, while enjoying consumer choice, do not enjoy the real freedom to be human. She concludes by saying, “Today’s political and economic situation leads us to

37 Ibid., 267–68.
38 Ibid., 269.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 266.
re-examine Paul’s critique of the law (as a system of logic), seeking the grace to discern the
ture freedom in Christ and to ask ourselves how we can live fully in freedom in this
society.” In many ways, Tamez accomplishes something analogous to what many
precritical interpreters accomplish with their allegorical interpretations: her attention to the
text of Galatians allows her to note what is going on in her own world and make a critique.
This is achieved, however, at the price of not noticing any historical connection between the
text (and its history of interpretation) and what is happening in the world. That is, Tamez has
no obvious interest in critiquing Paul, and where she comes up against this danger in her
reading of the text, she simply asserts that “Paul is against any exclusion.” (In this she
participates in the blind spot as fully as any of the interpreters that we saw in chapter four.)
One might say therefore that while she recognizes good effects, she does not seem to be
capable of (or interested in) recognizing bad ones.

Elizabeth A. Castelli, writing on the passage in 1994, is willing to go further. In her
analysis, Castelli brings together two puzzles: what she describes as “the nagging
persistence in the collective imagination of the West of the figure of Hagar,” and the
interpretive character of allegory. She sees both these puzzles working together in Paul’s
allegorical rendering of the Hagar-Sarah-Abraham narrative of Genesis. Castelli’s interest
in the passage is focused primarily on the figure of Hagar, and she notes that Paul’s

41 Ibid., 271.
42 Elizabeth A. Castelli, “Allegories of Hagar: Reading Galatians 4.21–31 with Postmodern
McKnight and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon; Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press
43 Ibid., 228–29.
treatment works to reinforce Hagar’s marginalization, something that is already at work in the traditions that Paul is working with, but is heightened in his retelling.\textsuperscript{44} Although she acknowledges that initially Paul’s interpretation of Hagar and Sarah may have functioned to offer resistance to a dominant reading, she sees Paul’s allegory working towards a “foreclosure, reification and ossification of meaning.”\textsuperscript{45} Both the conceptual dualism that Paul develops in his letter (slavery/freedom, promise/flesh, etc.) and the structural dualism that is inherent in allegory itself (literal/analogical, surface/depth, spirit/letter, etc.) combine to create a hegemonic reading of Hagar that reduces her to her allegorical reconfiguration. Yet Castelli also sees in allegory the potential for resistance to hegemonic readings, and she draws attention to Renita Weem’s allegorical treatment of Hagar from an African American womanist perspective.\textsuperscript{46} Drawing on the work of Dawson and others, she notes that allegory has a tendency to undermine itself—simultaneously insisting on a hidden, intrinsic meaning at the same time that it posits that meaning resides elsewhere.\textsuperscript{47} As a result, Paul does not have the final word: it is possible to conceive of allegorical readings of both Genesis and Galatians that create new ways of viewing the world and do justice to Hagar.

Unlike Tamez, Castelli is therefore willing to offer a critique of Paul, but since she is more

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 241.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 243.
interested in exploring the interpretive potentialities of allegory in principle, her critique lacks focus. By arguing that Paul’s allegory falls prey to the tendency of allegory to “cease to be allegory and become, rather, hegemonic,” she “indicts” Paul’s allegory “in its new form as hegemonic, normative discourse.”\(^{48}\) It is not clear whether her issue is with “Paul” himself, or with how Paul’s allegory functions in the history of interpretation.\(^{49}\) What troubles her in Paul’s allegorical interpretation, reading as she does with postmodern feminist eyes, is that Sarah and Hagar are “reduced to essences to which are attributed singular, authoritative meanings.”\(^{50}\) For all Castelli’s interest in the paradox of allegory, her reading of Gal 4:21–31 ends up being itself rather “typological” (if I can use that word) in that Hagar represents something of a “type” for her. (We saw something similar with Josephine Butler, for whom Hagar represents the “typical outcast.”) As Castelli implies in her last paragraph, Hagar embodies the very possibility of antihegemonic readings at the margins of interpretive discourse.\(^{51}\)

Finally, to bring in a third voice, Charles T. Davis, writing in 2002, uses the perspective of narrative therapy to describe Gal 4:21–5:1 as a “toxic text.”\(^{52}\) He says that when Paul wrote

\(^{48}\) Castelli, “Allegories of Hagar,” 243.

\(^{49}\) For the same reason Castelli is not particularly interested in knowing whether Paul’s binary oppositions in this passage are between ‘Christians’ and ‘Jews,’ or between those of Paul’s side and his opponents, since “it is the dualistic structure of his argument that is crucial” to her interpretation (ibid., 244–45 n.9).

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 243.

\(^{51}\) Castelli’s reluctance to make this association explicit is understandable: “antihegemonic” readings are antihegemonic precisely because they insist on remaining “contingent, situational, partial” (ibid., 246).

his letters he was “deeply enmeshed in a religious family feud.” In the milieu of the first century, various Jewish factions were engaged in a fierce struggle regarding Jewish identity. On the one hand, they shared the same narrative identity, derived from the same root narrative, but on the other hand, they were drawn into conflict with each other over the interpretation of that identity. Using the book of Acts as his guide, Davis shows how the fledgling Gentile Christian movement adopted the “root narrative” of Judaism to express its own identity, which inevitably led to a clash with the official story as experienced by members of the Jesus movement in Jerusalem, as well as other Jewish groups. At the point in time when Paul writes to the Galatians, the members of the Galatian church were in the process of giving up their personal story for the sake of “some version of the Jewish-Jesus official story.” Paul responds to this with an allegorical interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures in Gal 4:21–5:1 that turns “the traditional people of God into an Other to be driven out as enemies of God.” Unfortunately this “robs the Jerusalem community, and Jews generally, of their own story.”

Like Castelli, Davis is willing to criticize Paul. His category of “toxic text” provides him with a standard for assessing Paul’s allegory. Drawing on principles of narrative therapy, he notes that revelatory tales heal through their power to facilitate the discovery of one’s authentic story, whereas toxic texts “subjugate one’s authentic voice to a dominant story by

builds upon the work of anthropologist Gregory Bateson and the literary psychologist Jerome Bruner.
53 “Evolution,” 165.
54 Ibid., 172.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 173.
inappropriately claiming the privilege of superior validity.”

Davis affirms that Paul is the champion of the authentic personal story of the Galatians against attempts to subvert it to the official story coming out of Jerusalem, but in his allegory of Hagar and Sarah, Paul crosses a line and becomes what Davis describes as a “caustic interpreter of scripture.”

In his attempt “to ground Christian experience in the authority of Jewish scripture,” Paul dispossesses the Jews “of their own story and even of their scripture.” He goes on to note that in time, as this and other “toxic texts” of Paul “were elevated to the status of scripture,” they became “a fountainhead of the toxic story of anti-Semitism that has accompanied the story of the cross for the past 2000 years.”

Davis thus shows some awareness of the effects of the passage, both in Paul’s immediate context, and in the history of interpretation. He concludes by acknowledging that Paul can be “our guide in learning to give priority to our own authentic experience in the face of subjugating official stories,” but “his example should also serve as a cautionary tale.”

Again, neither Tamez, nor Castelli, nor Davis fully unravel the issues related to social effects any more than Gerber, Hays, and Childs fully unravel the issues related to canonical incoherence, but it should be clear by now why I am reluctant to pass judgment on whether

57 Ibid., 167.
58 Ibid., 172.
59 Ibid., 175. Davis seems to be drawing heavily on Martyn here (apparently indirectly through Hans Küng, Christianity: Essence, History and Future [trans J. Bowden; New York: Continuum, 1998], 100). While he shares with Martyn the view that Paul is exhorting the Galatian community to cast the troublemakers out (ibid., 172), he does not share Martyn’s concern to distinguish between Paul’s critique of the law-observant mission to the Gentiles and law-observance as such. As a result, Davis is in danger of misunderstanding what Paul is saying here (at least from Martyn’s point of view).
60 Ibid., 176.
61 Ibid.
Paul’s (mis)reading of Genesis in Galatians is actually justifiable. If we knew exactly what was going on in Galatia and what Paul (that is, the historical Paul) accomplished with his writing (whether intentionally or unintentionally) we might be in a position to judge whether Paul was justified under the circumstances. But we cannot even be sure of what Paul was trying to say, let alone figure out what the results were. Since all we have is Paul’s letter, we are dependent on his judgment of the situation (or rather, our interpretation of his judgment). While Paul himself (specifically, the implied author) certainly seems to think that the circumstances justify his exegetical manoeuvre, this does not give us much to work with. However, even if we somehow did know, it would still not be enough: the chain of effects reaches far beyond Paul’s immediate context and stretches to our own day. And, to go full circle, it is not just the issues of social effects that come into play, but the question of misreading doubles back into the issue of the canon as part of the social effects. As a result, even those readings that on the surface might seem to be harmless in terms of their effects, yet still partake of the binary structure of Paul’s argument, are prone to perpetuating the structure. Because the issues of canonical coherence and social effects are intrinsically

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62 Beyond Galatians, all we have are hints in Paul’s other letters. Martyn conjectures from the reference to the churches in Galatia in 1 Cor 16:1–2 that Paul wrote another letter to the Galatians instructing them on how to participate in his collection for Jerusalem, and from the lack of any reference to them in Rom 15:25–27, that they refused to participate. Martyn infers from this that “politically, the interpretation of Galatians by the Teachers and their followers seems to have won the day,” and they “apparently persuaded almost all of their colleagues in the Galatian churches to distance themselves from Paul,” though the preservation of Galatians itself suggests to Martyn that there were at least a few who remained true to Paul (Galatians, 29, 227).

63 That is, one of the “social effects” of Paul’s letter to the Galatians is that it becomes a part of the Christian canon.

64 For examples, we might look to Augustine’s musings in the City of God that the expulsion of the slave woman is equivalent to “the shadows passing away with the coming of the
intertwined with each other in this way, the passage is ultimately impossible to unravel. We are back to “the lump in the carpet.”

To return to the question of ethical evaluation, not only have I tried to avoid language in the previous chapters that was explicitly evaluative, but I have even tried to avoid language that would suggest I am trying to “explain” anything: my goal has been merely to describe the history of interpretation of the passage in all its complexity. But I have also suggested that a faithful reading includes the question of ethical responsibility. Ultimately, who is to blame? On the broadest scale, is the history of interpretation a function of the text itself, or is it a function of the historical conditions in which the text is read? Or more specifically, are the social effects to be blamed on misreading, or is misreading just another of the social effects? As should be clear by now, there can be no simple answer to these questions. The history of interpretation is the result of a complex interaction that cannot be reduced to cause and effect, yet this does not negate the need for an ethical response. What I see when I look back over the history of interpretation are interpreters failing to pay close attention to the biblical text, and at the same time, failing to be aware of the social and political implications of their interpretations. Even without knowing the whole picture, we can still make the critical judgement that these are examples of “unfaithful” reading. I am not interested in holding past interpreters up against the wall, as if to put them on trial, but I am interested in an “ethics of accountability” (to use Schüssler Fiorenza’s formulation). That is, can we learn something from past interpretation of this passage that helps us do better in our own time?

light,” or the anagogical interpretation of Thomas Aquinas that the slave woman, “i.e., sin and vice itself” will be cast out of the kingdom of heaven, or even Tamez’ contention that “the new life in Christ leaves no room for slavery.”
4. Toward a Faithful Reading of Gal 4:21–5:1

This investigation has examined the ways in which Paul’s treatment of the Genesis story has been understood (or misunderstood as the case may be) within the history of interpretation. As we have seen time and time again, a number of crucial discrepancies between Galatians and Genesis have been, to say the least, underappreciated by most interpreters in the tradition, a pattern so pervasive I described it as a blind spot in the history of interpretation. In particular, not only does Paul not reproduce the nuances, crosscurrents, and multiple perspectives of Genesis, but his apparent characterization of Ishmael as a persecutor is problematic, as is his collapsing of narrative levels to make “the Scripture” the speaker of Sarah’s words in the story. Yet interpreters routinely do not notice these discrepancies, or if they somehow notice them, they do not appreciate their significance. On top of this, Paul’s words themselves are routinely misunderstood by interpreters, yet, as we have often seen, in such a way as to reproduce the structure of Paul’s binaries, if not their actual content. By doing this, even as interpreters misunderstand Paul, they show themselves to be understanding him all too well. In this way they end up contributing to the perpetuation of the blind spot in their own time. Simultaneously, in various times and places, some interpreters buck the trend and see through at least some elements of the blind spot, though in terms of the overall patterns, these interpreters can be described as exceptions that in fact prove the rule. In other words, everywhere I have looked, the history of interpretation of this passage has for the most part been anything but “faithful.”

Only in our own time has it been possible to recognize the blind spot as a blind spot, but to
say this is not to imply that the blind spot (or all blind spots) has been eliminated entirely. This investigation has consistently drawn attention to how all interpretation is perspectival. We may now be in a position to see what other interpreters in other times were not able to see, but this may be coming at the price of other blind spots. Again, this may be a question of the “lump in the carpet”: with some effort we may be able to eliminate the lump in one particular spot, but the lump will likely turn up somewhere else. Only some kind of hypothetical perspective beyond time and space would be able to reveal the truth “face to face” as it were. As long as we are interpreting from within a tradition—and I have suggested that this is always the case—the best we can do is continue on “faithfully” as best we can in our own time.

To show what I mean by this, let me conclude by offering in an epilogue an example of what a faithful reading of the passage in our own time might look like. I am including it as an epilogue because I want to emphasize that it is in no way a reading that resolves all the problems. Indeed, the very notion that one can resolve the problems that a passage like this one presents in fact plays into the blind spot. A faithful reading of this passage (and of its history of interpretation) must acknowledge, among other things, the unresolvable complexity that Gal 4:21–5:1 as part of the Christian canon entails. The “faithful” reading that I offer here is therefore both provisional and limited. It is provisional, as I said earlier, in the sense that it is necessarily incomplete; it is limited, in the sense that it is my own response from a very specific time and place. Nevertheless I offer it as something that might make a helpful contribution at the present time. It does not pretend to address all the issues that this passage presents, let alone try to resolve them. In fact, as I noted earlier, it merely
serves to open up innumerable further questions.
Epilogue
Example of a Faithful Reading of Gal 4:21–5:1

Having examined the complex history of interpretation of the passage, I am now ready to offer a brief example of what a “faithful” reading of Gal 4:21–5:1 in our own time might look like. Make no mistake: this is not a definitive reading of the passage. I am not trying to provide the right answer. Nor am I pretending that it resolves all the issues that I have raised here. But I offer it as a response to everything I have encountered in the history of interpretation of this passage.

To begin, let me provide a context. In chapter one I suggested that this investigation might have something to contribute to interpretation in my own particular strand of the Christian tradition, as represented by the United Church of Canada. At the risk of making a great overgeneralization, I suggested that in the United Church people desire to respect the authority of the biblical text, but this is combined with an equally strong or even stronger desire to engage the world within an explicitly moral framework. For some, these two impulses are unrelated, if not outright at odds with each other, but others see the commitment to justice in the world as stemming directly from engagement with the biblical text itself. In any case, I suggested that people in the United Church often do not know what to do with difficult biblical texts, and I expressed the hope that this investigation might help them deal with texts like this one that are difficult, both in the sense that they are difficult to understand, as well as difficult in that they are hard to integrate into a moral framework. Alas, the complexity of the history of interpretation of this passage (as I have recounted it here in this investigation) does not make the passage any easier to understand. It does, however, bring to the table some of the issues that are at stake.
To give an example, in May of 2014 I was invited to participate in a symposium sponsored by the United Church of Canada on *Doing Theology on Occupied Land: Contributions to the United Church Engagement with Israel/Palestine*. The aim of this symposium was to assist the United Church in reflecting more deeply on the connections between the Canadian experience of colonialism as it continues into the present, and the church’s current engagement with issues pertaining to Israel/Palestine. The immediate background of this reflection was the decision by the General Council of the United Church in 2012 to encourage members to take concrete steps to support the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories by supporting the “unsettling goods” campaign targeting products produced in the occupied territories. It is precisely on issues like these that clever clichés are not enough: if the United Church is to offer a just response, deeper reflection that involves the asking of hard questions is required. My contribution to this reflection was a workshop on Gal 4:21–5:1 and Israel/Palestine’s colonial legacy. Recognizing that the involvement of Western Christianity in the holy land goes back to the period of the crusades, I focused on the use of the passage by William of Tyre in his *History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, particularly his record of the speech of Urban II to the Council of Clermont when launching the first crusade. As we saw in chapter four, William’s record of this speech is typical of many interpretations of this passage in that it participates in the blind spot by reproducing the structure of Paul’s binaries, in this case, directing its polemics against the Saracens as the “son of the slave woman.” According to the hermeneutical traditions of the medieval period, this would have been understood as an interpretation of Genesis (and Galatians) according to the *literal sense* of the text. Within my presentation, having retraced in abbreviated form
much of the history of interpretation that I have recounted here, I offered the following three reflections that address the questions raised by the symposium. (Whether they were helpful in the context of the symposium or not is another question, but they are helpful here in providing a context as I formulate my own faithful reading of the text.)

The first point I emphasized was that when North American churches engage the issue of Israel/Palestine, they do so as outsiders to the present conflict, but not as outsiders without historical baggage.\(^1\) There is more than 1500 years of Christian interpretation of this passage that has been used to justify the oppression of non-Christian minorities in Christian societies, particularly Muslims and Jews.\(^2\) As I already noted, it was used by William of Tyre in the twelfth century to justify the violence that had been exercised in the founding of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1099. No matter how carefully any North American Christian response to the current Israel/Palestine conflict is worded, it cannot help but come up against this history.

The second point I emphasized was that you do not have to go very far to discover that the interpretation of this passage (perhaps all interpretation) is connected to questions of identity. The history of interpretation shows us that when Christian interpreters have taken up Gal 4:21–5:1 in the past, they have often done so in order to differentiate themselves from others. We have seen how the passage could be used (very conveniently) by medieval interpreters at one and the same time to identify the Saracens as the descendants of Hagar

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\(^1\) I was thinking in particular here of North American churches like the United Church of Canada with membership drawn largely from people of western European extraction.

\(^2\) This is something that is also emphasized in Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church—Jewish Relations Today (United Church of Canada, 2003).
according to the sensus literalis, and at the very same time to identify the Jewish people as the descendants of Hagar according to the sensus spiritualis. In both cases, Christian interpreters saw themselves as the persecuted “children of the promise,” and therefore justified in casting out and dispossessing the “children of the slave woman,” whether they be Jews or Saracens (or others). Having identified themselves as persecuted, they were blind to their own potential for oppression.

Finally, the third point I emphasized was (and here I will quote the exact words I used at the time): “Since the issues being discussed in this symposium are complicated and messy, we might be tempted to turn to the Scriptures to look for something simpler to help us understand the complexity of the world that we find ourselves in.” However, the history of interpretation shows that the biblical text is every bit as complicated as the contemporary social and political situations that we want to understand. The same dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that are at play in the text also play themselves out in the world that we are a part of. What is required for both is an ethical adjudication of competing claims, an awareness of the broader ramifications, and a social analysis of the context in which interpretation takes place. That is, both the social context and the text have to be carefully exegeted in light of our own complicity with the power dynamics of our own situation. In other words, there is no short-circuiting the process of interpretation at either end. Both the biblical text and the social/political situations that we face require an exegesis that includes being accountable for our interpretations.

With this context in mind, let me conclude with my reading of Gal 4:21–5:1. It is subject, of
course, to the qualification that I am selectively filling in gaps on the basis of my context, just as Paul does with Genesis, and just as other readers do in turn with Paul, but I offer it as a prototype of what a faithful reading of Gal 4:21–5:1 in our time might look like, with special attention given to what we can learn from the history of interpretation.

Genesis is a nasty business. Hagar and Ishmael are mistreated. Hagar is first used by Abraham and Sarah for their own ends, and then discarded when she is no longer useful; Ishmael, the favoured son for at least the first thirteen years of his life, is then also shunted aside. Whatever their participation in the predicament that they find themselves in, Hagar and Ishmael are relatively powerless with respect to the events that befall them. Abraham and Sarah, by contrast, are more powerful in the situation, yet they too are vulnerable in their own ways. Despite Abraham’s formal power in this situation, he seems helpless to alter the unfolding of events. Sarah, for her part, responds in a way that reflects her own lack of power in the situation. She sees the son of her rival “playing” and she moves quickly to have the threat nipped in the bud. Her only consideration is the future well-being of her child, and she does not tolerate any possibility of both sons sharing in the inheritance in any way: in her eyes, both Hagar and Ishmael must be cast out. The story that is told in Genesis is therefore—as Thompson says—“terrifying,” but I find a redeeming feature in that Genesis has multiple angles from which to view the events, and this allows us to adjudicate for ourselves as readers (as best we can) the complexity of the situation. By doing this Genesis conveys that the story of the covenant cannot be told without also telling what happens to those who are excluded. Not only does this pull us sympathetically into the story of the covenant as participants, but it forces us to see our own capacity for oppression when we
feel threatened.

Paul does not reproduce this feature in his own account of the story, and this is fatal. In writing Galatians he adopts what is primarily the perspective of Sarah with respect to his own situation. The stakes have been raised so high that the two “sons” are now locked in a life-and-death all-or-nothing struggle for the inheritance. Like Sarah, Paul does not conceive of any possibility of both “sons” sharing in the inheritance. In a selective repetition of the structure of the Genesis narrative, if not its content, Paul, as the narrator of the story in his own time, “focalizes” the son begotten in accordance with the flesh as “persecuting” the son begotten in accordance with the spirit, and in response he has “the Scripture” declare that the slave woman and her son must be cast out, and the son of the slave woman excluded from any share in the inheritance. He can do this because—let me paraphrase him here—“after all, this is what the story says.” Paul may have been forced to this extreme by the circumstances that he finds himself in, but both sides now seem to be bent on excluding the other side from the inheritance. We are left in the dark regarding who actually started it, but in any case, regardless of Paul’s role in the escalation of the conflict, here in this letter he is setting dangerous dynamics in motion that will bear fruit in subsequent history.

I can find a redeeming feature to the story as told in Genesis, but can I find a corresponding redeeming feature to the story as told by Paul in Galatians? At first glance, Paul’s contrast between slavery and freedom, and his challenge to the Galatians to choose the one over the other, is attractive as a rallying motif, except that this very contrast is at the core of the binaries that I find so troublesome. What Galatians does offer is a warning about the dangers
of misreading our own situation into the biblical text. If we miss this point in our reading of Galatians, we need only look at the history of interpretation! In their own times many readers of Galatians (with very few exceptions, as we have seen) adopt the perspective of Sarah as adopted by Paul: like Paul reading Genesis, they focalize the son begotten in accordance with the flesh persecuting the son begotten in accordance with the spirit, and declare that “according to the story,” the slave woman and her son (whoever they may be in their particular understanding), must be cast out. There are different versions of this, but let us settle for a moment on one fairly recent example, that of Betz, who concludes that according to Paul in Galatians, “the Jews are excluded from salvation.” This is, of course, merely the negative side—Paul showing us how not to interpret. On the positive side, however, within the layers and layers of embedded focalization, the multiple perspectives that we find within the text of Genesis are restored within the history of interpretation of Galatians. This places upon our shoulders, as interpreters of Scripture, and as interpreters of the history of interpretation of Galatians, responsibility for adjudicating the competing claims that we come across in our reading, a responsibility that goes hand in hand with our ongoing participation in the story of the covenant.
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Appendix 1
Other Ancient Versions of the Story

In my description of Gal 4:21–5:1 in chapter three, I occasionally mention some of the other ancient texts that also treat the story of Hagar and Sarah. Closest to Galatians (at least structurally) is the treatment of Hagar and Sarah that appears in the writings of Philo (early first century C.E.). Other treatments appear in the Book of Jubilees (second century C.E.), in the writings of Josephus (late first century C.E.), and in the Targums, particularly Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (written down in final form as late as the tenth century C.E., but perhaps recording traditions that go back much earlier).¹ Although there are long stretches of time between these treatments, I am not interested here in lines of influence. My comparison of these treatments is strictly synchronic (even on the technical question of whether they are themselves derived from a text of Genesis identical to ours). Primarily I am interested in what these versions tell me about the version that appears in Genesis, but secondarily I am interested in what they tell me about what Paul does with that version in his letter to the Galatians. Comparing how the story is told in Genesis with how it is told in these other accounts serves to highlight, therefore, not only the distinctive features of the Genesis account, but also the distinctive features of Paul’s response to it.

1. Jubilees

The version of the Hagar-Sarah story that appears in Jubilees is only slightly different from what we have in Genesis, yet it differs in subtly significant ways.² Originally written in

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¹ Among the numerous Targums, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan offers the most interesting version of this story.
² See Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, “Hagar in the Book of Jubilees,” in Abraham, the
Hebrew perhaps as early as the middle of the second century B.C.E., *Jubilees* exists now in complete form only in Ethiopic, with various fragments in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and Latin. Nevertheless, the version of the story that appears in *Jubilees* is nearly identical to the version of the story that appears in the Masoretic Text, but with various omissions and expansions. What stands out with regard to the story of Hagar and Sarah is that the conflict in the story is downplayed. For example, *Jubilees* recounts the episode of Sarah offering Hagar to Abraham, but omits what happens after Hagar becomes pregnant. It narrates merely that in the eighty-sixth year of Abraham’s life, Hagar “conceived and bore a son, and he [Abraham] called him Ishmael” (*Jub.* 14:24). Thus the events recounted in twelve verses in Genesis are summarized within less than half a sentence. Gone is the conflict between Hagar and Sarah, the tension between Sarah and Abraham, Sarah’s harsh treatment of Hagar, Hagar’s flight, the messenger’s annunciation of the birth of Ishmael, and Hagar’s return and submission. At the same time, *Jubilees* goes out of its way to tell us that Abraham informs Sarah about the promises made to him with regard to his descendants inheriting the land (*Jub.* 14:21). Accordingly, when offering Hagar to Abraham, Sarah does not say to him, “It may be that I will be built up from her;” as she does in Gen 16:2, but “it may be that I will

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build up seed for you from her” (Jub. 14:23), implying that her desire is merely to fulfill the promise that the LORD has made to Abraham, and that both Abraham and Sarah are motivated by a harmony of purpose with God’s plan.

Likewise, Jubilees also removes any hint of conflict between Ishmael and Isaac later in life. It does this by offering an expanded account of Abraham’s death. Whereas Genesis says only that “his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah” (Gen 25:9), Jubilees describes the event in more detail. Isaac and Ishmael come together to visit their father during the feast of Pentecost. Abraham rejoices to see his two sons. While Isaac is offering up a burnt offering on the altar at Hebron, and giving a feast of joy “before Ishmael his brother” (Jub. 22:4), Abraham dies in the house, while giving a final blessing to Isaac’s son Jacob. Upon returning, Isaac and Rebecca find Abraham dead, whereupon Isaac begins weeping. Jubilees then recounts that the word was heard in Abraham’s house and “Ishmael, his son, arose and went to Abraham, his father” (Heb.: ויקום ישמאל בן ויבוא אברהם אביו) and wept for him (Jub. 23:6). Then, as in Genesis, both sons bury Abraham in the cave near Machpelah near Sarah his wife. Following this, “all of the men of his house and Isaac and Ishmael and all of their sons and all of the sons of Keturah wept for him forty days” (Jub. 23:7). In this way, Jubilees presents the relationship between Ishmael and Isaac as amicable

4 It does this even while making it clear that Isaac is the one who inherits, not Ishmael (Jub. 20:11).
5 Jubilees is at pains to show that the patriarchs faithfully observed the requirements of the Torah.
6 3Q5 f. 3 (VanderKam, Textual and Historical Studies, 61–62). See also Charles, Ethiopic Version, 81.
7 2Q19 (Vanderkam, Textual and Historical Studies, 67); Charles, Ethiopic Version, 81.
and harmonious.  

Nevertheless, *Jubilees* cannot avoid conflict in the story when it recounts the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael. Here the conflict cannot be avoided without omitting the incident entirely. Even here, however, *Jubilees* emphasizes that the conflict arises from understandable jealousy on Sarah’s part, since she had been directly told by the messengers that it was Isaac who was to inherit, not Ishmael (*Jub*. 16:19). *Jubilees* begins, like Genesis, by reporting that Abraham gave a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. It then describes the scene: “Ishmael, the son of Hagar, the Egyptian woman, was in place in the presence of Abraham, his father” (*Jub*. 17:2). Abraham rejoices and blesses the LORD because “he had seen his sons and had not died without sons,” and because “the LORD had given him seed upon the earth so that they might inherit the land” (*Jub*. 17:3–4). It is at this point that *Jubilees* recounts that Sarah saw Ishmael “playing and dancing” (Eth.) and Abraham rejoicing greatly. It then explicitly tells us that “Sarah was jealous of Ishmael” (*Jub*. 17:4), before narrating that Sarah tells Abraham to cast out this slave woman and her son. Otherwise, *Jubilees* narrates the episode of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael almost identically to Genesis, except Hagar is given the last word. When Hagar and Ishmael are

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8 As we saw in chapter three, this seems to be quite at odds with Paul’s version of the story.


10 Note how different the focalization is here. In MT Gen 21:9, Sarah sees “the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had born to Abraham, playing” (LXX: “playing with Isaac”); in *Jub*. 17:4, Sarah sees Ishmael “playing and dancing” (Lat.: “playing with Isaac”) and Abraham watching him and rejoicing. This fills in some gaps and opens up others. As Betsy Halpern-Amaru notes, *Jubilees* makes that sight, “of father and elder son—‘Ishmael playing and dancing and Abraham being extremely happy’—the trigger for Sarah’s reaction” (*The Empowerment of Women in the Book of Jubilees* [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 78).
rescued in the desert, the messenger of the LORD says to her, “The LORD has heard your voice and has seen the child” (Jub. 17:11). Subsequently, when the narrator relates that Ishmael named his first son “Nebaioth,” this is said to be because Hagar had said, “The LORD was near to me when I called to him” (Jub. 17:14).

*Jubilees* also has an interesting narrative structure, and this makes for interesting differences between *Jubilees* and Genesis in terms of how the story is told. *Jubilees* presents itself as being narrated to Moses by the messenger of the LORD at Sinai. This means that the narrator of the story—to use Genette’s terms—is *intradiegetic*.11 At points in the narration the narrator even slips into first person, as when relating the encounter with Abraham at the oak of Mamre: “Sarah laughed because she heard that we discussed the matter with Abraham. And we reproached her” (Jub. 16:2). This is a role played by the LORD in the text of Genesis, but here it is played by the messenger who is narrating.12 The narrator is thus a participant in the story itself. Similarly, at other points, the narrator slips into the second person to talk to Moses about the current situation of the people of Israel, providing a digression from the story at the level of the *narrating instance*. For example, the circumcision of Abraham becomes an opportunity for the narrator (the messenger of the LORD) to tell the narratee (Moses) to command the sons of Israel to maintain the law of circumcision and to keep it as a sign of the covenant for all generations, as well as to warn him what will happen if they fail to do so (Jub. 15:28, 33–34). What this means structurally

11 But there is also an unnamed *extradiegetic* narrator who explicitly tells us in the opening sentence that it is the messenger of the LORD who is narrating (the rest) of the story. 12 In both Gen and *Jub.*, the messenger of the LORD and the LORD seem to be rather indistinct from each other.
for the narrative is that the story is narrated from the LORD’s point of view. This can be detected even at the level of focalization. In Gen 21:11, the narrator says merely that the matter was very bad in Abraham’s eyes, on account of his son. The narrator of Jubilees fills in this gap by saying, “The matter was grievous in the sight of Abraham, because of his maidservant and because of his son that he should drive them away from him” (Jub. 17:5), which is the perspective that the LORD adopts in the next verse (in both Genesis and Jubilees). At the level of the story, this makes little difference; but at the level of the discourse, it is a profound shift. In Genesis, the LORD (even though in the exalted position of God) is still just one character in the story, providing one more perspective that the reader (to be more specific, Iser’s implied reader) must sort through. In Jubilees, the perspective of this one character is foundational for the narrating instance. To use Chatman’s terms, the slant and the filter have been fused.13

2. Josephus

Another version of the story of Hagar and Sarah appears in Josephus’ Jewish Antiquities, which was written around 95 C.E.14 What stands out in Josephus’ account is not so much that he provides details to the story that are different from those provided by Genesis, but that he differs in the way that he tells the story. Whereas the narrator of Genesis is almost

13 Likewise, as we saw in chapter three, at the very same time that Paul is narrating the originating story from the outside as an extradiegetic narrator, he is also narrating the allegorical story from the inside as an intradiegetic narrator. Here again, the slant of the narrator coincides with the filter of one of the characters, except that in Paul’s case the two stories are mixed together, which complicates the discourse.

imperceptible—merely providing a description of what the characters in the story say and do (and occasionally what is going on in their minds), Josephus as a narrator makes his presence felt much more strongly by “showing” us little and “telling” us much. In fact, Josephus rarely steps aside to let the characters speak in their own voice. Rather, he speaks for them, using indirect speech to tell his readers in his own words what they are saying and thinking. In this way Josephus is able to summarize the flow of the story, make explicit connections between events, and smooth over many gaps. As a result, the reader does not have to do so much “reading between the lines.” For example, the narrator of Genesis states merely that when Hagar saw that she had conceived, her mistress “was lowered in her esteem” (Gen 16:4): it does not tell us why this is, or what actions indicate that it is so.\footnote{Moreover, in Gen 16:4, Sarah remains the subject of the verb, even if it is Hagar who is doing the focalizing.}

Josephus, however, relates that after Sarah’s attendant (θεραπαινίς) became pregnant, “she dared to be insolent (ἐξοβριζείν) toward Sarah, behaving like a queen as if the rule would devolve to the son about to be born from her.” (\textit{Ant.} 1.188).\footnote{Birgit van der Lans notes that Josephus greatly emphasizes Hagar’s insolence by characterizing her behaviour as ὅβρις (“Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham’s Household in Josephus’ \textit{Antiquitates Judaicæ},” in \textit{Abraham, the Natians, and the Hagarites}, 186).} This does not actually contradict anything in the Genesis account. Indeed, on the basis of information implied in Genesis, readers might come to this very conclusion on their own. By making it explicit, however, Josephus takes responsibility for it in a way that the Genesis narrator does not.\footnote{Likewise, Josephus indicates that when the messenger of the LORD finds Hagar in the desert, he tells her that “her present plight was but due to her arrogance and presumption towards her mistress” (\textit{Ant.} 1.189). Again, Josephus’s account states explicitly what is (at most) merely implied in the Genesis account.}

As with \textit{Jubilees}, Josephus takes us into the minds of the characters more readily than the
narrator of Genesis. One of the prominent gaps in the Genesis account is that we are not told anything explicitly about Sarah’s relationship with Ishmael after he was born. By repeatedly describing him to us as the son whom Hagar bore “to Abraham” (Gen 16:15, 16:16, 21:9, 25:12), the narrator may be implying that Sarah had no direct relationship with him at all, but this information is not given explicitly. Josephus, however, tells us that when Ishmael had first been born, Sarah “used to love” (στέργω) him without holding back any of her affection, as toward her own son, for he was being raised for succession to the rule, but after giving birth to Isaac, “she began to think that Ishmael should not be brought up with him, since he was the elder and capable of doing evil after their father died” (Ant. 1.215). Similarly, Josephus leaves no gap with regard to the reason for Abraham’s distress at casting out Ishmael and Hagar, telling us that Abraham at first refused to consent to Sarah’s scheme, “thinking that it would be more cruel than anything to send an infant child (παιδα λήπηνλ) and a woman away without the necessities” (Ant. 1.216). It is only after Abraham realizes that God sanctions Sarah’s schemes, Josephus explains, that he changes his mind. In both these cases, Josephus, by filling in the gaps and telling us what is going on in the characters’ minds, allays any doubts that Abraham and Sarah were guided by anything except the highest motives.

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18 Josephus seems to understand Ishmael to be very young here, but partially seems to correct himself in the next sentence when he says that Abraham handed Ishmael over to his mother and sent them off, since Ismael was “not yet able to depart by himself,” a point that would be self-evident if Ismael were truly an infant. See chapter two, n.32.


20 James L. Baily emphasizes that Josephus offers a “rather positive” portrait of Sarah,
At the same time, there are also points in the narrative where Josephus’ commentary goes well beyond what is offered in the Genesis text, even implicitly. For example, Josephus tells us that when Abraham was distressed at his wife’s sterility, God assured him that he would have children, whereupon Sarah, “because God commanded” (τοῦ θεοῦ κελεύσαντος) brings to bed one of her attendants, an Egyptian named Hagar, so that he might be built up with children (παιδοποιησομένῳ) from her (Ant. 1.187). The Genesis text is silent on the question of God’s attitude toward Sarah’s plan. One might surmise that the narrator does not think that God approves, but if this is the case, it is implicit. Not only does Josephus attribute Sarah’s plan entirely to God’s command, but he also shifts the motivation. In Gen 16:2, Sarah is the subject of the verb (MT: אבנה; LXX: ηεθλνπνηήζῃο): it is her desire to be built-up. In Josephus’ account, however, it is Abraham who is to be built up. As we have already seen, Jubilees does this as well, since Sarah’s intention is to “build up seed for Abraham from Hagar” (Jub. 14:22), but with Josephus, Sarah has no direct interest in the action at all.

The effect of telling the story in this way is that Josephus is able to offer a version of the story that flows much more smoothly than the version of Genesis. Because the slant of the narrator is so prominent (to use Chatman’s term), there are no sudden shifts in perspective. Although we still have the benefit of seeing the events through the various filters of the characters, Josephus interprets for us at the level of the discourse what we as readers are to make of what we see and experience at the level of the story. In Genesis, part of the tension is that there are multiple perspectives for the readers to sort through for themselves.

depicting her as both more reasonable and more obedient than in the account in Genesis (“Josephus’ Portrayal of the Matriarchs,” in Feldman and Gohei, *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, 154–79).
Josephus, however, gives us a perspective that is rather one-sided. Of course it is always true that a narrator, whether covert or overt, shapes how a story is heard by the narratee (and this is also true with Genesis), but Josephus does it here rather overtly by ensuring that his perspective dominates. To some degree, we have already seen this with Jubilees. With Jubilees, however, the effect is to downplay the conflict. With Josephus the conflict is still there but the tension in the narrative is eliminated. To make an exaggerated comparison, Genesis provides us with numerous perspectives on the conflict, none of which swallow up the others, with the result that the tension is left unresolved. This is absent in Jubilees, because there is simply no conflict. In Josephus the conflict remains, but the tension is resolved because we are fed a perspective that is one-sided. One might say that Genesis tells a story where the slant of the narrator and the filters of the characters are in tension. In Jubilees, by contrast, the slant and the filter are fused, because one of the characters has become the narrator. In Josephus, by further contrast, the filters of the characters are simply eclipsed by the slant of the narrator.21

3. Philo

In contrast to Jubilees and Josephus, Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.) offers an allegorical interpretation of the story of Hagar and Sarah in his writings. Responding explicitly to the text of Genesis, Philo treats the characters that he finds in Gen 16 and 21 as ciphers for philosophical principles.22 In On Mating with the Preliminary Studies, Philo

21 As we saw in chapter three, this is also what we have in Gal 4:21–5:1.
22 A summary of how Philo treats the figure of Hagar appears in Abraham P. Bos, “Hagar and the Enkyklios Paideia in Philo of Alexandria,” in Goodman, van Kooten, and van
offers an interpretation of Gen 16:1–6 with Sarah representing “virtue” (ἀρετή) and Hagar representing “the preliminary studies” (τὰ προσαναθήματα), which he describes as virtue’s “attendant” (θεραπευτώ). In On Flight and Finding, he offers an interpretation of Gen 16:6–12, with Ishmael representing the “sophist principle” (ὁ σοφιστής), which springs from the preliminary studies and is associated with those who love to argue for the sake of argument but have not yet attained higher truth. In On the Cherubim, he offers an interpretation of Gen 21:10–14, with the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael as an allegory for the wise man’s abandonment of the preliminary studies (and her “son,” the sophist), in favour of true wisdom. Similar allegorical treatments can be found in On the Change of Names, On The Posterity of Cain and His Exile, On Dreams I, and Questions and Answers on Genesis III. A slightly different allegory appears in The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain, where Abraham gives all his possessions (which are, allegorically, “the perfect virtues”) to the “all-wise Isaac” (τῷ πανσώφῳ Ἰσαάκ), while leaving nothing for his concubines’ sons (who are, allegorically, “the illegitimate and wayward thoughts” that have arisen from the preliminary studies), except some “small things for those small minds.” Like Gal 4:21–5:1, none of these treatments take narrative form. Indeed, like Paul, Philo’s purpose in writing them is not

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Ruiten, Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites, 163–75.


27 De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini 43 (Philo in Ten Volumes, 2:126).
to tell a story but to make an argument.28 Nevertheless, by providing allegorical interpretations of these passages as the foundations for his argument, Philo (like Paul) ends up offering his own alternative rendering of the story.

To take On Mating with the Preliminary Studies as an example, Philo finds allegorical significance in nearly every element in the originating story. He starts off by saying that virtue is continuously giving birth, not to infants, but to “cultivated words, blameless counsel, and praiseworthy deeds” (Congr. 4). However, not everyone is ready to produce children by her. He observes that the text of Genesis specifically does not say “Sarah did not bear” (μη τικτειν την Σαρα) but only “she did not bear for him in particular” (αυτω τιν μη τικτειν, Congr. 9). Philo explains this by treating the character of Abraham as a cipher for the human being who loves learning: “For we are not yet able to receive the offspring of virtue unless we first consort (ἐντθογγάνω) with her attendant” (Congr. 9). For Philo it is an important point that Sarah herself selected Hagar and gave her to Abraham. He explains this by saying that since in the initial stages we are not yet able to produce a child by wisdom, virtue herself pledges her attendant to us (Congr. 72). He notes (as we also observed in chapter two) that the text of Genesis refers repeatedly (and unnecessarily as it might seem to us) to Sarah as “Abraham’s wife.” According to Philo, this indicates that Abraham does not forget the real purpose of his liaison with the attendant: “When Abraham is about to be pledged to the attendant of wisdom, that is, the elementary studies (την ἐγκόλιον παιδείαν), it says that he was not forgetful of his agreements with her mistress, but he knew the one as

28 However, since Philo makes explicit reference to the story as it appears in Genesis, Dawson’s definition of allegory as we identified it in chapter three is satisfied.
his very own wife by law and purpose, but the other by necessity and the circumstance of the moment” (Congr. 73). However, to those who come to embrace the preliminary studies too closely and forget to move on, virtue will say (paraphrasing Sarah in Gen 16:5), “I am wronged and betrayed! . . . For from the time you embraced the preliminary studies (τὰ προπαιδεύματα), the offspring of my attendant, you have greatly honoured her as spouse, but you have turned away from me as though we had never come together” (Congr. 152). In this way, virtue summons the lover of learning back into relationship with her.

On the allegorical plane, of course, Philo’s discourse is telling an entirely different story from what appears in Genesis. The story it tells is about how one comes into true wisdom through the preliminary studies. This is seen most clearly when Philo uses autobiographical language: “Therefore Sarah, the virtue which rules my soul, was giving birth, but not giving birth for me, for being still young, I was not able to receive her offspring: wise thinking (τὸ φρονεῖν), righteous acting (τὸ δικαίωσις), pious living (τὸ εὐσεβεῖν), on account of the multitude of illegitimate children which empty glories had brought forth for me” (Congr. 6).

At the same time, however, Philo’s allegorical interpretations (like Paul’s) also shape his reading of the originating story. This is especially true when he insists on the allegorical meaning of the passage in question. He goes to great length, for example, to show that the verb κακῶ ("to afflict"), which appears in Gen 16:6, can have positive connotations when it refers to the proper discipline of a parent over a child, a master over a slave, or a king over his people. He concludes by saying “Let us then not be misled by the sounds, but let us look

29 As with Galatians, Philo’s treatise does not take narrative form, and yet a story is being told through his discourse.
into the things that are being signified (σημαίνόμενα) through the hidden meanings (ὑπονοοῦν), and let us say that ‘afflicted’ (ἐκάκωσε) is equivalent to ‘disciplined’ (ἐπαιδεύσε) and ‘admonished’ (ἐνοικητησε) and ‘chastened’ (ἐσφρὸνισε)” (Congr. 172).\(^\text{30}\)

It is in this vein that he concludes the treatise: “Therefore whenever you hear about Hagar having been afflicted (κακουμένη) by Sarah, do not conjecture that it is some of the usual jealousies among women, for the statement is not about women, but about minds, on the one hand, the mind that is training itself in the preliminary studies, and on the other, the mind that is breaking through to the rewards of virtue” (Congr. 180). As we saw with Paul and Galatians in chapter three, this reflects back on the originating story. By insisting on these allegorical associations, Philo subtly changes the way the originating story is to be understood.\(^\text{31}\)

As a result, Philo’s allegorical treatment of the story has the effect of smoothing out the conflict that lies at the heart of the Genesis account in much the same way as we saw with Jubilees and Josephus. Philo does this in both the structure of his allegorical treatments as well as in the nuance he gives them. For Philo, Hagar and Sarah do not represent antithetical elements: the former is preliminary and subordinate to the other, to be abandoned when the time is right. Although there is a tension between the two of them, especially when the time comes to let go of the one and embrace the other, they do not come into open conflict.\(^\text{32}\)

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\(^{30}\) Thus Philo acknowledges the “literal” meaning of the originating story as it appears in Genesis, even as he seeks to replace it with another meaning. (This is what Dawson enunciates as the paradox of allegory.)

\(^{31}\) That is, Philo, as the implied author of his treatise, is directing the implied reader to view the originating story in particular ways.

\(^{32}\) As Beth A. Berkovitz notes, Philo navigates the tensions of Jewish identity in first-century
harshness of the Genesis account, as seen in Sarah’s affliction of Hagar (Gen 16:6) or later on in Abraham’s expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael into the desert (Gen 21:14), is allegorized. Thus, the verb “afflict” (κακόω) takes on a positive meaning for Philo, and the allegorical Hagar and Ishmael are “cast out” when one abandons the preliminary studies and advances from mere sophistry to true wisdom. These kinds of nuances mean that the two principles represented by Hagar and Sarah never come into open conflict. There are those who never go beyond the preliminary studies and remain in the imperfect state of the sophist as represented by Hagar and Ishmael, but this does not prevent others from moving on to the state of perfection and wisdom represented by Sarah and Isaac. In some ways Philo is like Jubilees in that he softens the conflict. In other ways he is like Josephus in that he mitigates the tension by taking sides. Yet in other ways, Philo is quite different from either one: by allegorizing, he shifts the conflict onto another plane entirely.

4. **Targum Pseudo-Jonathan**

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, an Aramaic paraphrase of the Hebrew biblical text that dates as recently as the tenth century C.E. also provides an alternative version of the story. While Alexandria with this allegorical reading of Hagar that thematises “the foreignness of Greek education even as he reads it into the biblical narrative,” with the result that “even as he advocates for Greek education, he also subordinates it to what might seem more compatibly ‘Jewish.’” (“Allegory and Ambiguity: Jewish Identity in Philo’s ‘De Congressu,’” *JJS* 41 [2010]: 8–9).

Philo spells this out more explicitly in Cher. 8: after the birth of “Isaac” (who pursues not children’s games but divine ones), “the preliminary studies that bear the name of Hagar will be cast out, and also their son the sophist named Ishmael.”

Paul, by contrast (as we saw in chapter three), allegorizes so as to intensify the conflict. According to Michael Maher, elements of anti-Islamic polemic in *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 25:11 suggest that the Targum received its final form after the Arab conquest (Targum Pseudo-
there are notable differences between the way in which the story is narrated in Genesis and the way in which it is narrated in Jubilees, Josephus, and Philo, this is hardly the case with Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. As a paraphrase, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan structures the story identically to how it is structured in Genesis, and for the most part even follows the same wording (albeit in Aramaic rather than Hebrew). Where the Targum differs from Genesis is in the addition of a few words here and there in short sections. One might say that the other accounts differ from Genesis primarily at the level of the discourse; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan differs from Genesis merely with respect to the details of the story itself.

Nevertheless, these differences are significant.

The most significant of these differences have to do with Ishmael. Whereas the Genesis account seems to go out of its way not to appear to be taking sides, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan seems to avail itself of every opportunity to show that Ishmael’s treatment was deserved, even a necessary measure against his wickedness.\(^3\) For example, in Gen 21:9 (MT), Sarah sees the son of Hagar “playing” (מצחך) a rather suggestive word, as we noted in chapter two, but nothing more explicit. In the Targum, however, Sarah sees him “playing

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Jonathan: Genesis [Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992], 11–12). Robert Hayward, however, argues that the Targum’s portrait of Ishmael as an idolater is consistent with descriptions of pre-Islamic Arabs and does not require an anti-Islamic background to explain its origins (“Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Anti-Islamic Polemic,” JSS 34 [1989]: 77–93).

\(^3\) This negative portrayal of Ishmael applies also to the Ishmaelites as his descendants (and possibly also by extension to Muslims, if the text postdates the Muslim conquest). For example, where Gen 21:13 MT has the LORD promising to make the son of the slave woman into “a nation” (לגוי), Tg. Ps.-J. has the LORD promising to make him into a “nation of bandits” (ליסטיס לעם). For the Aramaic text, see Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance (ed. E. G. Clarke; Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav, 1984), 16–28.
with foreign idols” (נוצראה, Tg. Ps.- J. Gen 21:9). Moreover, when Sarah tells Abraham to cast out this slave woman and her son, it is very bad in Abraham’s eyes, not merely “on account of his son” (MT Gen 21:11), but on account of his son Ishmael “who will worship foreign idols” (נוצראה דוגלק נחל ת, Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 21:11). Thus, whereas Abraham in Genesis is disturbed by Sarah’s request that Ishmael be cast out; in the Targum, he is disturbed by Ishmael’s behaviour itself. Likewise, when the LORD tells Abraham not to be distressed about the lad, the words, “who has departed from your education,” are added (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 21:12), again emphasizing Ishmael’s bad behaviour. Along the same lines, when the LORD rescues Hagar and Ishmael, the messenger tells Hagar not merely that “the LORD has heard the voice of the lad” (MT Gen 21:17), but “his voice has been heard before the LORD and he has not judged him according to the wicked deeds (עבדוי בישיא) that he is destined to do.” It comes as a bit of a surprise, therefore, that the Targum, when recounting the death of Abraham, emphasizes twice that Ishmael repented later in life (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 25:8, 17). Possibly this is emphasized in order to explain how Isaac and Ishmael can come together in the next verse to bury their father, apparently without hostility (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 25:9, as in MT). Nevertheless, Ishmael is not viewed positively by posterity: later on in the Targum, Jacob, worrying about his sons, says, “Alas! Perhaps someone unfit (פסול) has come forth from me, just as Ishmael came forth from Abraham, and Esau came forth from my father” (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 35:22).

37 Or “had been worshipping foreign idols.”
Other significant differences have to do with Hagar. The Targum repeatedly fills in gaps in the Genesis account with regard to Hagar by providing explicit comments. Whereas the text of Genesis introduces her merely by saying that Sarah had an Egyptian handmaid by the name of Hagar, the text of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan says that Hagar was a daughter of Pharaoh, whom he had given to Sarah as a handmaid “when he had taken her and had been smitten by a word from before the LORD” (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 16:1). Sarah herself also mentions that Hagar was a daughter of Pharaoh, and further, that Pharaoh was the son of Nimrod, who had thrown Abraham into the furnace of fire (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 16:5). This alludes to an episode described in Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 11:28 where Abraham is thrown into a furnace of fire by King Nimrod for failing to worship idols. As we saw with Ishmael, these kinds of references serve to portray Hagar negatively in association with idolatry. Likewise, after Hagar and Ishmael have been expelled, the Targum says that they wandered, and when they reached the opening of the desert, “they remembered to stray after idolatry (פולחנא),” again associating them with idolatry (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 21:15). Along the same lines, when Abraham sends Hagar away with “a bill of divorce” (파טרה בגיטא), he binds the bread and skin of water to her loins to show that she is a “slave woman” (אמתא, Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 21:14), which emphasizes her status as a slave, even though she is now technically free. With these comments Targum Pseudo-Jonathan seems to be filling in gaps in the Genesis account in such a way as to place both Hagar and Ishmael in a negative light by associating them with idolatry.

39 Yet, ironically, if Hagar’s status was that of a slave, and not a wife, she would not have been entitled to a “bill of divorce.” As Florentino García Martínez observes, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan is not entirely consistent on this question (“Hagar in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,” in Goodman, van Kooten, and van Ruiten, Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites, 263–74).
slavery and idolatry.

Although these comments are often short, usually no more than a few words here and there, one of their effects is to exaggerate the conflict that appears in the Genesis account. Again, to use an exaggerated comparison, whereas Jubilees tries to present the picture of a big happy family, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan presents them as being at each other’s throats. Indeed, the longest additions usually involve an expanded description of conflict. For example, Sarah’s complaint to Abraham after Hagar becomes pregnant is more bitter than it is in Genesis: “All my humiliation (עולבני) comes from you, for I had trusted that you would render justice to me, since I left my country and the house of my father and I went up with you to a foreign land . . .” (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 16:5). Later on, in Gen 22, when the LORD tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on the mountain, the incident is triggered by a quarrel between Isaac and Ishmael with regard to which of them is more worthy to inherit (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 22:1). Finally, when the Targum describes Abraham’s death, it specifically adds that Abraham did not bless Isaac, because he was afraid of the enmity it would cause: “Because Abraham did not desire to bless Ishmael, he thus did not bless Isaac either; for if he had blessed Isaac and not blessed Ishmael, the latter would have borne a grudge (נטיר) against him” (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 25:11).

We have seen here in Jubilees, Josephus, Philo, and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan four alternative versions to the story that appears in Genesis. Examining these ancient versions brings some of the distinctive features of the Genesis account into further relief. As we discovered in chapter two, Genesis tells a story that I describe as “filled with conflict and
fraught with tension.” All four of these alternatives lack the intensity of the tension in the Genesis account, in various ways, and to various degrees. Philo is the most radical: he resolves the tension by allegorizing the conflict onto another plane, as it were. Jubilees resolves the tension by sweeping the conflict under the carpet and hiding it as much as possible (even at the cost of generating large gaps in the narrative). Josephus retains the conflict but mitigates the tension it causes by taking sides at the level of the discourse. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan follows the same strategy, but goes out of its way to make the conflict even more intense, at the level of both the story and the discourse. Josephus is harder on Hagar, and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan is harder on Ishmael, but both have similar effects: they resolve the tension by placing as much of the blame for the conflict on Hagar and Ishmael as they can. Genesis, by contrast, does not shy away from the conflict, either at the level of the story or the level of the discourse. As a result, the moral ambiguity of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael at the level of the story is left unresolved at the level of the discourse. The tension that the other versions take such pains to avoid, is thus front and centre in the Genesis account.40

40 Moreover, to compare these alternative versions with what we find in Galatians, Paul does something quite different with the Genesis account in Gal 4:21–5:1. Like Philo, Paul allegorizes, but this does not eliminate any of the conflict. Like Josephus and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Paul takes sides, but this does not resolve any of the tension. Whereas Jubilees resolves the tension by sweeping the conflict under the carpet, and Philo resolves the tension by allegorizing the conflict onto another plane, and Josephus and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan resolve the tension by blaming the conflict on Hagar and Ishmael, Paul resolves neither the tension nor the conflict. In fact, he intensifies both the tension and the conflict, and sends them on a collision course—what is on full display in chapter three.
Appendix 2
Attempts to Fill in the Gaps in Paul’s Argument in Gal 4:21–5:1

In chapter three I observed that there are several points in Paul’s argument where interpreters rush in to fill the gaps. Because my focus in chapter three was exclusively on what Paul actually says, and not on what he means, I tried to avoid speculating on how these gaps might be filled. Instead, I focused on identifying the gaps themselves as structures in the text. Nevertheless, it is useful to see how interpreters (particularly recent interpreters) deal with these gaps as they try to make sense of Paul’s argument. What follows here is a selective list of some of the more noteworthy gaps that interpreters seem to be especially compelled to fill in, along with some of their comments. One of the advantages of focusing on recent interpreters (i.e., interpreters from the last thirty years or so), is that it reveals how gaps can be filled in quite differently, even by interpreters from approximately the same time period.

Gal 4:21:

*When Paul asks the Galatians whether they listen to the law, what does he mean?*

Jerome (and probably also Origen before him), understands Paul not to be asking the Galatians merely whether they *hear* the law, but whether they hear the law *spiritually*. Jerome reflects, “Those who, like Paul, ‘hear the law,’ are those who look, not at its surface (*superficies*), but into its marrow (*medulla*), whereas those who, like the Galatians, do not ‘hear the law,’ follow only the outer shell (*exteriorem corticem*).”¹ In interpreting Paul in this way, Jerome is of course reading into “the marrow” of Galatians and not its “outer

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¹ *Sancti Hieronymi presbyteri commentarii in epistulam Pauli apostoli ad Galatas* 4.21 (ed. Giacomo Raspanti; Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, CCSL 77A:136). See also chapter four, n.25.
In other words, Jerome is taking Paul to be speaking “allegorically” even in Gal 4:21. Some recent interpreters of Galatians understand Gal 4:21 along similar lines (perhaps without being aware of how close they are to traditional patristic allegorical exegesis). Timothy George, for example, says, “The law of Moses, properly understood, points beyond itself both backwards toward the Abrahamic covenant and forward toward its final fulfillment in Jesus Christ. To ‘hear’ the law clearly, however, required more than traditional rabbinic exegesis as filtered through the lenses of the Judaizers’ theology.”

Gal 4:22:

_How can Paul say that Abraham begot only two sons?_

Among recent interpreters, the response of Douglas J. Moo is typical: “Paul’s claim that ‘Abraham had two sons’ technically contradicts the OT claim that Abraham and Keturah had several more sons after Sarah’s death (Gen. 25:1–6). But Paul’s focus is on the sons of Abraham who might have a role as his heirs.” However, some medieval readers of Galatians take Paul to be allegorizing here. It is precisely because Genesis does not mention Abraham having “two sons,” that they conclude Paul must be referring to Abraham’s two sons _allegorically_: that is, the Gentile people and the Jewish people. Augustine, on the other

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2 In my description of Gal 4:21 in chapter three, by contrast, I take pains to read, not “the marrow,” but merely (what Jerome would describe as) the “outer shell.”
3 *Galatians* (NAC 30; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 335.
4 *Galatians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 298 n.6.
5 For example, Bruno the Carthusian says, “Abraham qui interpretatur pater multarum gentium, habens duos filios, id est duos populos, significat Deum habentem duos filios, Gentilem scilicet et Judaeum” (“By having two sons—that is, two peoples—Abraham, which, when translated, means ‘father of many nations,’ signifies God, who has two sons,
hand, suggests that Paul refers to only two sons because “when the two covenants were being signified, Abraham did indeed have these two sons.”

**Gal 4:23:**

*What does Paul mean by saying that one of the sons had been “begotten in accordance with the flesh” and the other “through a promise”?*

Richard N. Longenecker argues that the two processes are not mutually exclusive: “While Ishmael’s birth can be understood simply in terms of κατὰ σάρκα, ‘according to the flesh,’ or the natural processes of procreation, Isaac’s must ultimately be seen as διὰ ἐπαγγελίας ‘as a result of, or through, promise.’” Thomas R. Schreiner objects, however, that Paul is not making a neutral comment as if thinking of the birth of Ishmael in merely biological terms: the contrast “between the flesh and the promise and the flesh and the Spirit in 4:29 suggests that Paul intends the deeper theological meaning of the word ‘flesh,’ so that ‘flesh’ refers to what human beings are in Adam. Such a reading fits the Genesis narrative as well. Abraham and Sarah’s attempt to have a child via Hagar signaled a lack of faith on their part—a human attempt to fulfill the promise.” Gerhard Ebeling also insists that κατὰ σάρκα means more than that the birth was purely natural, but for him what it indicates is “the absence of the

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7 *Galatians* (WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990), 208.
8 *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 299.
Gal 4:24:

There are several noteworthy gaps in this verse. Paul’s use of the verb ἀλληγορέω attracts the lion’s share of attention, in both ancient and modern commentary (as we noted in chapter three), but there are several other gaps as well.

Regardless of how Paul understood the word, are we looking at what technically should be called “allegory” here, or is it more properly called “typology”—or is it some sort of combination?

John Chrysostom says that Paul, “against proper use” (καταχρηστικῶς), refers to the “type” as an “allegory.”10 Along similar lines, Severianus (ca. 400), says that Paul here calls “prophecy through works” (ἡ ὁτ’ ἔργον προφητεία) an “allegory” (ἀλληγορία).11 Many interpreters from more recent times also insist that Paul is not doing allegory here, but rather typology (or typology as a very specific form of allegory). F. F. Bruce, for example, says that by his use of the term, Paul “has in mind that form of allegory which is commonly called typology.”12 Others insist that Paul is most assuredly doing allegory, just as he says. Ben

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10 Commentarius in epistola ad Galatas 4.24 (PG 61:662).
11 As recorded by Karl Staab in Pauluskommentare aus der griechischen Kirche (Münster: Aschendorff, 1933), 302.
Witherington III, for example, says, “Had Paul wanted us to see this text typologically, he could easily have used the appropriate terminology to signal the fact,” and he goes on to say, “One suspects that the resistance of many modern scholars to see allegory or allegorizing interpretation in Gal. 4 comes from bringing to the reading of this text more modern and western notions about what an allegory must look like.”\(^\text{13}\) Most recent interpreters, however, opt for some kind of combination of the two. Schreiner sums up the debate by saying, “Probably the best solution is to see a combination of typology and allegory. Paul argues typologically with reference to Isaac and Ishmael, especially in 4:21–23 and 4:28–30,” but there are “clearly allegorical elements in the argument, particularly in 4:24–27.”\(^\text{14}\) Other

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debates range over questions of whether Paul’s hermeneutical approach is closer to Alexandrian or Palestinian allegory,\textsuperscript{15} whether Paul is saying that the passage itself is allegorical or merely that it should be read allegorically,\textsuperscript{16} and whether the passage serves merely to illustrate a point already proven on other grounds or whether it is a key part of Paul’s argument.\textsuperscript{17}

*What is Paul referring to when he says, “these things” are allegorical?*

According to Alfio Marcello Buscemi: “The use of the indefinite neuter relative pronoun ἅτηνα instead of the simple relative ἃ could be understood in either a general sense (‘those things which’), or in a paradigmatic sense (‘these and those others’), summing up everything that has been said concerning Abraham, Hagar, Sarah, Ishmael, and Isaac, and applying it to the concrete case of the situation of the Galatians.”\textsuperscript{18} Along the same lines, Frank J. Matera notes simply that ἅτηνα “is employed instead of the simple relative pronoun and refers to everything that Paul has said in vv. 22–23.”\textsuperscript{19} According to Longenecker, Paul uses a participle in the neuter plural and not a finite form of the verb ἄλληγορέω because his


\textsuperscript{19} *Galatians* (SP 9; Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), 169.
meaning is not that “allegory was built into the biblical narrative itself but that the biblical narrative is now being treated by the interpreter (whether the Judaizers, or Paul, or both) in allegorical fashion.”

What does Paul mean by two covenants?

For ancient interpreters, this does not seem to be an issue: they immediately take this as a reference to the “old” and “new” covenants respectively. For this very reason, however, it is troubling for some recent interpreters. James D. G. Dunn, for instance, insists that Paul is really talking about only one covenant: “What Paul describes as two covenants for the purposes of his exegesis are in effect two ways of understanding the one covenant purpose of God through Abraham and his seed.” Richard B. Hays, by contrast, emphasizes, “The ‘two covenants’ of Gal 4:24 are not the old covenant at Sinai and the new covenant in Christ. Rather, the contrast is drawn between the old covenant at Sinai and the older covenant with Abraham.” Similarly, Gijs Bouwman observes that “the two women, and with them also the two ‘covenants,’ are here not two groups of people who lived after one another, but rather two ways of existing (Existenzweisen) which stand (and since Abraham have stood) beside each other synchronically.”

Along completely different lines, J. Louis Martyn

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21 For example, Augustine says that Paul subsequently “explains that the son of the slave woman called Hagar signifies the old covenant, that is, the people of the old covenant, on account of its servile yoke of carnal observances, and earthly promises” (Ad Galatas expositionis liber unus 40.4 [Plumer, 194]).
23 Echoes, 114.
insists that Paul, in speaking of two covenants, is referring to two distinct missions to the Gentiles: one law-observant, and bearing into slavery, the other law-free and bearing into freedom: “Paul identifies the two women as two covenants, in order to speak of these two missions.”

What is the connection between Hagar and Mount Sinai?

Theodoret of Cyrus draws a connection between Hagar and Mount Sinai by noting that the race (γένος) of Hagar camped (σκηνέω) beside that mountain. 

Bruce says that Paul’s identification of Hagar with Sinai “means simply that she and her descendants represent the law, which holds men and women in bondage.”

Carolyn Osiek speculates that “perhaps Sinai is brought in because of its association with the Israelites’ wandering in the wilderness, just as Hagar fled to the wilderness when mistreated by her mistress.”

Michael G. Steinhauser, noting that in Tg. Ps.-J. and Tg. Onq. Gen 16:7, Hagar is found by the messenger by a spring on the road to Hagra (הגר) rather than Shur (as appears in the Masoretic Text), argues that Paul knows of traditions associating Hagar with Hagra, and therefore with Sinai.

J. C. O’Neill, by contrast, regards the prepositional phrase “from Mount Sinai” as relating, not adjectivally to the covenant, but adverbally to the participle “giving birth”: hence Paul is not saying that the covenant from Mount Sinai gives birth into slavery but “Hagar” (understood allegorically as one of the covenants) gives birth into

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25 Galatians, 455.
26 Interpretatio epistolae ad Galatas (PG 82:492A).
27 Galatians, 220.
28 Galatians (NTM 12; Wilmington, Deleware: Michael Glazier, 1980), 54.
slavery “far away from” (ἀπό) Mount Sinai.\textsuperscript{30} Heinrich Schlier, having examined the many and varied attempts of others to make sense of this verse prior to his time, throws up his hands in despair: “the exact meaning of the phrase in v25a, and with it the grounds and reason with which it enabled Paul to connect Hagar with the diatheke from Sinai, must remain in the dark.”\textsuperscript{31}

**Gal 4:25:**

Aside from questions relating to the wording of the text, there are also a number of other questions that arise. (These perhaps partly explain why there are so many text variations in the first place.)

**How can Paul say that Mount Sinai/Hagar is in Arabia?**

Hans Dieter Betz (following Oepke, Mussner, and others) says that Paul, “who spent some time in Arabia (Gal 1:17)” may have thought that the Arabic word hadjar (“rock”) was used in reference to mountains in the Sinai area, and hence he is saying that the name “Hagar” means “mountain” in Arabia. He goes on to say, “That the Arabic ḥ does not correspond to the Hebrew _HEAP, not to mention the Greek, would not bother a man who is absorbed with ‘allegory’ and would be guided even by the most superficial similarities.”\textsuperscript{32}

Lührmann argues that Sinai really was perceived to be in Arabia: “The writers of ‘the five


\textsuperscript{31} Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, 12th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 220.

\textsuperscript{32} *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 245.
books of Moses’ seem to identify the ‘reed sea’ with the Gulf of Aqaba, not with the Red Sea, and to have imagined Mount Sinai in the mountains that one can find in today’s atlases south of the city of Tebūk in extreme northwest Saudi Arabia, where the city of Chegra also lies.”

Along similar lines, Martin McNamara suggests that in some Jewish traditions Sinai was believed to be in the vicinity of Petra, which was associated with the dwelling place of Hagar and her son Ishmael, and therefore “in the heart of Arabia.”

Taking a completely different approach, Susan Elliott argues that Paul is referring to Hagar as the “Meter Sinaienē,” the mother mountain, according to the idioms of Anatolian religious tradition: “the key to understanding these verses is not the geographic location of Mount Sinai but the simple image of Hagar as a mountain,” and therefore, “To an Anatolian audience, the image of Hagar as a mountain, in a territory they have heard of but probably never visited, would evoke the familiar image of a Mountain Mother.”

Why does Paul even feel the need to bring Arabia into the discussion?

Andrew C. Perriman, noting that Hagar is designated an “Egyptian” in Gen 21:9, argues that “such a designation found in the very text that provided the logical basis for Paul’s argument

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here must at least partially account for the association of Hagar-Sinai with Arabia.” Matera suggests that “Paul may have associated Hagar with Mount Sinai because Sinai is located in Arabia, the land of Hagar’s descendants through Ishmael.” Paul Nadim Tarazi argues that the only plausible explanation for Paul’s mention of Arabia is that it serves to stress the limited nature of the Sinai covenant’s authority: “by emphasizing that the place of origin of the Law was in Arabia, Paul is pointing out that this is, after all, an ‘earthly’ location.” Sam K. Williams offers a solution to the puzzle that makes sense of Gal 4:25a in light of the rest of the verse: he paraphrases Paul as saying, “Now this ‘Hagar’ refers to Mt. Sinai in Arabia; but (nevertheless) she corresponds to present-day Jerusalem.” Paul’s point would be that “the geographical locale of Hagar-Mt. Sinai (in Arabia) is no barrier to his associating Hagar with Jerusalem (in Palestine).”

Hagar (either as the female character in the story or as one of the covenants in Paul’s allegorical treatment) is grammatically feminine, so why does Paul introduce her name with the neuter article τό?

Peder Borgen explains this by saying that it is a common exegetical formula to repeat a word or phrase from a text by introducing it with the neuter article, which functions in much the same way as placing the phrase in quotation marks. Thus Borgen paraphrases Paul as saying,

37 Galatians, 170.
39 Galatians (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 128. See also Mussner, Der Galaterbrief (HTKNT 9; Freiburg: Herder, 1974), 322.
“Now ‘Hagar’ here (in v 24) is Mount Sinai in Arabia.”⁴⁰ Others read the neuter article as connected to the neuter noun ὄρος (“mountain”), with the nouns “Hagar” and “Sinai” functioning as adjectives.⁴¹ From another perspective, G.I. Davies comments, “As happens elsewhere in the Pauline writings, a new motif seems to have come to mind in mid-sentence, and the apostle lacked either the inclination or, conceivably, the time to rewrite the passage in the light of it.”⁴² Ernest de Witt Burton dismisses the whole statement as probably “a gloss from the hand of a scribe.”⁴³

**What is Paul saying precisely: that Hagar/Sinai is a mountain in Arabia; that Hagar/Mount Sinai is in Arabia; or that Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia?**

Dunn opts for the first possibility, arguing that Paul is making a clarifying explanation, perhaps adding it as an afterthought “in case any of his audiences did not know where Mount Sinai was.”⁴⁴ Along lines similar to Williams, Moo opts for the second possibility, seeing the clause as adversative, and paraphrases Paul as saying, “Now the mountain that is Sinai and that is represented by Hagar is, to be sure, in Arabia; nevertheless [δὲ, de] she [or it] represents the present Jerusalem.”⁴⁵ Martinus de Boer opts for the third possibility, paraphrasing Paul as saying, “I would have you know that the Hagar mentioned in the

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⁴¹ Moo paraphrases Paul as saying, “the mountain that is named Sinai and which I have associated (v. 24) with Hagar” (*Galatians*, 302).
⁴³ *Galatians*, 259.
⁴⁴ *Galatians*, 251–2.
⁴⁵ *Galatians*, 303.
Genesis stories is actually a reference to Mount Sinai in Arabia, and thus to the covenant established there with the Israelites by the hand of Moses.” As such, Paul is not really saying anything new to what he has already said in the previous verse, except that “Paul may be trying to indicate that Mount Sinai . . . is in ‘Ishmaelite’ territory.”

**What does Paul mean by “it is in line with the present Jerusalem”?**

John Chrysostom takes Paul to be saying that Mount Sinai, which is called ‘Hagar’ in the language of that country, is in line with the present Jerusalem geographically: “that is, it borders on it, and is joined to it.” Most modern commentators, however, typically take “Hagar” (with the neuter article) as the subject of the verb, hence Longenecker paraphrases Paul as saying, “Hagar corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem.” Lloyd Gaston, however, argues that in using the verb συστοιχέω, Paul is saying that Mount Sinai stands in the opposite column from the present Jerusalem, in contrast to Hagar, who is enslaved along with her children. Dunn objects that this would require ἀντιστοιχέω, and concludes along with Martyn and others that Paul is placing Hagar-Mount Sinai in the same column as the present Jerusalem. Along completely different lines, R. A. Lipsius suggests that what we have here is an example of the mystical use of numerical symbols or gamatria: by his use of the word συστοιχεῖ, Paul is indicating that the letters of “τὸ Ἁγάρ Σινᾶ ὁρος” have the

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47 “τοιεύτε, γειτνιάζει, ἀπεταί” (*In epistulam ad Galatas commentarius* 4.25 [PG 61:662]).
48 *Galatians*, 213.
50 *Galatians*, 252.
same numerical value as “τῇ νόν Ἱεροσαλήμ.”

**How is the present Jerusalem to be understood as enslaved along with her children?**

Hays answers this by saying: “The city of Jerusalem symbolizes Israel, which is, empirically speaking, in slavery under the dominion of Rome. . . . The political captivity of Jerusalem provides the immediate real-world background for Paul’s symbolic identification of Jerusalem with the slave Hagar. To speak of the present Jerusalem as living under slavery was hardly a far-fetched fantasy.” A more usual explanation, however, is offered by Matera: the present Jerusalem is enslaved “because she is under the Law which Paul has already described as a paidagōgos.” Similarly, Witherington points out that Jerusalem is “the heart of Judaism.” Martyn, by contrast, asserts that Paul is referring to the Jerusalem church: “To the degree that, under the sway of the False Brothers, the Jerusalem church is offering support to the Teachers’ work—thus reaching into the life of his churches as it earlier reached into the life of the Antioch church—Paul is sure that the Jerusalem congregation is itself producing Gentile churches that are enslaved.”

**Gal 4:26:**

**What is the “Jerusalem above”?**

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53 *Galatians*, 170.
54 *Grace in Galatia*, 333.
55 *Galatians*, 464–65.
Many interpreters note a shift from a temporal reference ("the present Jerusalem") to a spatial one ("the Jerusalem above"). Ronald Y. K. Fung, for example, says that Paul has here mingled "the two forms, the temporal and the spatial, in such a way as to indicate that the Jerusalem that is to come has already arrived . . . in the form of a heavenly, spiritual Jerusalem."56 Andrew T. Lincoln suggests that Paul’s opponents made use of the traditional Jewish claim that Jerusalem was their mother, which explains both why Paul starts out with the two women in the first place, and why they lead up to the contrast between the two Jerusalems: by turning the tables on his opponents, Paul "gives new content to the idea of Sarah as mother of Israel as she now becomes the prototype of the new covenant and its freedom and of the heavenly Jerusalem."57 Gordon D. Fee argues that Paul intends his readers to see here a side reference to Sarah, as the ‘free woman’ who bears children for freedom, as well as a reference to Christ and the Spirit, who are responsible for the Galatians’ being God’s children under the new covenant: “having put the primary geographical places on the Hagar/Torah/slavery side of the analogy,” Paul now has nowhere “to place the Sarah/Christ/freedom contrast,” so he does the only logical thing, and “that is to place them in heaven, where Christ is now enthroned.”58 J. Cornelius de Vos, reflecting on the image of “the Jerusalem above,” paraphrases Paul as saying to the Galatians that “the earthly Jerusalem is worth hardly anything.” For the Galatian Christians “this meant that they could, so to say, remain in Galatia and had, nevertheless, a connection with

56 The Epistle to the Galatians (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 210.
58 Galatians (Pentecostal Commentary Series; Blandford Forum, Dorset: Deo, 2007), 180.
Jerusalem—with the Jerusalem that is and will be above them.”

Gal 4:27

For what purpose does Paul bring in this quotation from Isaiah?

To Charles H. Cosgrove, the connection is clear: “Since in Paul’s context Sarah, the barren woman, is the ‘free woman,’ his citation from Isaiah clearly serves to associate the eschatological Jerusalem with Sarah, thus substantiating the identification of the heavenly Jerusalem with Sarah implied in ἡ δέ ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐλευθερα ἐστίν.”

To Karen H. Jobes, the point is that the connection is not clear: “Though Paul explicitly identifies Hagar with Sinai, slavery, and the earthly Jerusalem, he does not explicitly identify Sarah in the same way with the new covenant, freedom, and the heavenly Jerusalem,” and she goes on to say, “One can only wonder how Paul could have expected the Galatian Christians to understand his argument, which can be fully comprehended only by hearing within it the echoes of the Greek text of Isaiah.”

To de Boer, the quotation is the key to understanding the whole passage: “Isa 54.1, with its picture of two contrasting women provided Paul with a pair of opposites (or, better, an apocalyptic contrast or antimony) that enabled him then also to find other pairs in the Genesis story two covenants instead of one, slave/free,


60 “The Law,” 230 n.41.

flesh/promise, flesh/Spirit, and even the two Jerusalems."

**Whom does Paul intend us to understand as the “woman with the husband” and “the desolate woman”?**

Most interpreters understand Paul here as taking Isaiah’s references to the barren woman (ἡ στείρα) and the desolate woman (ἡ ἔρημος) as references to Sarah in the Genesis story, and the reference to the woman who has the husband as referring to Hagar. Di Mattei even argues that in the first century Isaiah 54:1 was the haftarah liturgical reading for Gen 16–17, which forms an implicit connection between the barren woman and the barren Jerusalem, and thus Paul is “safely working within his own Jewish heritage in seeing a reference to Sarah in Isa 54.1.” Angela Standhartinger, however, points out that in the Genesis account, it is Hagar who is the one “without the husband” (Gattleness) and “desolate” (Vereinsamten), and therefore by invoking the Isaiah passage, “Paul’s dichotomous opposition between the slave woman and the free woman is, at the very least, blurred.”

**Gal 4:28:**

**How are the Galatians “children of promise” like Isaac?**

This is something Paul asserts but does not explain. What Bruce draws out of it is that, “If the story of Abraham’s two sons is to be allegorized at all in terms of the gospel order, it follows as the night the day that the analogy of Isaac, the son of promise, is maintained by

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64 “Paul’s Allegory,” 114, 116.
those (Gentiles though they are) who in Christ Jesus have received ‘the blessing of Abraham, . . . the promise of the Spirit through faith’ (3:14).”

Mussner paraphrases Paul as saying, “You have the benefit of being children of promise (v. 28); but do not think that this exempts you from suffering; rather you are undergoing persecution just as Isaac once did.”

Jean-Pierre Lémonon suggests that “In these verses, Paul superimposes two stories, that of the sons of Abraham and that of the Galatians,” and he remarks, “The story repeats itself, or rather the story of the sons now finds its true meaning, because those in accordance with the flesh ‘are persecuting’ the children of the promise, just as those ‘begotten in accordance with the flesh’ were persecuting (those begotten) in accordance with the spirit.”

Along similar lines, but expressed in different words, A. Andrew Das sees Paul in effect “developing two separate family trees or genealogies in 4:28–29. One family consists of children who were born ‘as a result of the flesh’ (θατὰ σάρκα, 4:29) in a merely human manner. The other family tree consists of children who were born ‘as a result of the Spirit’ (κατὰ πνεῦμα, 4:29).”

Witherington, on the other hand, emphasizes that the Galatians are children of promise “after the manner of Isaac”: Paul “wishes to stress that the Galatians came to receive the promise and the inheritance in the same miraculous fashion as Isaac had—by divine intervention. . . . It is in this way that they are really like Isaac, because of course otherwise they are not like him. Isaac, unlike the Galatians was a Semite and a ‘natural’ son of

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66 Galatians, 223.
67 Der Galaterbrief, 5th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1988), 329, quoted in Moo, Galatians, 309.
68 L’épitre aux Galates (CBiNT 9; Paris: Cerf, 2008), 161–62.
69 Galatians (Concordia Commentary; Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 507.
Abraham in the proper line and born of the proper mother.” L. Ann Jervis says that “Paul’s interpretive boldness in declaring that his uncircumcised converts are kin to Isaac, who was circumcised on the eighth day (Gen. 21:4), is in line with his conviction that his gospel and his converts manifest the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham.” It is precisely this “interpretive boldness” on the part of Paul that some interpreters find particularly difficult to swallow. Simon Légasse, for example, comments that Paul feels neither “hesitation nor scruple” (ni hésitation ni scrupule) to see in his own mission and its results the fulfilment of a prophecy, but it is necessary to recognize that this comes at the price of a “remarkable distortion” (remarquable gauchissement).

**Gal 4:29:***

*Why does Paul say that Ishmael “used to persecute” Isaac?*

Many interpreters draw attention to the rabbinic interpretations of Gen 21:9 that see Ishmael’s “play” as hostile towards Isaac. For example, Pierre Bonnard notes that neither the Hebrew nor Greek texts of Gen 21:9 make allusion to persecution of Isaac by Ishmael, but a late rabbinic commentary (T. Soṭa 6.6) that is attributed to Rabbi Ishmael (who died around the middle of the second century), interpreted Gen 21:9 in the sense of an animosity of Ishmael against Isaac: “Paul’s text shows that this exegetical tradition was even older and that the apostle knew of the rabbinic exegesis of his time.” Likewise, George reports,

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70 _Grace in Galatia_, 336.
71 _Galatians_ (NIBCNT 9; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1999), 125.
72 _L’épître de Paul aux Galates_ (LD 9; Paris: Cerf, 2000), 361.
73 _L’épître de Saint Paul aux Galates_, 2nd ed. (CNT 9; Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé,
“Most scholars believe that Paul was drawing on Jewish rabbinical tradition which attributed to Ishmael idolatry, wickedness, and overt hostility toward his younger brother Isaac.”

Many interpreters, however, noting that in Genesis Ishmael is not actually described as “persecuting” Ishmael, take Paul’s reference as an indication that he is thinking more about his own situation than about the situation described in the Genesis account (especially since he is using the imperfect tense). Phillip F. Esler notes that “Paul’s interpretation of Ishmael as persecutor allowed him to make a very pointed connection with his own situation, which to his view was characterized by various types of Judaic persecution (Gal 1:13, 23; 5:11; 6:12).” Tarazi, drawing on Chrysostom, argues that the key to understanding v. 29 is to “take it as a reply to a hypothetical objection based upon the actual persecution suffered by the Galatians.” Witherington argues that “the whole allegorical context of the discussion here leads one to expect a metaphorical use of verbs. . . . the exegetical handling of the Genesis story in early Judaism already involved a metaphorical handling of the key verb. It would not be surprising if Paul followed in that line.” Di Mattei, however, objects that Paul is not referring here to events in the Genesis story at all: “There is simply no indication in the text that this is indeed what Paul intended. . . . Rather, Paul seems to be setting up a temporal analogy by highlighting a then-now correspondence: as Scripture spoke τότε of the

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74 Galatians, 346. Longenecker goes so far as to provide an excursus that examines the Hagar-Sarah story in Jewish writings and in Paul (Galatians, 200–206).
76 Galatians, 252.
77 Grace in Galatia, 337–38.
persecution of the one(s) born *kata pneuma* (i.e., ὁ γιος της ἐλευθερας) at the hands of the one(s) born *kata sarka* (i.e., ὁ γιος της παιδισκης) so also it speaks allegorically of the same persecution νου.78

**Who is persecuting whom in Paul’s situation “so also now”?**

Dunn notes that Paul reads “the original story in the light of its contemporary parallel: Ishmael’s treatment of Isaac foreshadowing the persecution which the sons of the present Jerusalem were visiting on the sons of the Jerusalem above.” He then proceeds to list the evidence that “there was such persecution of the Nazarenes, with at least some official backing from Jewish authorities.”79 Likewise, Cosgrove argues that “the term διώκω is never used in the New Testament of internal strife,” and therefore in Gal 4:29, “one thinks most naturally of this familiar conflict between the church and the synagogue.”80 Longenecker, on the other hand, says, “By reference to what he sees as a confirming historical parallel, Paul identifies the Judaizers with Ishmael, who is ‘of the flesh’ and a persecutor, and the Gentile believers of Galatia with Isaac, who is of ‘the Spirit’ and persecuted.”81 Jervis points out, “As is clear from 4:17, Paul understands the influence of the rival evangelists on his converts as a form of harassment.”82 Matera adds, “While the Galatians clearly did not perceive the activity of the agitators as persecution, that is how Paul interpreted it.”83 Martyn champions this position, as we saw in chapter five.

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78 “Paul’s Allegory,” 121.
79 *Galatians*, 256–57.
81 *Galatians*, 217.
82 *Galatians*, 125–6.
83 *Galatians*, 178.
Gal 4:30:

*Who in Paul’s situation is to be cast out? Who is to do the casting out? (And from where?)*

Interpreters offer a range of conclusions here, closely connected with how they understand the persecution in Gal 4:29. Betz says that the term “exclude” (ἐκβάλλω) must be taken seriously: “Paul does the same with the Jews as his Jewish Christian opponents want to do with him.”

84 G. Walter Hansen says that Paul is telling the Galatians in biblical words to “expel those troublemakers and to adhere to the gospel of freedom.”

85 Barrett says that this is “the command of God to his (angelic) agents, and expresses what the fate of each party is to be.”

86 Martyn says, “If for the sake of the truth of the gospel the apostle can and must pronounce a curse on the Teachers (1:8–9), then the Galatian churches’ adherence to the truth of the gospel requires them to expel from their congregations the Teachers (presumably with their firmly committed followers).”

87 Susan G. Eastman says, “The singular imperative in Gen 21.10/Gal 4.30 does not speak directly to the Galatians, but to its original auditor, Abraham. When the Galatians again ‘overhear’ what Scripture says to Abraham (cf. 3.8), they hear their own destiny if they persist in their reliance on the destructive nexus of the law and the flesh.”

88 Di Mattei says, “Yet Paul clearly intends, above all, for the allegorical meaning to resonate through, which following from the preceding allegorical exposition can

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84 *Galatians*, 250–51.
87 *Galatians*, 446.
only be rendered as: ‘Throw out the Sinai covenant and her sons (!): for the sons of the Sinai covenant/present day Jerusalem will not inherit with the sons of the Jerusalem above.’”

Gal 4:31:

*Why is there an article with “free woman” but not with “slave woman”?*

Das emphasizes that “Paul’s use of the article in τῆς ἐλευθέρας, ‘the free woman,’ and the absence of the article before παιδίσκης, ‘slave woman’ (both in 4:31), should not be overlooked. This is ‘the free woman’ as represented by Paul’s Gospel message of Jesus Christ, and by that Gospel message alone.” Witherington, however, argues that “Paul has someone specific in mind when he speaks of the free woman, namely himself, but since he is uncertain who it is who is bewitching the Galatians, he uses a more generic reference for them.” Légasse dismisses this attention to the article, arguing that (1) παιδίσκης lacks the article because it precedes its nomen regens, according to the chiastic construction of the sentence, (2) ἐλευθέρας appears with the article because it has already appeared with the article in the preceding verse, and in 4:22–23, and finally, (3) ἐλευθέρας, unlike παιδίσκης, is an adjective, which makes the article “virtually indispensable” (*pratiquement indispensable*).

Gal 5:1:

*What does Paul mean by “for freedom, Christ set us free”?*

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89 “Paul’s Allegory,” 121.
90 *Galatians*, 511 n.172.
91 *Grace in Galatia*, 339 n.69.
92 *Galates*, 366 n.5.
Betz, noting that the concept of Christ as liberator occurs in Paul only here, says, “In the Pauline sense, ‘to be free’ means to participate in Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection.”\(^{93}\) De Boer, by contrast, looks elsewhere in Galatians and infers that Paul is referring to freedom from the law: “As the presence of the article in the Greek indicates, Paul has a particular form of freedom in view: what he in 2:4 calls ‘the freedom \([\text{hē eleutheria}]\) that we have in Christ Jesus,’ which is freedom \textit{from the law}.”\(^{94}\) Jan Lambrecht looks rather to Gal 3:13: “Christ redeemed \(\text{ἐμεγάζαζελ}\) us from the curse of the law” offers close structural parallels to “Christ set us free \(\text{ἠιεζεξίᾳ}\).”\(^{95}\) Witherington, by contrast, looks to an inscription from Delphi uncovered by Deissmann that uses this expression \(\text{τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ}\) to refer to the manumission of a slave by a god: “Paul is drawing on the concept of sacral redemption of slaves, a process involving the slave paying money into the temple treasury, because the slave as a slave could not initiate or negotiate a legal contract. Through a legal fiction the god in question then purchased the slave out of bondage, and thereby the slave became the property of the god and had to serve him.”\(^{96}\)

**What does Paul mean specifically by this term, “yoke of slavery”?**

François Vouga, drawing on a number of references in Greek literature, notes that “yoke” is a classical metonymy for slavery, and thus “the metaphor results from the interpretation which the allegory of the two women applies to the spiritual development of the

\(^{93}\) \textit{Galatians}, 257.  
\(^{94}\) \textit{Galatians}, 309.  
\(^{96}\) \textit{Grace in Galatia}, 340.
addresses.” According to Dunn, “Paul thinks of submission to the law as the enslavement of one people

Accordingly, D. Francois Tolmie asserts that Paul, “by describing the alternative propagated by the opponents as a ‘yoke of slavery,’ he makes it highly unattractive to his audience.” Yet Fung points out that the term “yoke” was used “in current Jewish parlance in an honorable sense for the obligation to keep the law of Moses, and the Judaizers may well have urged the Galatians to ‘take the yoke of the law’ upon themselves.”

Likewise, Moo says that the phrase “yoke of slavery” plays on “the widespread Jewish use of the imagery of the yoke to describe the law (e.g. m. 'Abot 3.5; cf. Acts 15:10; Matt. 11:29–30),” but he also adds, “Of course, Jewish teachers would never have called the law a ‘yoke of slavery.’”

Sylvia C. Keesmaat notes that Paul’s language invokes traditions from Exodus, especially as they are reworked in Isaiah and Ezekiel: “Paul is in effect comparing the Galatian believers’ desire to be circumcised to the Israelites’ desire to return to Egypt.” Das remarks, “Paul’s mutation of the long-standing Jewish imagery of the yoke of the Law into a negative image of a yoke of slavery is only possible for him because he has come to know God’s grace in terms of what has taken place in Christ (4:8–11).”

What does Paul mean by telling the Galatians not to “get caught up” in this yoke?

According to Dunn, “Paul thinks of submission to the law as the enslavement of one people

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97 An die Galater (HNT 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 120.
99 Galatians, 217.
100 Galatians, 320.
101 Paul and His Story: (Re)Interpreting the Exodus Tradition (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 173.
102 Galatians, 520.
to another; ironically, Judaism’s struggle to free itself from ‘the yoke of the Gentiles’ (1 Macc. xiii.41) was now resulting in the reverse situation, where Jews were trying to bring Gentiles into subserviency to them.”

Udo Borse notes, however, that Paul is addressing the Galatians, not his opponents: it is the actions of the Galatians that are decisive here: “It is not others who are being thought of here, but rather they themselves who are in danger of subjecting themselves to constraint.”

Why does Paul specifically tell the Galatians not to get entangled in a yoke of slavery “again”?

Michael Bachmann objects to the reasoning that the yoke of slavery refers to subservience to the Law by saying that “To turn to the Torah for the first time is not a return to Judaism!”

F. S. Malan argues that Paul’s use of the word πάλιν (“again”) in this verse suggests the Galatians “propensity for slavery, be it to the basic principles of the world (4:3, 9) or to justification by works of the law.” Along the same lines, Longenecker says that “in Paul’s view, from the perspective of being ‘in Christ,’ Judaism and paganism could be lumped together under the rubric ‘the basic principles of the world’ . . . and so a leaving of Christian principles for either one or the other was a renunciation of freedom and a return ‘again’ to

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103 Galatians, 263.
slavery.”\textsuperscript{107} Williams offers up the possibility that “although the Galatians to whom Paul directs this appeal had not yet allowed themselves to be circumcised, earlier, as God-fearers, they had observed a number of the commands of Torah, so that adopting the views of the agitators now would indeed be getting caught \textit{again} in the Law.”\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Galatians}, 225.

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Galatians}, 132.