

## ***“Abraham Had Two Sons”*** ***A Study in Pauline Hermeneutics***

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### **I**

Abraham had two sons—Ishmael, the elder, and Isaac, his junior by fourteen years. When Sarah, Abraham’s wife, had given him no child and had now reached an age when she was unlikely ever to have one, she decided to give him one by proxy through Hagar, her Egyptian maidservant. Hagar became pregnant immediately and did not conceal her sense of superiority over her mistress, who felt correspondingly humiliated. Relations between the two women were thenceforth strained. Hagar in due course gave birth to Ishmael, who was his aged father’s pride and joy. But the time came, years later, when Abraham and Sarah received the promise of Yahweh that Sarah herself would have a son, and the promise was fulfilled the following year in the birth of Isaac—so named because of the laughter, first of incredulity and then of exultation, which attended his annunciation and birth.

The status of Ishmael and his mother now suffered a radical change; the security they had enjoyed so long as Hagar was the mother of Abraham’s one and only son was imperilled. Matters came to a head at the festivities which marked the weaning of Isaac (Gen. 21:9-10):

Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.”

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Abraham’s affection for Ishmael made him unwilling to do any such thing; he yielded only when God told him to do as his wife said and promised that Ishmael would become the ancestor of a great nation, “because he is your offspring” (Gen. 21:13; cf. v. 18). A parallel and expanded form of this promise in Genesis 17:20 speaks of Ishmael as destined to become “the father of twelve princes.” These are to be identified with the twelve sons of Ishmael listed in Genesis 25:13-15, eponymous ancestors of the Arab tribes which occupied the territory “from Havilah to Shur” (Gen. 25:18), that is, in the Syrian Desert between the Euphrates and the Egyptian frontier.

### **II**

There are several levels at which we might conduct an exegetical study of this narrative. We might view it in its dramatic date and compare it with current practice in the Near East at that time. According to the code of Hammurabi, for example, “the children of the wife shall divide the property of the father’s house equally with the sons of the bondmaid; the son and heir, the son of the wife, shall choose a share (first) and take it.”<sup>1</sup> This prescription, however, does not envisage a childless wife; for a closer parallel we go to marriage contracts from Nuzu, where

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. D. Winton Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1958), p. 33 (Hammurabi Code, par. 170).

it is stipulated that if a wife prove childless she shall provide her husband with a slave wife and that the son of such a slave wife shall not be expelled.<sup>2</sup> It may be that Sarah, in refusing to let Ishmael share Isaac's inheritance and in demanding his expulsion, was insisting on a breach of established usage; hence Abraham would have been the more reluctant to accede to her demand until he was divinely directed to do so.

But such a study would be irrelevant for our present purpose. Equally irrelevant would be a source analysis of the Ishmael narrative in Genesis.<sup>3</sup> The interpretation with which

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we are concerned treats the narrative as a whole within Genesis as a completed literary unit.

To the Jews the narrative was one of great religious and ethnic interest. Isaac, the promised son, was their ancestor; they were therefore the chosen people, the heirs of the promise, the true children of Abraham, to whom the divine oracle said, "through Isaac shall your descendants be named" (Gen. 21:12). (It could not be denied that Isaac was the ancestor of the Edomites also, but the Edomites were not regarded as joint-heirs of the promise—of which more anon.) The Israelites were acquainted with their Ishmaelite neighbors who lived beyond the limits of the cultivated land, and they may have been familiar with some of their customs, such as circumcision of boys at puberty, after the example of Ishmael himself (Gen. 17:25), by contrast with their own custom of circumcision at eight days old. But as time went on, the Ishmaelites would readily rank as representatives of the Gentiles in general, excluded from the special covenant which Yahweh had made with Abraham's descendants through Isaac (and Jacob).

### III

In his essay on "Contemporary Approaches to New Testament Study" in volume 8 of the *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Dr. Ray Summers discusses, among other approaches, that of salvation-history and affirms that when we adopt this as our interpretative principle we are approaching the Bible from its own point of view. Certainly in adopting salvation-history as an interpretative principle in our study of the Old Testament we are approaching the Old Testament from the viewpoint of the New Testament writers. "The history of God's provision of this salvation," says Dr. Summers, "begins in Genesis 12 with God's call of Abraham, and it continues in his raising up Abraham's descendants to the status of a people" (p. 55). The crucial role of the call of Abraham and its sequel in the unfolding of God's saving purpose is underlined by the part which Abraham plays in the New Testament as the father of the faithful.

In particular, the birth of Isaac and the circumstances attending it receive careful attention from more than one New

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ephraim A. Speiser, "New Kirkuk Documents relating to Family Laws," *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 10 (1930): 1-73, especially pp. 31-33.

<sup>3</sup> The common source-analysis assigns Gen. 16:1-15 to J and 21:8-21 to E, with added notes by P in 16:16; 17:18, 20, 23-27.

Testament writer. The writer to the Hebrews says that it was "by faith" that Abraham, "together with Sarah herself, received power to have a child when he was past age, since he considered him faithful who had promised," and adds: "Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the sea-shore" (Heb. 11:11-12, "Sarah herself" being construed as the dative of accompaniment).<sup>4</sup> He had good reason for his statement, for in the Genesis narrative it is as the sequel to the divine promise that, through a son and heir of his own, Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and that we are told that "he believed Yahweh; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

In the letter to the Romans Paul enlarges at greater length on the same theme. When Abraham received the promise of God, he says (Rom. 4:19-22):

he did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead<sup>5</sup> because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb..., but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "reckoned to him as righteousness."

The message of justification by faith is thus shown to have ancient scriptural precedent, and at the same time it is argued that Abraham's true descendants are his spiritual descendants—those who reproduce his faith, whether they are uncircumcised (as he was at the time referred to) or circumcised—rather than those who merely claim him as their biological ancestor.

Some years earlier, in the letter to the Galatians, addressed to Christians who were disposed to take up "the yoke of the law," Paul had used the same text (Gen. 15:6) to the same

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effect, with the purpose of making it clear that the gospel was in the true succession to the religion of the patriarchs, a religion of faith in response to promise, not of works in obedience to law (Gal. 3:6-14). The law, promulgated at Sinai, was a temporary though necessary parenthesis in the course of God's dealings with mankind (Gal. 3:15 ff.). But in that immediate context he does not make mention of the circumstances in which Abraham's faith was reckoned to him as righteousness.

#### IV

Those circumstances—the promise of Isaac's birth and the consequent fulfillment of that promise—come up for special treatment a little farther on in the letter. "Tell me," says Paul, "you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman" (Gal. 4:21-22).

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<sup>4</sup> This involves reading *outē Sarra* with an iota subscript beneath each of the two final vowels. That Abraham is the subject is plain from the unambiguous phrase, *katabolē spermatos*, which can refer only to the father's part in the generative process.

<sup>5</sup> Perfect participle passive *nenekrōmenos*, as in Heb. 11:12, quoted above.

We note in passing the swift transition in a single sentence from a narrower sense of "law" to one that is more general. But let us imagine that Paul, in the days when he was a rabbinical student, had been set an exegetical exercise on this text: "Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman." The main outline of the exegesis would be predictable: Isaac was the ancestor of the chosen people, while Ishmael's descendants were Gentiles. The Jews are the sons of the free woman; the Gentiles are the sons of the slave woman. The Jews have received the liberating knowledge of the law; the Gentiles are in bondage to ignorance and sin. Such mercies as they enjoy are uncovenanted mercies, like the promise that Ishmael would be made "a great nation" (Gen. 17:20; 21:18); the mercies confirmed to the Jews were covenant mercies.

If the extraction of a *sensus plenior* from the patriarchal narratives was permissible at all, the *sensus plenior* of this narrative would have followed such lines as these.

But Paul inverts the exegesis which would have commended itself to him in earlier days. Now it is the people of the law who are the offspring of the slave woman; the offspring of the free woman is found in those who embrace the gospel of salvation by faith, comprising a minority of Jews and a rapidly

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increasing preponderance of Gentiles. To Jewish readers this exegesis must have appeared preposterous. It was as plain as anything could be that they were Sarah's offspring, while Hagar's descendants were Gentiles. One could envisage a group like the Qumran community claiming that its members alone, because of their special devotion to the law, were sons of the promise, while the apostate majority of Israel was worthy to be classified with the Ishmaelites; but that bears no resemblance to Paul's argument. For Paul, law and promise are antithetical. His own experience had led him to the settled conviction that the law brought men into bondage, while the gospel was a message of liberation. Therefore, he argues, the people of the law belong to Hagar's family; those who believe the gospel are Sarah's children. This point of view is related not only to Paul's personal experience but also to his understanding of the history of God's dealings with men. The gospel is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that in him and his offspring all nations would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 22:18, quoted in Gal. 3:8, 16). The law, which was given later, was (as we have said) a parenthetical dispensation of God for a particular purpose; its validity continued only until the fulfillment in Christ of the promise to Abraham, and even while it was valid it did not modify the terms of the antecedent promise.

## V

Paul makes a later, non-allegorical, reference to Abraham's sons in his letter to the Romans. There, when emphasizing the sovereignty of divine election, he insists that it is spiritual, not natural, descent that is important. For, he says (Rom. 9:7-9):

Not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants; but "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named" (Gen. 21:12). This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants. For this is what the promise said, "About this time I will return, and Sarah shall have a son" (Gen. 17:21).

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In the Galatians passage, however, he expounds the story of Isaac and Ishmael in terms of Christian and Jew in his own day, finding significance even in details which do not belong to the essence of his analogy. Thus he goes on to say that "as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now" (Gal. 4:29). But how and when did Ishmael "persecute" Isaac? The reference must be to the statement in Genesis 21:9 that during the weaning festivities Sarah saw Hagar's son "playing with her son Isaac." The phrase "with her son Isaac" is absent from the Masoretic Hebrew, but as it appears in the Septuagint and some manuscripts of the Vulgate, it may well have been present in the *Vorlage* of these two versions. But the Masoretic text as it stands says that Sarah saw Ishmael "playing" or "laughing" (*m<sup>e</sup>šahēq*). The "laughing" motif is so prominent in the earlier phase of the Isaac narrative that it is hardly surprising that Ishmael should have laughed. Had not Sarah herself just said, "God has made laughter (*š<sup>e</sup>hōq*) for me; every one who hears will laugh (*yīšhaq*) over me" (Gen. 21:6)? Why should Ishmael not join in the universal laughter? But what was the nature of his laughter? The King James Version preserves a tradition that his laughter was unfriendly: "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian ... mocking." But even "mocking" is hardly tantamount to "persecuting."

What was it, then, in Ishmael's conduct on this occasion that made Sarah demand his expulsion? The original answer was probably quite simple: the sight of Ishmael playing with her baby son reminded Sarah that Isaac had this older brother who had been since his birth the apple of his father's eye, and she felt that Isaac's position was insecure so long as Ishmael was around. But the rabbis suspected a more sinister implication beneath the innocent participle *m<sup>e</sup>šahēq* ("laughing" or "playing"). The Palestinian Targum Neofiti 1 says that Sarah saw Ishmael "doing things which were not seemly" and an additional gloss explains these as actions pertaining to a foreign cult. Rabbi Ishmael (c. A.D. 100) also charged Ishmael with pagan worship, on the strength of Exodus 32:6, where the verb "play" is used of Israel's worship of the golden calf; more specifically, he said that Ishmael caught locusts

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and offered them in sacrifice (as a child, he could not catch larger animals). His contemporary, Rabbi Akiba, identified Ishmael's conduct as sexual immorality, on the strength of Genesis 39:17, where Potiphar's wife complains that Joseph came "to insult me" (*lišhōq bî*; literally "to play with me"). But Rabbi Azariah (in the name of Rabbi Levi) recalled the use of the same verb with a connotation of bloodshed in 2 Samuel 2:14 ("Let the young men arise and play before us") and expounded the situation thus:<sup>6</sup> "Ishmael said to

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<sup>6</sup> These rabbinical opinions are preserved in *Bereshith Rabba* 53:11.

Isaac, let us go and see our portions in the field';<sup>7</sup> then Ishmael would take a bow and arrows and shoot them in Isaac's direction, while pretending to be playing."<sup>8</sup>

It may be an earlier form of this last interpretation that Paul has in mind when he says that Ishmael "persecuted" Isaac, finding in this a further correspondence with his contemporary situation (v. 29). Alternatively, but less probably, he may have thought of occasions (e.g. Judg. 8:24; Ps. 83:6) when the descendants of Ishmael committed aggression against the Israelites, Isaac's descendants.

## VI

In working out the correspondence of the old situation with the new, Paul identifies Hagar (1) with Mount Sinai, where the law was given, and (2) with "the present Jerusalem." Sarah is identified with "the Jerusalem above" but she is not identified with any express evangelical counterpart to Sinai—perhaps because there is none, or perhaps because (as in Heb. 12:18 ff.) the heavenly Jerusalem is the evangelical counterpart to Sinai (as well as to the present Jerusalem). The identification of Hagar with Sinai may have been helped along by

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the existence of the word *hagar* ("crag"), which has a similar sound to Hagar, and could have been used of some Arabian mountain which in Paul's time was equated with Sinai.<sup>9</sup> But the identification simply indicates that Hagar is interpreted of the law, which holds men and women in bondage. When Paul speaks of "the present Jerusalem," he means not the literal city but the whole legal constitution of Judaism, which then had its world-center in Jerusalem. Law means bondage; the community which is under the law is "in slavery with her children" (Gal. 4:25). Similarly, "the Jerusalem above," which is the mother-city of free souls, is not located in the realms above the sky: it is the community of the new covenant.

Sarah's demand to Abraham, "Cast out the slave and her son..." (Gen. 21:10), is treated by Paul as a principle of holy writ; he introduces it with the rhetorical question: "But what does the scripture say?" (v. 30). Whatever moral or legal problems may have been raised by Sarah's demand in its historical setting, in Paul's application it becomes the statement of a basic gospel truth: legal bondage and gospel freedom cannot co-exist. In other words, as he puts it: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

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<sup>7</sup> Ishmael's invitation to Isaac is reminiscent of Cain's invitation to Abel in the Samaritan, Septuagint, and Vulgate texts of Gen. 4:8, "Let us go into the field"; the added reference to "our portions" suggests a dispute about their respective inheritances. According to Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai. Ishmael interrupted the rejoicings over Isaac by saying, "You are fools. for I am the firstborn and I receive a double portion": this, he adds, may be inferred from Sarah's words in Gen. 21 :10. "the son of the slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac" (*Bereshith Rabba* 53:11). The Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan on Gen. 22:1 represents such a dispute breaking out between the two brothers after they had grown to manhood.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gen. 21:20, "he [Ishmael] became an expert with the bow."

<sup>9</sup> The traditional identification of Mount Sinai with Jebel Musa does not appear earlier than the fourth century A.D. The Hagrites are referred to as an Arab group in Ps. 83:6; 1 Chron. 5:10, 19-20; 27:31.

The idea of two Jerusalem, lower and upper, earthly and heavenly, is not peculiar to Paul. Two other New Testament writers, the author of Hebrews<sup>10</sup> and the seer of the Apocalypse,<sup>11</sup> make use of it; but it goes back behind them all. As the wilderness tabernacle of Moses' day was to be constructed according to the pattern shown to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod. 25:40), so the temple and city of Jerusalem were regarded as material copies of eternal and heavenly archetypes. In 1 Chronicles 28:19 the plan of the temple which Solomon received from David is said to have been "made clear by the writing from the hand of Yahweh concerning it." More precisely, in Wisdom 9:8 Solomon, addressing God, describes his temple as "a copy of the holy tent which thou didst prepare from the beginning"—the "holy tent" being God's heavenly

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dwelling-place. At a later date the rabbis inferred the existence of the heavenly Jerusalem from the words of Psalm 122:3 ("Jerusalem, built as a city which is bound firmly together"), which they rendered: "Jerusalem, built like the city which is its fellow."<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Meir, in the first half of the second century A.D., said that of the seven heavens the fourth was called zebul, the high place, "in which are Jerusalem and the temple, and an altar is built, at which Michael the great prince stands and offers sacrifice."<sup>13</sup> In the Apocalypse of Baruch, written shortly after the catastrophe of A.D. 70, Baruch is told on the eve of the destruction of Solomon's temple that the earthly Jerusalem is not the true city of God: the true city was revealed to Adam before his fall, to Abraham when God made a covenant with him (cf. Heb. 11:10), and to Moses at the same time as he was shown the plan of the tabernacle on Mount Sinai (2 Baruch 4:2ff.).

But Paul's present use of the idea of the two Jerusalems is apparently the oldest approximately datable reference to it, although the way in which he introduces it suggests that it was no new idea to him nor, probably, to his Galatian readers.

## VII

"Abraham had two sons"—and so, in the next generation, had Isaac. And as it was through Isaac, not through Ishmael, that Abraham's descendants were named, so it was through Jacob, not through Esau, that Isaac's descendants were named, in the sense that it was not through Esau, but through Jacob, that the line of promise ran. But while Esau's descendants, like Ishmael's, were Gentiles, Paul does not invert the roles in the second generation as he does in the previous one and relate Esau to the Jews and Jacob to the Gentiles. On the contrary, in his quotation of Malachi 1:2-3, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom. 9:13), he does not depart from the traditional Jewish assessment of these two brothers and their progeny. True, he says that not all the descendants of Jacob or Israel are the true Israelites (Rom. 9:6), but he does not

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<sup>10</sup> Heb. 12:22 (cf. 11:10, 16).

<sup>11</sup> Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 9ff.

<sup>12</sup> Vocalizing *ḥ<sup>a</sup>bērāh* instead of MT *ḥubb<sup>e</sup>rāh*: cf. Targum and Midrash *Tehil-lim ad loc.*

<sup>13</sup> TB *Ḥagigah* 12b.

class as Edomites those sons of Jacob who fail to qualify as true Israelites. For there was one material difference between the two situations; Jacob and Esau were twin sons of one and the same mother, Rebecca, whereas Ishmael and Isaac were sons of two different mothers, one of a slavegirl and the other of a free woman—a free woman who was long childless and gave birth to a son belatedly, when all hope of such a thing had been given up.<sup>14</sup>

The mothers, then, as well as the sons play a determinant part in Paul's treatment of the Genesis narrative. And the contrast between the two mothers may have been suggested initially to Paul not by the Genesis narrative but by a text from the prophets which he quotes in this same connection. When he contrasts the two mothers in terms of the two Jerusalems, he reinforces his contrast by quoting (v. 27) the apostrophe of Isaiah 54:1: "Rejoice, O barren one that does not bear; break forth and shout, thou who are not in travail; for the desolate has more children than she who has a husband." In the original context these words refer to the derelict city of Jerusalem, bereft of her children who have been carried into exile, but destined to recover from her desolation and be blessed with returning children more numerous than those whom she lost. The prophet is probably not contrasting two distinct women; he is rather contrasting the desolate Jerusalem, widowed and bereft of her children, with Jerusalem as she was in the days of her earlier prosperity.

But Isaiah 54:1 is part of Isaiah 40-66, which in the New Testament is one of the most fertile fields of *testimonia*, from the "voice" of Isaiah 40:3<sup>15</sup> to the "new heavens and new earth" of Isaiah 65:17 (cf. 66:22).<sup>16</sup> By the New Testament writers, and especially by Paul, this whole corpus of prophecy is given a gospel interpretation. For such a reinterpretation

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the early Christians (whether they were aware of it or not) had pre-Christian precedent, as has been rather firmly established by the discovery and study of the Qumran texts. The command of the "voice" of Isaiah 40:3 provided the Qumran sectaries with authority for their wilderness retreat (1QS 8:13-14): "In the wilderness prepare the way of the *LORD*; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." And in a fragmentary commentary on Isaiah from Cave 4 (4Q Is<sup>d</sup>) parts of chapter 54 are quoted and expounded in such a way as to refer to the elect community forming the nucleus of the restored Israel of the new age. The promise to the widowed city, "I will lay your foundations in lapis lazuli" (Isa. 54:11), is explained as follows: "Its interpretation is that they have founded the council of the community, the priests and the peo[ple, to be] a congregation of his elect like a stone of lapis lazuli among the stones."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In Cyprian's *Testimonia* (1.20) the argument of Gal. 4:22ff. is summarized and then amplified with a reference to Jacob's two wives—the weak-eyed Leah representing the synagogue and Rachel, the mother of Joseph ("a type of Christ," he says), representing the church. He finds the same twofold analogy later in Elkanah's two wives, the church being represented by Hannah, the mother of Samuel (another "type of Christ"). All that we can say here is that the motif of the sterile wife ultimately getting the better of her fertile rival is a recurring one in the Old Testament narrative, drawing attention to Yahweh's grace and power (cf. Ps. 113:9 and, for a partial New Testament parallel, Luke 1:36-37).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Mark 1:3; John 1:21

<sup>16</sup> Cf. 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1.

<sup>17</sup> John M. Allegro and Arnold A. Anderson, eds. *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert of Jordan. V: Qumrân Cave 4: 1(4Q 1.58-4Q186)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 27-28.



So by Paul the promises of Isaiah 54 are understood as addressed to the church. But for Paul the contemporary church is a predominantly Gentile community. Formerly the Gentiles were spiritually sterile, producing no fruit for God, but now their response to the gospel has made them more fruitful than the synagogue; the new Jerusalem has more children than ever the old Jerusalem had. The two women have now become distinct persons.

This is not the only place where an Old Testament situation within the frontiers of Israel is applied in the New Testament to a more comprehensive situation, involving Gentiles as well as Jews. We recall, for example, the way in which more New Testament writers than one interpret Hosea's Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi not of temporarily apostate Israel but of the Gentiles who formerly were unrelated to God but have now been brought into his family (cf. Rom. 9:25-26; 1 Pet. 2:10). The principle of divine action is the same, but in the Gentile mission it is exhibited on a broader canvas.

The Christian application of Isaiah 54:1 was probably not peculiar to Paul; more probably it was part of the common exegetical stock of the church. But, when taken together with

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the insistence that Abraham's true offspring embraces all believers, and with the undoubted fact that Isaac's birth fulfilled that divine promise belief in which procured Abraham's justification, the Christian exegesis of the desolate woman and the married woman of Isaiah 54:1 probably suggested to Paul his "allegorical" exposition of the Hagar-Sarah narrative in terms of law and gospel, producing children for servitude and for freedom respectively.

## VIII

"This is an allegory," says Paul (Gal. 4:24), as he repeats the bare Old Testament statement that "Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman." "This is an allegory"—or, "these are allegorical entities," each of them corresponding to a reality in the new situation.

What Paul refers to here as allegory is not allegory in the Philonic sense, but what we frequently call typology: a narrative from Old Testament history is interpreted in terms of the new covenant. We have simple examples in 1 Corinthians: "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (5:7), and the people of Christ experience their own counterparts of the Red Sea passage, the manna, the water from the rock, and the vicissitudes of the wilderness wanderings (10:1-11). In this particular area of typology Paul and his Christian contemporaries had a precedent in the exilic prophets who portrayed their people's return from Babylonian exile in terms of a second Exodus.

A more elaborate example is the midrash on Exodus 34:29-35, the incident of Moses' shining face, in 2 Corinthians 3:7:4-6, where the fading reflection of the divine glory on Moses' face is contrasted with the permanent glory in the face of Christ and interpreted to show the inferiority of the old covenant, administered by Moses, to the new covenant, inaugurated by Christ. The contrast which Paul draws in this midrash is between the old covenant as the administration of law, pronouncing the death-sentence upon the law-breaker, and the new

covenant as the administration of the Spirit, imparting life to the believer. Since "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17), the contrast between

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law and Spirit is tantamount to the contrast between freedom and bondage which Paul draws in the Galatians passage. But in 2 Corinthians 3:7ff. the analogy between the old and the new proceeds fairly smoothly, step by step, without violating the natural sense of the old.<sup>18</sup> In the Galatians passage, however, the analogy is forcibly inverted. Whereas in the other passages the Old Testament narrative is left intact, in the Galatians passage the analogy finds itself up against the historical fact that *Isaac* was the ancestor of the Jews, while *Ishmael's* descendants were Gentiles. Such a clash between type and antitype is unique in Paul, and its uniqueness may be regarded as relevant to the thesis which I have sustained elsewhere,<sup>19</sup> that Galatians is the earliest of Paul's surviving letters. In itself it could have no demonstrative force, but when taken along with more positive arguments it could add to their cumulative effect.

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<sup>18</sup> It may indeed be held that the more natural inference from the wording of Exod. 34:29-35 is that Moses veiled his face in the presence of the Israelites because the radiance dazzled their eyesight; but the midrash of 2 Cor. 3:7ff. represents a perfectly possible interpretation of that same wording—an interpretation, of course, in line with the lesson which Paul is concerned to inculcate.

<sup>19</sup> "Galatian Problems: 4. The Date of the Epistle," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 54 (Spring 1972): 250-67.