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Hagar as Israel: A Prismatic Reading of Hagar and Ishmael

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By Rev. Wesley Walker

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Abstract

Wesley Walker: Hagar as Israel: A Prismatic Reading of Hagar and Ishmael
(Under the direction of Dr. Gary Yates)

The Hagar and Ishmael story (Gen 16, 21) is one of Genesis' most undervalued stories. Historically, Jewish and Christian interpreters have approached the text with a bias against Hagar in favor of Sarah. This approach hampers the ability of interpreters to see how the author(s) of Genesis may be utilizing the narrative in a pro-Hagar way. This thesis rehabilitates Hagar and Ishmael's image by engaging in a charitable and canonical hermeneutic which seeks to see the story in light of a network of inner-biblical allusions. There are three important literary connections which are necessary to understand Hagar and Ishmael include the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22), the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen 3), and Israel's Exodus. These three associations open the possibility for a positive reading of Hagar and Ishmael that shows God's universal tendencies which transcend ethnicity.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The plight of Hagar and Ishmael is one of the Bible's oft overlooked stories. It is easily relegated to a position of lower importance because it does not directly deal with Israel's etiology through Abraham or is used as a cautionary tale with Hagar and Ishmael representing the problem. This is an unfortunate hermeneutical reality because both of these approaches miss the point of the narrative which is literarily complex and theologically meaningful. As study of the Pentateuch has progressed and developed, it is clear how masterfully written it is. There are no accidents. Rather, the author(s) and editor(s) involved in shaping the account to its final form were incredibly intentional about what material they included and the order in which they arranged that material.

Given this reality, it is important that modern readers of the Hagar and Ishmael story do not neglect its literary importance or the role it plays in Genesis' larger agenda. According to Schneider:

> Hagar is a complex figure. She is a mixture of opposites: slave and free, subservient and arrogant, favored by the Deity and oppressed, foreign to and part of Israel. Her role as a mother is her most important one, since that is her primary role from her introduction to her last reference. Her background stands in stark contrast to the matriarchs. The Deity views her with sympathy and gives her help, but only a limited measure. This mix of characteristics is what makes it difficult to determine precisely who Hagar is, and highlights with her actions and those people around her how difficult the human situation can be.[1]

Hagar is an important figure in the literary of schema of Genesis who is often overlooked or maligned. Hers is the first annunciation story in all of Scripture.[2] She receives blessing from God

[1] Tammi J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 119.

[2] Bernard P. Robinson, "Characterization in the Hagar and Ishmael Narratives," in *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 27 (2013): 206; Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 2010), 67.

and the promise of a great nation as her consolation (Gen 16:10-12). From a literary perspective, she is utilized by the author(s) of Genesis in conversation with other stories from the book like the sacrifice of Isaac and Adam and Eve. Even more than that, her story is used as a way to retell the story of Israel as depicted in the book of Exodus. As a result, it is important for readers to rectify the trajectory of negative readings of Hagar and Ishmael that have taken place over the course of Jewish and Christian history of reading the text.

Statement of the Problem

According to Carol Bakhos, "Most interpreters extol Sarah's virtues, from her astounding beauty to her impeccable character and devotion to her husband and whitewash her behavior toward Hagar and Ishmael."[3] As will be shown in Chapter II, this has been the dominant mode of interpretation in both Jewish and Christian contexts. Many who have been exposed to modern Christian interpretations of the story may come away with the understanding that Hagar is "sultry and sinister—the archetypal other woman."[4] For example, Waltke insists that the references to Hagar as a "maidservant" (Gen 16:1; see below for a specific discussion of why Hagar is referred to this way by the narrator) are proof that she is "in the wrong when she tries to transgress social boundaries" and that even though she is "a heroic figure," it is "in spite of her own unrighteousness."[5] While such readings are understandable given the trajectory of the story's

[3] Carol Bakhos, *The Family of Abraham: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Interpretations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 106.

[4] Debbie Blue, "A Closer Look at Hagar: The Other Woman," *Christian Century*, November 24, 2014, accessed January 5, 2018, https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2014-11/other-woman.

[5] Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 249-50.

interpretation, these hermeneutical decisions miss what the author is actually trying to communicate.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, it is necessary to understand the way in which Hagar and Ishmael have been understood in the stream of Jewish and Christian biblical interpretation. This will be accomplished by first looking at the Jewish readings represented by Philo, Josephus, and the rabbinic traditions. Beginning with Paul's reading of the story in Galatians 4, Christian readings will be traced chronologically from the Early Church to the modern period. The second purpose is to establish a methodology by presenting three important interpretive emphases: charity, canonical reading, and an emphasis on inner-biblical allusion. It is important also to establish the boundaries and shapes of the two major Hagar texts (Gen 16:1-14; 21:8-21). The final purpose is to provide an interpretation of Hagar and Ishmael's story in a way that meets the standards set by the three emphases.

Statement of the Importance of the Problem

As will be argued in Chapter III, it is necessary for readers to approach the book of Genesis and its larger setting of the Pentateuch as a literary whole. When taking on this sort of hermeneutical orientation, the text becomes like a mosaic depicting a larger picture using smaller episodes. Consequently, such an interpretive framework brings significance to each individual story within the book because it understands that the whole is composed of parts. To ignore or misunderstand a layer of the text is equivalent to putting together a puzzle while misplacing the pieces. If the specifics are not in harmony with the larger picture, the whole thing can become

warped. Unfortunately, this has been the case with the Hagar and Ishmael story. Not only has negative bias towards these figures deleteriously affected this particular story but it has also hampered readers' ability to see how Hagar and Ishmael function in the larger, canonical picture.

Statement of Position on the Problem

Given the abuses and misunderstandings of previous readings of the story, it is necessary to rehabilitate Hagar and Ishmael in the collective Christian conscience. Hagar and Ishmael, while not perfect, are not deserving of such hermeneutical neglect. When seen through the lens of inner-biblical allusion, however, it becomes evident that they are important to the literary development of the story of Israel as depicted in the Old Testament. Hagar and Ishmael's story reverberates throughout the Pentateuch. They foreshadow the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22), Abraham and Sarah's actions look backwards to Adam and Eve (Gen 2-3), and the plight of Hagar and Ishmael prefigures the flight of the Israelite people out of Egypt as depicted in the book of Exodus.

If the entrenched view negatively biased against Hagar and Ishmael were accurate, the way they are utilized by the author(s) of the Pentateuch would be incoherent. The text does not reflect a disparaging view towards them. Rather, the way God intervenes and their story and the way the biblical authors employ it make demonstrate a profound point: God cares for all people, especially those on the margins. Not only that, but he is faithful to the Abrahamic covenant in which all nations of the earth receive blessing through the Abrahamic line (Gen 17:6; 22:18). Even early on in Scripture, it is evident that God's intentions are not ethnocentric or exclusive to Abraham. He acts on behalf of the outsider as well.

Limitations

Limits provide focus and enable research to be targeted in a more specific way. As a result, this thesis imposes some limits on itself in different areas. First, Hagar and Ishmael play an important role in the story of Islam. However, that tradition is omitted from Chapter II. This is intentional for multiple reasons. Out of the Abrahamic traditions, Islam is the least like the others. From a Christian perspective, Islam makes a radical divergence from the Judeo-Christian tradition while Christianity is the culmination of Judaism. Jews and Christians share large portions of religious texts in the form of the Hebrew Bible so they draw from the same stories even while reaching differing interpretations. Islam does not do this and so it would explode the grounds of research in order to fully include their perspective.

Second, in Chapter II, it should be noted that the section on Modern Interpretations is limited to only two categories: Moralistic Readings and Womanist Interpretations. The main purpose for this is twofold. First, literary interpretations advocated by modern scholars are discussed in Chapter IV so superfluity is avoided. Second, the purpose of Chapter II is to see is to see how Hagar and Ishmael have taken root in the Christian tradition. Moralistic readings are the clearest distillation of this trajectory. Womanist interpretations are important to consider precisely because they mark such a radical break from the interpretive tradition. By limiting that section to these two perspectives, the stark contrasts are more heavily emphasized.

Third, Chapter IV limits the amount of biblical allusions to three and all from the Hebrew Bible. More allusions could be drawn from both the Old and New Testaments. However, only three are included: Hagar and Abraham, Abraham and Sarah and the Fall of Adam and Eve, and the plight of Hagar and Ishmael and the Exodus. These are chosen because they mark the strongest and most significant of inner-biblical allusions.

CHAPTER II: HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

Throughout the centuries, Hagar and Ishmael have elicited many negative interpretations from Jewish and Christian perspectives. Often, as Heard affirms, the "interpretive impugning of Hagar and Ishmael owes more to interpreters' own attitudes over the centuries than to biblical data."[1] As will be seen, the Judeo-Christian traditions have habitually lacked charity toward her. This tendency is understandable given the proclivity of those traditions toward a pro Abraham-Isaac narrative often at the expense of Hagar and Ishmael. Nevertheless, this implicit bias, mixed with the allegorical contrast between Sarah and Hagar in Paul's letter to the Galatians (4:21-27), created a trajectory for Christian hermeneutics that has often devalued Hagar to make a defense of Sarah. While this bias has continued into modern times, historical criticism forced readers into considering how the development of the text impacted meanings, which will be further discussed in Chapter III. However, in modern times, new forms of reading have emerged, like womanist interpretations, which see Hagar not only as a positive figure but also as a symbol of empowerment and liberation. Most of these readings are valuable insofar as they are a helpful corrective but unfortunately go to the extreme. The survey of literature reveals that there is a need for a more balanced reading of Hagar and Ishmael.

Ancient Jewish Interpretations

To assess the role of Hagar and Ishmael within Judaism, three main sources will be considered. These sources are Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-50 CE), Flavius Josephus (37-100 CE), and the Midrash.

[1] Christopher Heard, "On the Road to Paran: Toward a Christian Perspective on Hagar and Ishmael," in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 68, no. 3 (2014): 270.

Philo

Philo of Alexandria was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher. Deeply influenced by Platonism and the larger Greek philosophical milieu, he frequently engaged in allegorical interpretation of Scripture.[2] This is evident in his reading of Hagar and Sarah, which paves the way for the Pauline allegory of Galatians 4 (which will be discussed below). Philo sees Abraham as a soul in search of wisdom and the pair of wives as different phases in the pursuit of wisdom, with Hagar being the early parts of the path which lead to wisdom and Sarah being wisdom itself:

> …he does not say that Sarah did not bring forth at all, but only that she did not bring forth for him, for Abraham. For we are not as yet capable of becoming the fathers of offspring of virtue, unless we first of all have a connection with her handmaiden; and the handmaiden of wisdom is the encyclical knowledge of music and logic, arrived at by previous instruction. For as in houses there are vestibules placed in front of staircases, and as in cities there are suburbs, through which one must pass in order to enter into the cities; so also the encyclical branches of instruction are placed in front of virtue, for they are the road which conducts to her. And as you must know that it is common for there to be great preludes to great propositions, and the greatest of all propositions is virtue, for it is conversant about the most important of all materials, namely, about the universal life of man; very naturally, therefore, that will not employ any short preface, but rather it will use as such, grammar, geometry, astronomy, rhetoric, music, and all the other sorts of contemplation which proceed in accordance with reason; of which Hagar, the handmaid of Sarah, is an emblem, as we will proceed to show.[3]

Being a "vestibule" or "suburb" of wisdom shows that Philo maintains a moderately positive posture towards Hagar. However, from a literary reading of the text, Philo's allegory still suffers from inadequacy because he overlooks the clearly prevalent flaws of Sarah (and Abraham) by positing her as the culmination of wisdom.

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[2] David M Scholer, "Foreword: An Introduction to Philo Judaeus of Alexandria," in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995).

[3] Philo, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. Charles Duke Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 304–305; Backhos, 107.

Even when he grapples with the text on a literal level, Philo exhibits a fair amount of bias towards Sarah, which is understandable given his Jewish heritage. The most telling example is how he sees the offering of Hagar to Abraham by Sarah (Gen 16:2). In Philo's reading, "Sarah graciously and humbly offers an elaborate rationale for her motives. Since as a couple they cannot fulfill the purpose of their union Abraham should not suffer on account of her infertility. She exhorts him to allow himself to become a father."[4] So when Philo approaches the story utilizing a more literal hermeneutic, he does so with the assumption that Sarah acts selflessly (Chapter IV will discuss some of the problems with this understanding of the passage). To Philo, Hagar is either a decent figure who is comparatively of lesser value than Sarah or she is a somewhat passive figure who becomes a means by which Sarah accomplishes her selfless act of allowing her husband to become a father through a surrogate.

Josephus

Jewish historian Flavius Josephus was a Jewish-Roman historian who sought to bridge the gap between his Jewish heritage and the reality of the Roman Empire. He discusses the Hagar and Ishmael story in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (c. 93-94 CE). Unlike Philo, he opts for a more literal hermeneutic though he does insert some interesting details into the story. He associates the Arab people with Ishmael. He also claims that Ishmael was circumcised at age 13 and is the reason why the Arab people circumcise at that same age (*Antiquities* 1.12.2-3).

Josephus exhibits a positive view of Sarah. He believes that she "at first loved Ishmael, who was born of her own handmaid Hagar, with an affection not inferior to that of her own son, for he was brought up, in order to succeed in the government; but when she herself had borne

[4] Bakhos, *The Family of Abraham*, 107.

Isaac, she was not willing that Ishmael should be brought up with him, as being too old for him, and able to do him injuries when their father should be dead" (1.12.3). By explaining it in this manner, Josephus seems to justify Sarah's actions as purely protective in a maternal sense. By attributing this prediction that Ishmael could be responsible for injuring Isaac after Abraham's death to Sarah, Josephus attempts to explain 21:9 when "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac."[5] What Sarah specifically saw is not elucidated by Josephus. The thing that really matters to him is that whatever Sarah saw, it was enough for her maternal instincts to be alerted.

It appears as though Josephus offers a polemical support of Sarah at the expense of Hagar. He sees Hagar and Ishmael as guilty of exhibiting pride by committing the sin of acting above their station. Hagar does this by behaving under the assumption that her son would receive the rights of the firstborn (1.187-90). In Hagar's defense, this appears to be the initial assumption of Abraham and Sarah as well. Ishmael is guilty by extension and compounds the severity of the situation by mocking and laughing at Isaac (Gen 21:8). After running away into the wilderness, Josephus adds that the angel rebukes her for her behavior and encourages her to exercise restraint to prevent future pain and suffering.[6]

Josephus' reading seems to place the burden of guilt primarily on Hagar and Ishmael, not Sarah. However, he does not see them as unredeemable either. Rather, he sees some redemption

[5] Many scholars have attempted to understand this verse in different ways. Some see it as a sign that Ishmael was abusing Isaac, physically or sexually. In reality, it is most likely that Ishmael was either explicitly mocking at or playing with Isaac as if they were on equal footing. The verb, צחק, translated "playing" by the NRSV or "mocking" by the CSB, NASB, NET, NIV, NLT is a play on Isaac's name (יצחק), a feature drawn out by the CEB and ESV translations which choose "laughing." Because the verb appears in the *piel* form in this instance, it does most likely carry a negative connotation in the sense that Ishmael was most likely exhibiting some form of cruelty towards his brother in the sense of "derisive laughing and thus mocking." See Tremper Longman III, *Genesis*, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 272.

[6] Backhos, *The Family of Abraham*, 108-9.

as possible, though whether it actually occurs is vague. He does, however, recognize the Ishmaelite descendants as children of Abraham who are virtuous and dignified (1.12.3). So, to Josephus' literal reading of the story, hostility between Sarah and Hagar (and, by extension, Ishmael) is the result of inappropriate attitudes and Sarah's admirable pragmatic concern for Isaac, her biological child.

Midrash

The Midrash is "a literary work of Scriptural commentary, known in the plural as Midrashim. A Midrash may be either halakic (legal, procedural) or haggadic (non-legal, illustrative, etc.) in content; exegetical, homiletical, or narrative in form."[7] Generally speaking, according to Leviant, even Midrash does not adequately deal with the similarities between Isaac and Ishmael (see below for more details on the parallels between Genesis 21 and 22).[8] In fact, he makes the point that many rabbis have interpreted the passage in a way that demonizes Hagar and Ishmael. Since Abraham provides them only bread and water upon their exile (21:14), they deduce his parsimoniousness to be on account of the faults of Hagar and Ishmael.[9]

A specific example of a rabbinical interpretation of Hagar and Ishmael can be found in *Genesis Rabbah* which falls in the Amoraic period, dating somewhere in the 200-500 CE

[7] Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 122.

[8] Curt Leviant, "Parallel Lives: The Trials and Traumas of Isaac and Ishmael," in *Biblical Review* 15 (1999): 20.

[9] Aryeh Cohen, "Hagar and Ishmael: A Commentary," in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 68, no. 3 (2014): 251.

range.[10] It adds the detail that Hagar was a member of the household of Pharaoh (XLV.1).[11] This extra-biblical backstory would explain the way she recoils at her treatment by Sarah because, as royalty, she would not have been used to being in the station of servant. However there are two ways in which Hagar and Ishmael end up receiving blame for the actions of Abraham and Sarah. First, the Midrash adds that Hagar was spiteful to Sarah, telling visitors that "My mistress Sarai is not inwardly what she is outwardly: she appears to be a righteous woman, but she is not. For had she been a righteous woman, see how many years have passed without her conceiving, whereas I conceived in one night!"[12]

The second way in which the Midrash perpetrates a negative view of Hagar and Ishmael is in its interpretation of Ishmael's "playing" with Isaac (Gen 21:9). *Genesis Rabbah* includes a variety of opinions on what exactly occurs in the text but all of them are worse than what was discussed above. Rabbi Akiva taught that "Sarah saw Ishmael ravish maidens, seduce married women and dishonor them."[13] Rabbi Ishmael believed that the term "playing" actually refers to idolatry meaning that Sarah caught Ishmael "building altars, catching locusts, and sacrificing them."[14] According to Rabbi Eleazar, violence is involved while Rabbis Azariah and Levi clarify that this violence was in the form of Ishmael shooting arrows at Isaac.[15] Leviant is correct: the Midrash does not change the trajectory of Jewish interpretation, instead reifying the interpretive

[10] Scott R. Moore, "Midrash," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

[11] H. Freeman and Maurice Simon, eds. *Midrash Rabbah Translated into English with Notes, Glossary and Indices: Genesis* (London: The Soncino Press, 1961), 379.

[12] Ibid., 381.

[13] Ibid., 469.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

practices of Philo and Josephus that blame Hagar and Ishmael for the disturbance of domestic tranquility in Abraham's household, while adding extra-biblical dialogue and exaggerations of Ishmael's "playing" with Isaac in Genesis 21:9.

Christian Interpretations

Distinctively Christian interpretations of the Hagar and Ishmael story originate with the Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:21-27. While different hermeneutical frameworks have been used by interpreters through the centuries, the overarching tenor of those interpretations have been mainly negative or, at most, lukewarm towards Hagar and Ishmael. Interestingly, it has been the rise of womanist hermeneutics that have created a shift away from the status quo.

St. Paul: Galatians 4:21-27

The most formative Christian interpretations of the Hagar and Ishmael story can be found in Galatians 4:21-27 where the Apostle Paul engages in an allegorical interpretation of the Hagar and Ishmael story. As has been brought to the fore by the movement known as the New Perspective on Paul, it is highly important to interpret him in light of his Jewish heritage. Indeed, Paul places himself in this cultural context, insisting that he was "circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee" (Phil 3:5). His reading of Hagar and Sarah follows the traditional Jewish understanding of the story. Like Philo, he sees the story as an allegory for an underlying spiritual truth, contrasting Hagar and Sarah, favoring Sarah. He uses them as symbols of two dueling covenants. Hagar corresponds to the covenant of Law, her slave status akin to those Judaizers

who would require circumcision as an entry rite into the Church (Gal 4:24-25).[16] Conversely, Sarah, and by extension, Isaac, stand for the covenant of grace (4:26).[17] This is a genius usage of the story because he inverts the expectations of his readers. Sarah, as the spouse of Abraham, would have been associated with circumcision which was an integral part of the Abrahamic Covenant.[18] Here, Paul uses her to oppose the Judaizing tendencies that required circumcision as an entry rite to the Church because New Covenant believers are not slaves to the Old Testament Law but free (Gal 4:31).

According to some, particularly those who embody a progressive perspective, Paul's allegorical reading is reducible to simply another abuse of Hagar though this lacks nuance, as will be discussed below.[19] On the other hand, some traditional or conservative scholars do not approve of calling Paul's use of Hagar and Ishmael an allegory because their implicit assumption is that allegory rejects the possibility of an event actually occurring in history, preferring to use the term typology instead.[20] However, this is not a valid concern. First, Christian interpreters have historically engaged in the four "senses of Scripture" (literal, allegorical, anagogical, and moral) without using one sense to negate another.[21] Secondly, Paul actually uses the Greek term

[16] Moises Silva, "Genesis," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament,* eds. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 807-8; Heard, 273.

[17] Paul's use of Sarah as symbolic of the Covenant of Grace builds off Paul's use of Abraham as a model of the Christian life (Gal 3 and Rom 4). It seems likely that Paul makes an implicit critique of his Judaizing opponents because they were trying to frame circumcision in terms of the Mosaic Law rather than the Abrahamic promise and, as a result, rejected the sufficiency of baptism, the New Covenant's sign of promise that corresponds to circumcision.

[18] Heard, "On the Road to Paran," 273.

[19] Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 103.

[20] See Silva, "Genesis," 808.

[21] N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2005), 50.

for allegory (αλληγορουμενα) in 4:24. Third, while Paul does not explicitly reject the historicity of the account, he does not seek to openly engage it, either. As Silva admits, "The central theological truth with which he is concerned is the contrast between Spirit and flesh: God works according to the former, while sinners depend on the latter. This contrast has manifested itself in a notable way at various points throughout (redemptive history). It did during the patriarchal period, and it does now at the fullness of time."[22] It is safe to say Paul uses an allegorical reading to convey a larger theological truth.

While the tension between Sarah and Hagar provides the apostle Paul the material for an allegory of the tension between Old and New Covenants, one of the latent consequences of his reading is that subsequent Christian readers of the story have:

> chosen to see the worst in Ishmael, usually out of a felt need to justify Sarah's insistence on Ishmael's expulsion. Sarah's own explicitly stated reason for getting rid of Ishmael—to avoid splitting Isaac's inheritance with his older brother—seems ignoble and even crassly materialistic. Therefore, readers offer additional considerations to bolster Sarah's case. Such additions usually prove exegetically weak and almost always lack charity towards Ishmael, though they may reflect a surfeit of charity towards Sarah despite the narrative's explicit characterization of her motives.[23]

Additionally, many Christian interpreters of the story have used Hagar and Ishmael anachronistically to explain modern geopolitical developments and conflicts based on particular eschatological systems. The fault for this is not Pauline. By creating an allegory, Paul is using the details of the story to address a "corresponding 'other' level of meaning" and interpreting it involves "foisting a second level of meaning on details that the author did not intend to be

[22] Silva, "Genesis," 808.

[23] Heard, "On the Road to Paran," 283.

allegorical."[24] However, as Brueggemann points out, the Pauline bias against Hagar has become the default approach for subsequent Christian interpreters.[25]

Early and Medieval Church

Following in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul, the dominant mode of understanding Hagar and Ishmael during the early and medieval church periods was an allegorical one.[26] Important sources to consider during this period are figures like Eusebius, Didymus the Blind, and Thomas Aquinas.

Eusebius

Writing around 325 CE, Church Historian Eusebius reflects the reality that authors often adapt Hagar and Ishmael to their current circumstances. In his work *Chronicon*, he writes, "the race of Ishmaelites, later called Hagarenes, and finally Saracens.' The term 'Hagarenes' may derive from Psalm 83:6, although that passage seems to treat Ishmaelites and Hagarenes or 'Hagarites' as separate groups. Moreover, associating either group with the 'Saracens' mentioned in earlier Greco-Roman sources stretches the available evidence."[27]

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[24] Leland Ryken, *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 20-21.

[25] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 184. See also Il-Seung Chung, "Hagar and Ishmael in Light of Abraham and Isaac: Reading Gen. 21:8-21 and Gen. 22:1-19 as a Dialogue," in *Expository Times* 128, no. 12 (September 2017): 574.

[26] Heard, "On the Road to Paran," 272.

[27] Quoted in Ibid., 275.

Didymus the Blind

Didymus the Blind (313-398) was one of Origen's (c. 184-c. 253) students in what is known as the Alexandrian school which favored allegorical biblical interpretation.[28] As a result, many parallels exist between his and Philo's methodology from which he draws heavily. To Didymus, the allegorical reading of Sarah and Hagar is almost identical to Philo's insofar as he sees Sarah as a representative of virtue while Hagar is the "introductory sciences" or "preparatory disciplines."[29] In this way, Hagar is necessary as the preparatory disciplines are required to understand virtue in its fullest expression. However, he reads the tension between Sarah and Hagar as symbolic of the necessity of the one to transcend the preparatory disciplines (Hagar) in order to achieve perfect virtue (Sarah).

In addition to his Philonic allegorical reading, Didymus contributes a literal interpretation which focuses on childbirth and sexual relations in order to vindicate Sarah:

> The literal sense also deserves consideration. The saints entered the married life not to pursue pleasure but for the sake of children. There is in fact a tradition that says they would go with their wives only when the time was suitable for conception. They could not go with them during the lactation period, when they were nursing their young, or when they were with child, because they regarded neither of these times as suitable for coming together…When Sarah, therefore, who was wise and holy, had observed for a long time that in spite of coming together with her husband she was not conceiving, she abstained from conjugal relations, and since she knew that it was in the order of things that he should have children, she gave him her slave girl as a concubine. This shows the moderation and the absence of jealousy of Sarah and the passionlessness of Abraham, who chose this solution at his wife's instigation and not of his own initiative and who yielded to her request only in order to give birth to children (*On Genesis*, 235).[30]

[28] Andreas J. Kostenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011), 70.

[29] Mark Sheridan, ed. *Genesis 12-50,* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 41.

[30] Quoted in ibid., 42.

In this regard, Didymus' literal interpretation reflects a bias towards Sarah and Abraham for their actions.[31] Didymus draws from both Philo and Paul and, like prior interpretations adds extra-biblical parts to the story in order to make his interpretation sustainable.

Aquinas

Aquinas addresses the Hagar and Ishmael story through Paul's reading in Galatians 4. He understands allegory as a "different understanding," a term derived from the Latin words *alos* (alien) and *goge* (leading).[32] He claims that Paul is using the "mystical sense" of the allegorical method by claiming that the women are the two testaments (Gal 4:24) while adding that Hagar is symbolic of the Church Militant while Sarah is symbolic of the Church Triumphant.[33] He does include some positive regard for Hagar and Ishmael in that he also sees them as symbolic of the Gentiles while Sarah and Isaac represent the Jewish people. Like Hagar and Ishmael, Gentiles share the same father as Jews and that is important because even Gentiles can be part of the family of God, as Paul asserts in Romans 3:29, "Is he the God of the Jews only?"[34]

Aquinas does not seek to engage the Hagar and Ishmael story on a literal level. This is understandably the case since he was a systematic rather than biblical theologian who was engaging with Paul's point. However, one of the latent consequences of this approach is that he

[31] Justin M. Rogers, "The Philonic and the Pauline: Hagar and Sarah in the Exegesis of Didymus the Blind," in *The Studia Philonica Annual* 26 (2014): 73.

[32] Thomas Aquinas, "Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Galatas lectura," Magi Books, accessed March 16, 2018, http://dhspriory.org/thomas/SSGalatians.htm#47.

[33] Ibid. In Catholic theology, the Church Militant is composed of Christians on earth while the Church Triumphant refers to Christians in heaven who have passed through purgatory (those Christians are made up of the Church Triumphant).

[34] Ibid.

ends up affirming a mostly negative view of Hagar and Ishmael which, in an allegorical reading like Paul's may be wholly valid but risks missing the point of the literal reading of the story.

Reformation

The understanding of Hagar and Ishmael shifted away from allegory toward an etiological approach near the end of the medieval period. This adjustment was largely in reaction to the rise of Islam, a religion which many Christian interpreters associate with Ishmael.[35] Since the Reformation, readings of Hagar and Ishmael have become more tropological and moralistic.[36]

Luther

Reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) took a radically pro-Sarah interpretation of the story of Hagar and Ishmael. Rather than seeing any flaws in their misplaced initiative, Luther praises Sarah's plans as "honorable and godly."[37] As Heard notes, in his commentary, he appears to be quite cautious so as not to be accused of attributing impropriety to either Abraham or Sarah.[38] However, it is also true that Luther did not view Hagar entirely in a negative light. Most likely influenced by Paul, Luther believes her to be a good woman who received adulation above her station. Ultimately, he concludes his commentary on Genesis 16 with the assertion she is "saintly" for returning to Sarah to submit to her position as a slave.[39]

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[35] Heard, "On the Road to Paran," 272.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Quoted in ibid.

[38] Ibid., 280.

[39] Ibid., 281.

Luther reads the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael in chapter 21 more sympathetically than chapter 16. While he believes Ishmael's sin was pride in the presumption that he deserved favoritism over the right of primogeniture, Luther sees redemption in their experience in the wilderness where they learned reliance on God. He even goes so far as to assume that "Ishmael undoubtedly developed into a well-informed and learned preacher who, after he had been taught by his own example, preached that God is the God of those who have been humbled."[40] He also believes that reconciliation between Hagar, Ishmael, Sarah, and Abraham occurred after the events of Genesis 21 so that Keturah (Gen 25:1), Abraham's wife after the death of Sarah, is Hagar.[41]

Calvin

Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) was not as optimistic about the actions of Abraham and Sarah as Luther and many of the other Christian interpreters who preceded him. He faults Sarah immediately for perverting "the law of marriage, by defiling the conjugal bed, which was appointed only for two persons. Nor is it an available excuse, that she wished Abraham to have a concubine and not a wife; since it ought to have been regarded as a settled point, that the woman is joined to the man, 'that they two should be one flesh.'"[42] He also sees Abraham as blameworthy, saying, "Nor was Abram free from fault, in following the foolish and preposterous counsel of his wife. Therefore, as the precipitancy of Sarah was culpable, so the facility with

[40] Quoted in ibid. It is possible that Luther's analysis of the story is influenced by the controversy regarding Philip of Hesse's bigamous marriages.

[41] Ibid.

[42] John Calvin, "Commentary on Genesis – Volume 1," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed March 11, 2018, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xxii.i.html.

which Abram yielded to her wish was worthy of reprehension."[43] He then concludes that the faith of the patriarch and his wife was "defective," and their actions proof that they did not trust God.[44]

While Calvin is critical of Abraham and Sarah, he is also somewhat critical of Hagar. In explaining 16:4 where Sarah becomes despised in the eyes of Hagar, he claims this is an "instance of ingratitude" because "she, having been treated with singular kindness and honor, begins to hold her mistress in contempt."[45] Similarly, he sees Sarah's harsh treatment of Hagar in 16:6 as justified because it was within her "proper authority."[46] Hagar's encounter with the Angel of the Lord, then, becomes an example of "what clemency the Lord acts towards his own people, although they have deserved severe punishment."[47]

Calvin's view of Ishmael seems to be more moderate than some of his Jewish and Christian predecessors. Instead of physical or sexual connotations, he reads the sin of Ishmael in 21:9 as "the scorn of the virulent tongue," though he does not excuse this behavior as it "pierces to the very soul."[48] Much like Luther, Calvin explains that Ishmael receives grace from God insofar as "the Lord declares that his promise is not void, since he pursues Ishmael with favor."[49] Still, in the end, he does conclude by connecting Ishmael to the "prodigious monster" of the

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid; see also Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 151.

[45] Calvin, "Commentary on Genesis – Volume 1."

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

papacy and sees Ishmael as a "prelude to the future dissension between the Israelites and the Ishmaelites."[50]

Modern Interpretations

Modern interpretations of the Hagar and Ishmael story tend to take on a moralistic understanding of the story.[51] This exhibits itself in two different ways. The first is through an intense spiritualization of the narrative. The second is through the appropriation of the story in terms of post-modern identity-based hermeneutics, as seen in Womanist circles.

Moralistic Readings

The first form of moralistic modern interpretations tend to be more popular in contemporary lay-level circles. In these readings, many facets of prior Christians understandings of the text are present though they are repackaged for the reader in terms of contemporary concerns. For example, in the book *Why Settle for Ishmael, If God Promised Isaac*, author N.M. Montgomery contrasts Ishmael and Isaac to dichotomize dating decisions. Young women, the target demographic of the book, are exhorted to avoid an "Ishmael," that is a less desirable option in favor of an "Isaac," who represents God's choice for their lives.[52]

Utilizing a similar framework, Rev. Kirk Devine's sermon, "Don't Settle for Ishmael When You Can Have Isaac," applies the Isaac and Ishmael dichotomy to a wider range of issues

[50] Ibid.

[51] Heard, "On the Road to Paran," 282.

[52] See N.M. Montgomery, *Why Settle for Ishmael, If God Promised Isaac* (Baltimore: PublishAmerica, 2009); see also Heard, 282.

than just marriage and dating. He encourages listeners to "Let go of whatever is out of the will of God" (i.e. Hagar and Ishmael) in order to receive the product of God's will (i.e. Isaac).[53]

The impulse of modern moralistic interpretations geared towards lay audiences may tend to lack the depth and nuance of their hermeneutical ancestors but they definitely draw from the tradition. This is most clearly seen in the reflexive denigration of Hagar and Ishmael in favor of Sarah and Isaac. As will be demonstrated below, this almost default view which places Hagar and Ishmael in a negative light may obfuscate the intention of the author(s) of Genesis and their larger role in the canon of Scripture.

Womanist Interpretations

One of the most fascinating usages of the Hagar and Ishmael story in modern times has been in womanist circles. Given Hagar and Ishmael's social location as enslaved African people, this has become a popular story amongst womanist biblical scholars. Womanism is a term defined by Alice Walker as a "black feminist or feminist of color." As a result, womanist interpretations of Scripture seeks to draw parallels between struggles faced by women of color and the text. While womanist readings of the text need to be differentiated from post-Reformation moralistic readings, they are, nevertheless similar.[54]

Womanism maintains an intersectional approach to critiquing privilege in that it looks to the:

> destruction of interconnected forms of oppression that impact black women's lives (and other women of color) and their communities. Black women experience multiple forms

[53] Kirk Devine, "Don't Settle for Ishmael When You Can Have Isaac," Sermon Central, May 10, 2007, accessed March 15, 2018, https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/dont-settle-for-ishmael-when-you-can-have-isaac-kirk-devine-sermon-on-growth-in-christ-106431. This strategy is also seen in Billy L. White, *No More Substitutes: Releasing Ishmael to Receive Isaac* (Columbia: J&J Publishing, 2010).

[54] Heard, "On the Road to Paran," 283.

> of oppression, simultaneously. Such oppressions include racism, sexism, and classism. As a political act, womanist biblical interpretation seeks to critically engage, expose, and/or dismantle the interconnected oppressions found in biblical texts, contexts, or interpretations.[55]

In the context of biblical studies, it is accomplished by asking a series of questions about the text which involve beginning from the reader's social position in order to draw parallels between the characters and womanist readers.[56] Hagar and Ishmael's story makes an appropriate one for womanists then because in it, "issues of gender, wealth and poverty, ethnicity, power, and justice all come together."[57]

Hagar's story of liberation is not confined merely to parallels between experiences. Rather, the womanist interpret seeks to liberate Hagar from Scripture's authors to empower her to "speak in new and fresh ways" rather than seeing her as an instrument in the Abrahamic schema.[58] One of the keys, according to Clark, is that "God does not liberate Hagar; rather, God provides Hagar and her son the tools and resources necessary for *survival*."[59] This liberation is totalizing, even making her free from a monotheistic paradigm. Some womanist authors see her naming of God as "the God Who Sees" (*El-Roi*) as code switching the derivative of the Egyptian god *Ra* and the associated female goddesses, *Hathor* and *Maati* who are the divine feminine. "This act of defiance is at the heart of an African-centered womanist approach. It defies

[55] Mitzi J. Smith, "Womanism, Intersectionality, and Biblical Justice," CBE International, June 6, 2016, accessed March 16, 2018, https://www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/mutuality/womanism-intersectionality-and-biblical-justice.

[56] Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 8.

[57] Bailey, "Hagar," 220. See also Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 7.

[58] Adam Clark, "Hagar the Egyptian: A Womanist Dialogue," in *Western Journal of Black Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 52.

[59] Ibid., 53.

oppressive hierarchies and seeks right relatedness among humans, nature, and the Divine."[60] However, not every womanist reading goes this far. The central concern of many womanist interpreters is the power dynamics at the core of the story. The text takes place in a culture where a woman's value was largely based on procreation. Not only is Hagar drafted into being Abraham's surrogate wife with seemingly little concern for her autonomy, the text also highlights Sarah's social privilege in that she can force Hagar into the relationship with Abraham.[61] She is also a single mother who suffers hardship and abuse which, womanist readers see paralleling the experience of black women in America.[62]

The womanist interpretation is an important one mainly because it marks a shift from what might be called a "traditional" understanding of the text. In so doing, they bring a fresh perspective to the story where Hagar is destigmatized and, even further, seen as a positive figure. The problem with their interpretation is that it remains somewhat subjective given that it is based on an argument from social positionality. This limits the impact Hagar's story can have because the narrative's meaning becomes fluid based on the reader's social position. While womanist interpreters do bring out some compelling readings of the story, they do so predominantly for those occupying certain social positions which places a barrier to the far-reaching implications of the Hagar and Ishmael story.

[60] Ibid., 52-3.

[61] Wilma Ann Bailey, "Hagar: A Model for an Anabaptist Feminist?" in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 68, no. 2 (Apil 1994): 220; Heard, "On the Road to Paran," 283.

[62] Clark, "Hagar the Egyptian," 48.

Conclusion

Judeo-Christian readings of the Hagar and Ishmael story have generally been similar to one another. In the ancient Jewish world, Hagar and Sarah were often compared. Sometimes this occurred in a literal sense in which case the focus seems primarily etiological while at other times, the story is allegorized to show the desirability of striving for virtue. Christians, inspired by the apostle Paul, have taken on similar biases. Allegorically, this can be seen in a "covenantal reading" of the story where the two women become symbolic of the Old and New covenants. On a literal level, the story has typically provided an opportunity for interpreters to defend Abraham and Sarah against potential accusations of wrongdoing while oftentimes foisting blame onto Hagar and Ishmael. The rise of womanist readings marks a potential shift in how readers understand the Hagar and Ishmael story. Though it suffers from some problems, it can provide a compelling starting point for modern interpreters who wish to approach the text with nuance and charity while unlocking a newfound appreciation for Hagar and Ishmael's textual importance.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Interpretive Emphases

The Bible is a complex collection of works produced by many different authors over the course of many millennia. The Scriptures have their own "scandal of particularity" insofar as the specific contexts which produced the individual literary events recorded in Scripture contain traces of the transcendent. In other words, the poems, stories, oracles, letters, etc. contained in Scripture may have been underlying causes anchored in time and space but they nevertheless contain universal truths and principles about God and the world.

In order to discern the transcendence in the text, it is vital for readers to remember the literary aspect of the text. Approaching a work with great literary care is vital to any serious hermeneutic. The literary forms in Scripture are "*the only form* in which the content is expressed. All content in a piece of writing is communicated *through form*. Without the form, no content exists. Form is meaning. Meaning is embodied in form."[1] *How* an author chooses to say something is virtually inseparable from *what* the author chooses to say.

In order to understand how and what the author(s) and editor(s) of Genesis are attempting to communicate, it is necessary to embrace three methodological presuppositions. The first principle, especially in the case of the oft misunderstood and belittled Hagar and Ishmael, is an emphasis on hermeneutical charity which seeks to understand God's purpose in his interaction with them in a positive light. The second is canonical criticism which emphasizes the final form

[1] Ryken, *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible*, 16.

of the text in order to establish hermeneutic stability. The third is an emphasis on inner-biblical allusion which seeks to understand the text in light of a complex network of literary connections.

Charity

As discussed above in the chapter on "History of Interpretation," one of the watermarks of Christian readings of Hagar and Ishmael has been a generally negative view of the two figures perhaps in an attempt to bolster Abraham and Sarah. A Christian hermeneutic should avoid seeing Hagar and Ishmael as inconvenient or inherently problematic figures. First, this assumption is not even grounded in the text given God's provision and promise to Hagar. Second, it is dehumanizing and risks repeating the same mistake made by Abraham and Sarah in their actions involving their slave. Heard correctly urges readers to "begin by treating Hagar and Ishmael as people, not as problems."[2] This does not necessarily place them above criticism or fault. Certainly they exacerbated tensions with Sarah through their own actions. Even still, to focus on the faults in a way that minimizes them is problematic. By lacking charity, Christian interpreters can overlook the literary importance of and theological message centered around the story of Hagar and Ishmael. As will be demonstrated in Chapter IV, the inner-biblical allusions embedded in the Hagar and Ishmael story is a cogent reason for reading the story in a more nuanced manner. Theologically, Heard explains it best by saying, "God's choice to limit the Abrahamic covenant to Isaac's line does not inhibit God from blessing Hagar. An interpretive practice driven by Christian charity should seek to do the same."[3]

[2] Heard, "On the Road to Paran," 284.

[3] Ibid., 285.

Canonical Approach

Gordon Wenham defines the canonical approach as, "Study of the final form of the biblical text, because it is the authoritative (canonical) text for religious readers."[4] This method shifts the locus of inquiry from the historical development of a given text to the significance of that text's position in the larger landscape of that text's canon. This form of reading was initially promulgated by scholar Brevard Childs (1923-2007) in his book *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (1970). Childs strongly reacted against the shortcomings of the Biblical Theology Movement in his day. This movement, which emphasized the theological unity and revelatory origin of Scripture, fell short because of its appropriation of modern higher forms of criticism and relegation of Scripture to history exclusively. The result was a field that "imploded upon itself, primarily because it failed to address and was unable to answer the most crucial questions."[5]

The canonical approach as developed by Childs forces interpreters of Scripture to seek how a given unit corresponds to larger themes and motifs in the rest of the canon. Childs' recognized that, while one can acknowledge the particular contexts of parts of Scripture, there is still a unifying aspect to all of the Bible:

> The interpretation of the material will vary in relation to the particular context in which it is placed. Because there is often an interrelation between different contexts, one can expect to find areas that reflect a common design for several different contexts. The search to discover the original historical contexts…is essential for a number of historiocritical disciplines....However, it is also true…that an interpreter can approach the same material and use only the final stage of the literature as a legitimate context.[6]

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[4] Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, vol. 1 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 199.

[5] Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 42-3.

[6] Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 58.

This canon which defines the context for biblical interpretation can be defined in three ways: the reception of authoritative literature, the process of establishing a literary corpus into a complete compilation, and the theological extrapolation of a text's primary meanings within that body of collected documents deemed authoritative.[7]

A canonical approach seeks to understand the text on multiple levels that can be divvied up into three steps. The first is the plain sense in which the interpreter must grapple with the text in its immediate context first. The second is the extended sense in which the reader must seek to understand the text's meaning in light of the larger Scriptural picture, especially in light of the dual Testament structure. Finally, the canonical interpretation seeks to synthesize the plain and extended senses.[8]

Inner-Biblical Allusion

Intertextuality encompasses a broad semantic range. Many times, it is used to denote potential relationships between texts. However, in actual literary and biblical studies, intertextuality proper can refer to something distinct from the fields of inner-biblical exegesis and inner-biblical allusion.[9] The modern concern with intertextuality was popularized by the work of poststructuralist literary critic Julia Kristeva and has become a vital part of modern biblical scholarship.[10] Intertextuality is the hermeneutical practice where the reader seeks to

[7] Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 144.

[8] Ibid., 148-50.

[9] Russell L. Meek, "Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Ethics of a Methodology," *Biblica* 95, no. 2 (2014): 290-1.

[10] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 59-60. See also Jordan Scheetz, "The Concept of Canonical Intertextuality and the Book of Daniel," (PhD diss., Universitat Wien, 2009) 8.

identify connections between texts. In Kristeva's synchronic framework, the direction of influence as well as the identity of the hypotext and hypertext are unimportant. Beyond that, no objective criteria can be established to identity the presence of an intertextual relationship because texts are viewed to be in universal conversation.[11] A later development in biblical studies occurred when Michael Fishbane crafted inner-biblical exegesis as a method to "isolate texts and examine texts that have in some way revised previous texts."[12] Finally, there is inner-biblical allusion which "sets out to determine whether a receptor text has in some way referred to a source text, but the goal is not to demonstrate that the receptor text has modified the source text. Rather, with inner-biblical allusion the goal is simply to demonstrate that a later text in some way references an earlier text."[13]

Inner-biblical allusion as a methodology harmonizes well with canonical criticism. By focusing on a text's fixed final form, the interpreter's task becomes the discovery for why these various narratives have been placed in their positions and how they are in conversation with each other.[14] When these methods are purposefully joined together, the implications are far reaching, as Scheetz claims, "What may be of secondary importance in one context becomes of primary importance in another context, and a term or phrase in one context is used in a different way in another context, all of which reflects not static textual units but a dialogue between smaller texts

[11] Meek, "Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion," 284.

[12] Ibid., 285. See Michael Fishbane, "Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical Exegesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 343-61.

[13] Meek, "Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion," 289.

[14] Scheetz, "The Concept of Canonical Intertextuality and the Book of Daniel," 36.

and a larger context."[15] This will be especially true in Chapter IV where a "prismatic" approach to the Hagar and Ishmael story that heavily emphasizes inner-biblical allusion will be practiced.

As Robert Alter reminds readers of the Hebrew Bible, it is important to assume a high degree of intentionality in its literary construction.[16] Robert Gordon explains that it is highly necessary for biblical scholars and interpreters to utilize what he calls "narrative analogy" which is:

> a technique whereby episodes which may be basically unrelated are made to resonate with each other through the reprise in one of words or ideas which belong in the first instance to the other. In this way it is possible to draw comparisons or contrasts between one character or situation and another, or between the responses of the same character in different sets of circumstances. Sometimes a relatively minor event may assume unsuspected significance by association with one of greater moment, while still more complex goings-on are also possible through the use of this technique of writing.[17]

It then becomes necessary to establish metrics by which readers can determine the probability of an intentional inner-biblical allusion. It must first and foremost be acknowledged that recognizing inner-biblical allusions is a skill that requires some flexibility. As Richard Hays says, "the identification of intertextuality is not a science but an art practiced by skilled interpreters within a reading community that has agreed on the value of situating individual texts within a historical continuum of other texts (i.e., a canon)…The ability to recognize—or to exclude—possible allusions is a skill, a reader competence inculcated by reading communities."[18] Nevertheless, it is possible to determine different guidelines that can be

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 58.

[17] Robert P. Gordon, "Simplicity of the Highest Cunning: Narrative Art in the Old Testament," in *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 6 (1988): 76.

[18] Richard B. Hays, "Who Has Believed Our Message? Paul's Reading of Isaiah," in *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 30.

employed to determine the prospect of the connection. According to Jeffery Leonard, "Shared language is the single most important factor in establishing a textual connection" because "verbal parallels provide the most objective and verifiable criteria for identifying these allusions."[19] He goes on to offer the following criteria: shared phrases are stronger than individual terms, the accumulation of instances of shared language strengthen the case for a literary connection, shared language between two texts should occur in similar contexts, and that shared language does not need shared ideology or form to establish a connection.[20]

Responsible reading must be exercised by biblical interpreters. While this is true in all situations, it is especially true in the instance of Hagar and Ishmael's story given how it has been mishandled throughout history. A responsible reading is one which leads with charity, not approaching Hagar and Ishmael with an automatically degrading bias. It also seeks to understand the placement of the story in its canonical context, and as a result, how it reverberates in the form of literary echoes through the rest of the canon.

Literary Structure of the Accounts

Finally, it becomes important to focus on the literary structure of both accounts in order to establish their shapes and structures. For this analysis, each story must be considered separately.

[19] Jeffery Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case," in *The Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008): 246-47.

[20] Ibid., 252-55.

The Surrogacy of Hagar (16:1-16)

16:1-16 can be divided into two main segments. The first is Sarah's scheme and the drafting of Hagar into her plan (16:1-6) and then the Hagar's escape from Sarah (16:7-14). 16:15-16 is a brief conclusion to the story. In the first unit, Hagar is an object to be implemented in Sarai's plan while in the second section, she becomes the focal point. Waltke notes that the first section follows an alternating structure:[21]

A Sarah proposes Hagar as a surrogate (16:1-2a)
  B Abraham submits to Sarai's plan (16:2b)
    C Sarah exploits Hagar (16:3)
      D Hagar conceives (16:4)
A Sarah calls on the Lord's judgment between her and Abraham (16:5)
  B Abraham submits to Sarah's judgment (16:6a)
    C Sarah's abuse of Hagar (16:6b)
      D Hagar's flight (16:6c)

It is important to note, in this schema, that Hagar is the culmination of both movements which compose the section. In the first subunit, she conceives while in the second, she flees from her mistress.

Waltke also notes that the second section (16:7-14) is composed of a concentric construction:[22]

A Hagar encounters the Angel of the Lord by the spring (16:7)
  B The Angel engages Hagar (16:8-9)
    C The Angel's first prophecy regarding progeny (16:10)
    C' The Angel's second prophecy regarding annunciation and Ishmael's future (16:11-12)
  B' Hagar names the Lord (16:13)
A Hagar names the well (16:14)

[21] Waltke, *Genesis*, 249.

[22] Ibid.

In this portion, the story centers around the Angel of the Lord's prophecy regarding Hagar's future both distant, in the form of numerous descendants, and immediate, regarding Ishmael. It is important that the Angel of the Lord is the one who engages Hagar in this situation because, as von Rad points out, "there is no clear distinction between the angel of the Lord and Yahweh himself. The one who speaks is obviously one and the same person. The angel of the Lord is therefore a form in which Yahweh appears. He is God himself in human form."[23] God does not engage Hagar in a disembodied way or even through a mediator. He addresses her face-to-face.

The Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael (21:8-21)

Chapter 21 can be divvied up into a chiastic structure with the center being God's promise regarding Ishmael's descendants:

A Isaac weaned (v. 8)
B Sarah "saw" Ishmael mocking Isaac (v. 9)
C Sarah's request regarding the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael (v. 10)
D Abraham's Distress (v. 11)
E God's Assurance of Abraham (v. 12)
God's promise to Ishmael (v. 13)
E. Abraham's Obedience to God (v. 14)
D' Hagar's Distress (vv. 15-16)
C' God's Provision for Hagar and Ishmael (vv. 17-18)
B' God opened Hagar's eyes (v. 19)
A' Ishmael matured (vv. 20-21)

Both A segments report the maturing of Abraham's children, Isaac's weaning and Ishmael's maturity into manhood. The B units have to do with "seeing." Sarah sees Ishmael's negative attitude directed at Isaac while Hagar has her eyes opened by God to see a well, signaling yet another instance of divine favor towards her. In the C pairing, there is a reversal. Sarah's request for Hagar and Ishmael to be expelled marks a deprivation of provision. In verse

[23] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 193.

14, they are sent out with just bread and water for their journey but no means beyond that. Yet, in verses 17-18, God provides for Hagar and Ishmael by opening her eyes to see a well just as Ishmael is on the verge of dying from thirst. In D, Abraham and Hagar both experience distress. The E section features God's assurance of Abraham and Abraham's subsequent obedience. The center of the chiasm is God's promise to Ishmael. This is significant because it shows that God does in fact care about Abraham's "other" son, even if the chosen line does not run through him.

Literary Unity and Reconciling the Doublets of Genesis 16 and 21

With the rise of source criticism in the 20th century, the literary unity of Scripture has been called into question. For example, Brodie gives six reasons to reject literary unity in the book of Genesis. First, there are general variations in style and language specifically manifested in the different names used for God. He also sees various theological perspectives underlying different components of the book. The book also tells many of the same stories twice in a phenomenon scholars call "doublets." For Brodie and many critical scholars, having this variety of sources and views in the book leads to internal contradictions. Finally, the book exhibits literary diversity in the forms utilized.[24] The only way to see unity, according to Brodie, is to discard the genre of history in favor of seeing the narratives of the book as a "mantle for artistry" by which the author(s) convey theological messages.[25] Despite what many critical scholars believe, one can find organic unity in the book of Genesis (and the Pentateuch as a whole). When one embraces the literary unity of the book, the doublets become explainable textual events.

[24] Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.

[25] Ibid., 11.

A Case for the Literary Unity of Genesis

As discussed above, Brodie summarizes the spirit of critical readings of the book of Genesis insofar as he points out a range of diverse literary practices. Yet, is this a reason that the literary unity should be rejected? According to Sailhamer, it is not. Rather, readers should recognize that the author(s) of Genesis most likely drew from an assortment of records, stories, genealogical records, etc. in order to compile a "coherent compositional strategy" (as opposed to "an absolutely smooth and uniform narrative").[26] In order to see this unity, it becomes necessary first to place Genesis in its proper place at the head of the Pentateuch which is arranged in a way that is chronological in which history is interpreted as having a *telos*, "the ultimate direction of the Pentateuch becomes a return to the theocratic garden of Eden (Gen 2) rather than an eschatological release from Babylon (Gen 11:1-9; Deut 30:1-6). The future, not the past, is what lies ahead—not a return to the covenant at Sinai, but preparation for a new covenant and a new heart (Deut 30:11-16)."[27]

However, the structure of the Pentateuch is far more advanced than merely chronological ordering of events. Within the Pentateuch is a complex system of recurring theological rhythms and motifs. To Sailhamer, these themes are human failure, divine grace and blessing, faith, law, and covenant.[28] These themes interact throughout the course of the Pentateuch and "ultimately provide the central theological momentum of the Pentateuch."[29] Given such unity, it becomes

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[26] John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis-Leviticus*, eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 25.

[27] John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 289-90.

[28] Ibid., 290.

[29] Ibid.

difficult to maintain Brodie's position earlier that there are fissiparous theologies embedded into the text. Instead, it becomes much more tenable to read the text in a way which emphasizes its unity centered around a lucid theological articulation of the history of the world and the history of Israel as a nation. Even with the general assumption towards unity it becomes necessary to reconcile the specific problem of the doublet concerning Hagar within that framework.

Reconciling the Hagar Doublet

The stories of Hagar in Genesis 16 and 21 share many similar features. Hagar departs from the camp (in chapter 16 to escape and in chapter 21 because she has been expelled) and has an encounter with God in the wilderness. According to Friedman, J is largely responsible for the story of chapter 16 (with exception of verse 3 which he credits to P) while E is the source behind chapter 21.[30] When a story is told twice by different sources in the Pentateuch, it is called a doublet.[31] Many scholars contend that doublets are evidence of the different sources behind the text where one source is merely copying an earlier one while revising it based on theological presuppositions, often resulting in inconsistencies between the stories.[32] For example, Hamilton points out that Yahweh is used for the title of God in chapter 16 (which is characteristic of J). while Elohim is the preferred name for God chapter 21's account.[33] Similarly, Hagar is described using different words in the two accounts. In J's version, she is called שִׁפְחָה which refers to a

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[30] Richard Elliot Friedman, *The Bible With Sources Revealed: A New View into the Five Books of Moses* (New York: HarperOne, 2003), 55, 63-64. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 77.

[31] Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997), 22.

[32] Ibid., 22-23. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 58.

[33] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 77.

maidservant but in E's account, she is called אָמָה which means maidservant but carries the connotation of a higher social station.[34] He also points out that in chapter 16, he is submissive to Sarah but in chapter 21 he finds her ultimatum disturbing.[35] The major inconsistency is the age of Ishmael. In both accounts, Ishmael is depicted as an infant but in in 16:16, Abraham is said to be 86 while in 21:5 he is said to be 100. That means Ishmael should be between 14-15 years old yet Hagar carries him on her shoulder (21:14) and leaves him under a bush to die helplessly (21:15-16).[36] In a similarly critical way, it could also be pointed out that the birth announcement given to Hagar (16:11-12) which is almost identical to the one in Isaiah 7:14, is merely a "standard annunciation formula."[37]

This raises an important question which requires an answer before proceeding. Is Genesis 21 just a retelling of Genesis 16? As Cotter points out, making arguments from the sources is an exercise in hypothetical guesswork because none of the underlying sources survive, "There are no rough drafts with which we can compare the final version to trace the development of the author's ideas. The documents known as J, E, D and P, scholarly reconstructions of various stages in the development of the final text, remain hypothetical."[38] Indeed, the academic support for the traditional documentary hypothesis is waning with the only real consensus being that the Pentateuch can be divided into Priestly and non-Priestly materials. The implications of this

[34] Bailey, "Hagar," 220.

[35] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 77. It is not clear why this is necessarily a contradiction. Abraham is compliant to Sarah's request that he marry Hagar to produce children. That is a vastly different scenario than when Sarah wants to cast out his own son from their camp.

[36] Ibid; Bailey, "Hagar," 220.

[37] Bailey, "Hagar," 223.

[38] David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), xxiii-xxiv.

division are also up for debate with no real resolution.[39] In light of the heavily speculative status of the underlying assumptions of the Documentary Hypothesis, it is important to affirm Gordon's reminder that while "The historical-critical approach, its shortcomings notwithstanding, has yielded much that is good and positive and will continue to do so…there is obvious need for other approaches, including the literary, to be exploited more fully."[40]

Specifically in relation to Hagar and Ishmael, there are a number of reasons to reject reading the doublet as disparate parts that developed in separate traditions but rather a singular narrative. First, it is clearly stitched into the flow of Genesis intentionally. Beginning in chapter 15, the focus of the narrative oscillates between Abraham and Sarah's interaction with other nations:

A God's Covenant with Abraham (15:1-21)
B Hagar Gives Birth and Receives Promises from God (16:1-15)
C God's Covenant Sign Established and a Son Promised (17:1-18:15)
D Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's Daughters (18:16-19:38)
D' Abraham and Sarah at Gerar (20:1-17)
C' God's Faithfulness to His Covenant: The Birth of Isaac (21:1-7)
B' Hagar and Ishmael's Expulsion (21:8-21)
A' Abraham and Abimelech Establish a Covenant (21:22-34)

In the corresponding A sections, Abraham enters into covenants. The first being with God while the second is with Abimelech illustrating the vertical and horizontal dimensions to the Abrahamic Covenant. The B units contain the pericopes of Hagar and Ishmael while the C segments pertain to the covenantal line of Israel from Abraham to Isaac. Finally, in D there is are unfavorable judgments aimed at non-Abrahamic groups. Within the progression, both the

[39] Douglas S. Earl, *Reading Old Testament Narrative as Christian Scripture* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbaruns, 2017), 281.

[40] Gordon, "Simplicity of the Highest Cunning," 71-72.

blessings towards outsiders (B, B', and A') and curses (D and D').[41] The placement of segments pertaining to Hagar and Ishmael is intended to be complementary to extrapolate God's use of the Abrahamic line to reach the world.

Focusing more on the Hagar and Ishmael narratives themselves, there are five literary parallels which, in light of the larger structural unity of this section as detailed above, should lead readers to assume a singular erudite strategy. First, the driving force in both accounts is the tension between Sarah and Hagar (16:4-6; 21:10). It appears that even Hagar returns after the evens in chapter 16, the tension in Abraham's household was palpable, eventually expressing itself in the events of chapter 21 when, seeing the slave's son mocking Isaac, Sarah has them ejected from the camp.

Second, Abraham's tacit consent is a common theme (16:6; 21:12, 14). In the first section, he is content to standby as Sarah abuses Hagar. It seems he may have developed a sensitivity to the domestic tension between the events of chapters 16 and 21 and only consents to Sarah's request for expulsion at God's behest (16:12-13).

Third, there is complementary promise and fulfillment which utilizes covenantal language in the accounts. The angel of the Lord promises Hagar (16:10), "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." In 21:13, God reiterates Hagar's promise to Abraham, "As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." This is further confirmed by the fact that Hagar finds Ishmael an Egyptian wife in 21:21 and ultimately in Ishmael's genealogy (25:12-18; see also 1 Chron 1:29-33).

[41] In regard to the curses, it is interesting to note that God relents after Abimelech makes amends while Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed due to a lack of repentance.

The fourth area of correspondence between the two accounts is that God intervenes on Hagar's behalf in the form of angels. In chapter 16, it is the Angel of the Lord while in chapter 21, it is the Angel of God. Critical scholars read the different uses for God's name as signs that they represent different traditions. However, the more personal use of the divine name in chapter 16 is most likely linked to the intimacy between God and Hagar. She names the Lord "*El-roi*" (אֵל רָאִי) which means "the Lord who sees." This name is related to the well mentioned in the passage, Beer-lahai-roi ("the Well of the Living One who sees me"; 16:14). The Hebrew word for "sees me" (רָאִי) is potentially linked to Exodus 33:23 where God informs Moses, "you shall see my back" (רָאִיתָ אֶת אֲחֹרָי).[42] It makes sense that in an account where Hagar shows great initiative by assigning God a name that the narrator prefers to use his proper name in this instance.[43]

Finally, in each instance promises regarding Ishmael form the central concern of each account as demonstrated in the above structural analysis. In 16:10-12, Hagar receives the promises from the angel of the Lord regarding progeny and her pregnancy. In 21:13, God promises Abraham, "As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." So in each account, divine promises regarding Ishmael can be found in the very heart of the stories.

[42] Sailhammer, *Expositors Bible Commentary*, 178.

[43] Naming is prevalent in the book of Genesis but the divine name is not self-disclosed until Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush (Exod 3:13-15). By the end of the book of Genesis, almost everything has been named including people, places, animals, etc., leaving the reader with the question "What is God's name?" Exodus is quick to answer this question through Moses' meeting with God precipitating the deliverance of the Israelites and their establishment as God's chosen nation. The point of Genesis in this regard is that the world is intelligible to humanity who can engage in logical ordering and categorization but it is only made possible by the force undergirding the universe, the "I am" who is revealed explicitly by Exodus.

Conclusion

Both in the larger literary schema of Genesis and in the particular points of correspondence between the two Hagar and Ishmael accounts, there appears to be signs of serious unity. Therefore, a proper posture towards reading these stories will be one which is holistic, understanding how they might be cooperating with the other like wheels on a bicycle in order to tell a larger story which will be discussed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Hagar and Ishmael need to be read in a "prismatic" way. Just as a prism refracts light through its multiple facets, so the Hagar and Ishmael story contains layers of meaning through allusions to other parts of Scripture. The echoes of Hagar and Ishmael throughout Scripture are not "neat and tidy." Rather, they are layered and complex. The three main reverberations of the story outside the direct narratives of Genesis 16 and 21 spiral out from their immediate context. They parallel neighboring passages, namely the testing of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22:1-14. However, it is important to see the story in light of the broader canonical context. As Childs reminds readers, "an interpreter can approach the same material and use only the final stage of the literature as a legitimate context."[1] For Hagar and Ishmael, its origin and source, while important, are not the only criteria for understanding the story because its literary trajectory transcends immediate context by shifting both backwards and forwards, pointing back to Adam and Eve and ahead to the metanarrative of Israel in the Exodus. Understanding each of these connections is vital to reading Hagar and Ishmael in the final form of the biblical canon.

Hagar and Abraham

The Hagar and Ishmael story occurs within the larger narrative of Abraham and Sarah, an instrumental component of both the book of Genesis and the story of national Israel's identity and origins. An interesting aspect of the Hagar's ordeal in Genesis 21 is that it appears to mirror characteristics of Abraham 's sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22.[2] For example, both Isaac and

[1] Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture,* 73.

[2] While Hagar's mirroring of Abraham can be helpful in providing the reader an interpretive key to the story, it is imperative that she not be reduced to a "mere foil to the main actors in the drama" because, according to Robinson, she is presented as "herself something of a noble character." See Robinson, "Characterization in the

Ishmael are promised children and blessings (15:4 and 16:11).[3] The birth promise to Hagar is the first birth annunciation in all of Scripture.[4] Both Hagar and Abraham are introduced by name in the story (16:15; 21:2-3, 12; 22:2).[5] They both face severe trials where a heavenly messenger intervenes on their behalf (21:17; 22:11-12). Both stories include a send-off and a solemn journey which occurs "early in the morning" (21:14; 22:3, 5).[6] Hagar and Abraham both have naming speeches which result from God's actions on their behalves (16:13-14; 22:14). Finally, they both have their eyes opened: Hagar to see a well (21:19) while Abraham looks up to see a ram caught in the thicket that he can sacrifice in lieu of Isaac (22:13).[7] Table 1 presents a visual representation of the parallels between the two figures.

Table 1. Important Parallels between Hagar and Abraham

Hagar	Abraham
Promised a child, Ishmael, and great blessing (16:11)	Promised a child, Isaac, and great blessing (15:4)
A heavenly messenger intervenes before the death of Ishmael in the wildnerness (21:17)	A heavenly messenger intervenes before the sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah (22:11-12)
Abraham rises early in the morning, gives Hagar provisions, and sends the mother and child into the wilderness (21:14)	Abraham rises early in the morning to take Isaac to Mount Moriah (22:3, 5)
Hagar gives God the name El-roi (אל ראי) which means, "the God who sees" (16:13-14)	Abraham gives the location where the sacrifice of Isaac was to occur, "The Lord will provide" (המקום ההוא יהוה; 22:14)

Hagar and Ishmael Narratives," 206 and R.R. Reno, *Genesis*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 191.

[3] Reno, *Genesis*, 167-68. Ishmael ends up having 12 descendants who are the "princes according to their tribes" (Gen 25:16): Nebaioth, Kedar, Abdeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah (25:13-15). Not only is the wording of the promise similar but the results, namely that there are twelve tribes of descendants, are also remarkably similar.

[4] Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 2010), 67.

[5] Leviant, "Parallel Lives," 22.

[6] Alter, *Genesis*, 99; Cohen, 250; Chung, 578.

[7] Leviant, "Parallel Lives," 22

Hagar's eyes are opened to see a well, saving her son from dying of thirst (21:19)	Abraham "looks up" and sees a ram which he can sacrifice in the place of his son (22:13).

The similarities between the two accounts are so pertinent that Kass goes so far as to title Hagar's ordeal in Genesis 21 as the "sacrifice of Ishmael."[8]

There are some contrasts between the two accounts as well. These differences do not necessarily negate correspondence between the narratives but they do provide interesting details. For example, the emotional tone of the stories are radically divergent. For example, Abraham is "distressed" about expelling Ishmael and his mother (21:11-12) and Hagar weeps over her son's impending death (21:17). Yet, during the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham is unnaturally lacking emotion, and Sarah is omitted from the story altogether.[9] Is this a statement that Abraham is somehow less emotionally affected by the commended sacrifice of Isaac? That is doubtful. Rather, the emotional components of the Hagar and Ishmael expulsion accentuate the disorder resulting from the way Abraham and Sarah act upon unapproved initiative. Genesis 22 may lack the same level of emotion because, though seemingly more traumatizing, it betrays Abraham's faith in God's ultimate provision (22:8). Even in their divergences, these two accounts are complementary and should be read in conjunction with one another.

It is not accidental that Hagar parallels Abraham in this instance. While many Christian readings have traditionally downplayed the significance of Hagar and Ishmael, the literary link between the two, "encourages readers to view Hagar and Ishmael as heroic characters and their story as a prominent story of God's blessings. God's promises and blessings are not only for

[8] L.R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), 332.

[9] Leviant, "Parallel Lives," 21-22.

Abraham (thus Isaac and Sarah) but also for Hagar and Ishmael."[10] In the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, the ordeal is utilized to prove the extent of Abraham's faith in God and confirm the covenantal line through Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22:16-18). The fact that Hagar is similarly depicted in terms of faith and blessing shows that the text has a high opinion of her even when Christian interpreters have not traditionally held her in such high esteem.

Abraham and Sarah as Adam and Eve (16:1-2)

Genesis 16 begins by looking at what has come before in the book of Genesis. Connecting the aspect of the story where Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham to the Adam and Eve story should influence how readers understand that tenor of the author(s) because it immediately demonstrates an implicit negative value judgment about Sarah and Abraham's handling of the situation with Hagar and Ishmael.

The first point of connection between the stories is in 16:1-2 when Abraham "listened" (שמע) to the voice of Sarah in her request that he have children through Hagar.[11] The same word appears in Genesis 3:17 when God punishes Adam for "listening" (שמע) to Eve.[12] Secondly, Sarah's proposition to Abraham models Eve's proposition to Adam where she "takes" (לקח) and

[10] Chung, "Hagar and Ishmael in Light of Abraham and Isaac," 574-75.

[11] While the language is not directly repeated, in Genesis 22, Abraham hearkens to God's voice rather than Sarah's by taking Isaac to Mount Moriah to be sacrificed. As Reno remarks, "unlike Sarah's barrenness, which she schemes to avoid by conscripting Hagar, on Mount Moriah there seems no clear way forward. How can God's promises be fulfilled if Abraham sacrifices his son? But God does provide. In this way, the episode of the binding of Isaac serves as a concluding commentary on the long and eventually failed effort of Sarah and Abraham to provide for themselves by way of Hagar." See Reno, *Genesis*, 165.

[12] Robinson, "Characterization in the Hagar and Ishmael Narratives," 201-2.

"gives" (נתן) her husband the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:6; 16:3).[13] The results of the two propositions are similar because, as Robinson points out, "Sarai blames Abram (16:5) like Adam blames Eve (3:11-12), making them both accounts of a fall."[14] Like Adam who was silent during Eve's temptation, Abraham is passive through the whole account.[15] While this does not exonerate Abraham (just as Adam's silence hardly excuses him), it does show that the primary source of tension between Sarah and Hagar, the former deciding the best way to treat the latter is harshly and in an abusive manner.[16]

The second way in which these stories are connected is in the fact that, in describing the actions of Sarah and Abraham, the text follows the same verbal progression as the Adam and Eve story. Sarah "took" Hagar (16:3) just as Eve "took" the fruit (Gen 3:6). Then Sarah "gave" Hagar to Abraham (16:3) mirroring Eve who "gave" the fruit to Adam (16:6).[17] At the height of their folly, Adam and Eve choose to eat fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and are expelled from the Garden as a result. Utilizing similar language as the story of the Fall, it is clear that, like Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah lack wisdom by taking fate into their own hands rather than waiting for God to work on their behalf.

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[13] Ibid. This proposition may also be a reversal of Genesis 12 when Abram is the one who convinces Sarah to lie about the nature of their relationship to Pharaoh while they sojourn in Egypt. For a more detailed analysis of this parallel, see Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 278.

[14] Ibid., 202. As R.R. Reno points out, Sarah's struggle against barrenness is not the problem. On a natural (or "carnal") level, she is completely aligned with God's original intention that humans "be fruitful and multiply." On a spiritual level, she desires to realize God's covenantal promises which are a part of his plan for redemption. For more, see Reno, *Genesis*, 163-64.

[15] Bailey, "Hagar," 222; Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 232.

[16] Bailey, "Hagar," 222.

[17] Waltke, *Genesis*, 252.

Still, in some ways, Sarah cannot be blamed for giving her handmaid to Abraham as a means of producing an heir. Hagar is described as an אשה which could potentially denote a "concubine" (2 Sa 15:16; 20:3).[18] Though perhaps it is to go too far to completely agree with Brueggeman's assertion that "No moral judgment need to be rendered against the alternative device for securing a son."[19] From the text's perspective, the issue with Sarah's action is less about what she did, which was culturally normative. Rather, given her motivation, it is depicted as symptomatic of misguided human initiative which is a prevalent theme in Genesis as seen in Adam and Eve's fall, the Tower of Babel (11:4), and numerous other stories.

Another point of connection between the stories of Adam and Eve and Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar is the role of angels. In Genesis 3:24, God "drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life." In Hagar's desperation in the wilderness, she is confronted by an angel. Only this angel is not part of a punishment or curse. Rather he is a conveyor of blessing.[20] Brueggemann sees the birth announcement to Hagar as evidence of a "history alternative to Abraham-Sarah which is also blessed by God."[21] While certainly the narrative makes a profound point about the blessing of God, it does not seem to be an "alternative to Abraham-Sarah." Instead, this is an instance where God's promise to Abraham that he might be a blessing to the nations (12:2-3) is fulfilled, especially given the reiteration of the promises extended to Hagar in 21:12-13.

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[18] The term אשה may be related to the Akkadian cognate *ashshatum* which, according to Nuzi texts, was a "chosen woman" provided to a husband by his childless wife so that he could secure children. See Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 232; Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 106-7.

[19] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 51.

[20] Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 232.

[21] Bruggemann, *Genesis*, 152.

In the fall, Adam and Eve are cast out of their home whereas in this instance, Hagar is the one cast out instead of the perpetrators.[22] However, this is mostly explained by the dominant role of Abraham and Sarah in God's salvation program. Additionally, the casting out of Hagar is not one that leads to death and separation from God as Genesis 3 details but rather it allows for God to intervene on Hagar's account in a way that ultimately blesses her. As Brodie concludes, "The negative dramas…are now reversed in the unlikely figure of Hagar."[23]

Hagar as a Prefigurement of Israel

In his book *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh*, Seth Postell postulates that "Genesis 1-3 intentionally foreshadows Israel's failure to keep the Sinai Covenant as well as their exile from the Promised Land in order to point the reader to a future work of God in the 'last days.'"[24] It could be similarly argued that many patterns of the Hagar and Ishmael story serve a similar function where they are utilized by the author(s), editor(s), or compiler(s) of Genesis to re-tell dimensions of Israel's history. There are numerous points of connection between the story of Israel in the Exodus and that of Abraham's family including the meaning of the names of the main characters and shared language with other significant events in Israel's history.

[22] Cohen, "Hagar and Ishmael," 251.

[23] Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 232.

[24] Seth D. Postell, *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 3.

Establishing Connections

For the sake of organization, the names of characters, which contain significant literary insights should be divided from other connections revolving around shared language. In isolation, each individual connection may lack evidence to justify the conclusion that the Hagar and Ishmael story foreshadows the story of Israel. However, when compiled together, the shared language of Hagar and Ishmael and the story of Israel's history can provide a stable basis for asserting the existence of a literary relationship.

Names

The first major point of connection between the stories of Hagar and Ishmael and the Exodus are the names and circumstances of the various characters in the story. The concept of naming is incredibly important in the book of Genesis. The Hebrew word for "name," שם, is used 864 times in 771 verses in the Old Testament. The Pentateuch contains nearly 30 percent of the uses, totaling about 250 occurrences. The book of Genesis contains the vast majority of the Pentateuch's usage at 111. This is not haphazard or accidental. Rather, the author(s) of Genesis are preoccupied with naming in order to provide literary layering as the names of characters typically clue the reader into important details of the narrative.[25] As such, the names of characters can be vital to fleshing out the shades of meaning in a narrative. The meaning of the names of the main characters in this story, Sarah, Hagar, and Ishmael, are all important and place the narrative in a broader context that connects it to the Exodus narrative.

[25] In addition to literary layering, the author(s) of Genesis use the proliferation of naming to connect the book of to its predecessor. By the end of the book, almost everything is named from aspects of the natural creation to the animals, from locations to people and people groups. However, at the end of the book, the only unnamed feature is the Creator responsible for all these things. The author(s) masterfully wait for the right moment to provide it in Exodus 3 when Moses is at the burning bush just prior to the consecration of Israel as God's Chosen People.

Sarah

Sarah's name means "princess" which draws a sharp contrast between her and Hagar.[26] Not only are their roles made clear in the text (see 16:1) but also, Sarah exclusively refers to Hagar as "slave girl" (שִׁפְחָה) instead of using her name.[27] More than that, Sarah's name is an anticipation of the Egyptian princess who finds Moses in his basket raft (Exodus 2:5-10). Instead of expelling him as Sarah does to Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 21:10, the daughter of Pharaoh names Moses and adopts him as her son.[28]

Earlier in their story, Sarah and Abraham sojourn in Egypt (Gen 12:10-20). While there, Abraham fears for his life because of Sarah's beauty so they lie about the nature of their relationship and Sarah is taken by the Egyptian Pharaoh until the Lord inflicts diseases on his whole household. While there, Abraham essentially gives Sarah to the Egyptian, a reversal occurs where she now gives her husband an Egyptian slave.[29] It has been postulated this is where Abraham and Sarah first encounter Hagar though it is purely speculative.

[26] Cotter, *Genesis*, xxxi-xxxii.

[27] Alter, *Genesis*, 70. See also Bailey, "Hagar," 221. Robinson, "Characterization in the Hagar and Ishmael Narratives," 204. Sarah also does not refer to Ishmael by name but instead uses generic terms for both of them as in 21:10: "Cast out this slave woman with her son" (גָּרֵשׁ[a] הָאָמָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־בְּנָהּ).

[28] Sarah's name changes from Sarai to Sarah in Genesis 17:15. However, the meaning is still "princess" and Abraham's new name still means "exalted father." See Alter, 73. The significance of the name change is not in the meaning of the names themselves but in the fact that the new name of Abraham, according to R.R. Reno, "seals and binds him to the future ordained by God. It is a verbal anticipation of the act of circumcision that adds a supernatural mark to Abraham's flesh." As Abraham's wife, Sarah's new name helps her participate in the future of the covenant. See Reno, *Genesis*, 172-73.

[29] Brodie, 232.

Hagar

Hagar's name foreshadows her expulsion from the household of the covenant, most likely meaning something like "immigration," "flight," "stranger," or "sojourn."[30] Some scholars do not see Hagar as her actual name but rather a title to emphasize her otherness.[31] Either way, the nomadic connotation clearly further contrasts her and Sarah.[32] However, when read against the backdrop of the Exodus, a connection develops as Israel becomes a wandering nation put to flight (Exod 14:3; Num 32:13; Josh 5:6). Notably, both Hagar and Israel are delivered in some respect through water (Gen 21:19; Exod 14-15) during their wilderness wanderings.

Hagar's Egyptian ethnicity is also of significance because it reminds the reader of the earlier Abrahamic story when Sarah and Abraham lie to Pharaoh about the nature of their relationship (Gen 12:10-20). The motives for their underlying fear are unclear. Whether they be a general mistrust of foreigners or specifically of Egyptians, the point is that there is a negative association with Egypt in many of these stories.[33] Perhaps these prejudices explain aspects of Sarah's mistreatment of Hagar, or maybe she lashes out at Hagar given how the Egyptians treated her, but it is hard to conclude that the author views Hagar in a negative light. Quite the

[30] Blue, "A Closer Look at Hagar;" Cotter, *Genesis*, xxxi-xxxii, 103; Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 40; Murphy, "Sista-Hoods: Revealing the Meaning in Hagar's Narrative," in *Black Theology: An International Journal* 10, no 1 (2012): 81.

[31] Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 40.

[32] It is true that Abraham and Sarah are technically nomads but they are on a trajectory towards a land of their own. Hagar is someone removed from her home lacking this trajectory (though God does eventually bring her home).

[33] Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 106.

opposite, by drawing parallels between her story and the story of Israel, it is clear she is highly valued.

Ishmael

Ishmael's name also finds a correspondence with the Exodus narrative. Ishmael is named by the angelic messenger with a name that means "God has heard."[34] The previous use of the root שׁמע is when Abraham "listened" to Sarah's suggestion that he marry Hagar to produce children.[35] His name is important in the story because in 21:17, as the boy is on the brink of dying from thirst, God "heard (שמע) the voice of the boy." This contrast is hardly accidental. Abraham hears Sarah's plan which was made independent of divine consultation. Abraham's action is a giving in to pressure, which is reminiscent of Adam's passivity at the tree in Genesis 3:6. Meanwhile, God "hearing" Ishmael's cries is the precursor to his providential actions on their behalf, namely the opening of her eyes to see the well in 21:19.[36] Interestingly, this same root word (שׁמע) appears in Exodus 3 during the encounter at the burning bush when the Lord tells Moses (3:7), "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard (שמע) their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings." Connecting Hagar and Ishmael's encounter with God at the well in the wilderness with the Exodus further proves the point that God is an agent of salvation for the ostracized duo.

[34] Alter, *Genesis*, 68. It is interesting to note that in 16:2, "Abraham listened (יִשְׁמַע) to the voice of Sarai" which plays on the name Ishmael (יִשְׁמָעֵאל).

[35] Ibid., 70; Alter goes on to note that God's hearing in this story is complimented by Hagar's seeing in 16:13.

[36] Ibid., 100.

Shared Language

As discussed in Chapter III, shared language is one of the most important ways a reader can assess the strength of a proposed biblical allusion.[37] The important correspondences to assess are the offering of Hagar to Abraham and the exploitation of the Israelites in Egypt, the precipitating events which led to the exile of Hagar and Ishmael and the precursors to the Exodus of Israel, and the parallels between Hagar and Moses.

The Offering of Hagar to Abraham and the Exploitation of the Israelites in Egypt

In Genesis 16:2, Sarah offers her slave-girl to Abraham by stating, "it may be that I shall obtain children by her."[38] The wording of many English translations obfuscates the phrasing. The Hebrew wording is, "אולי אבנה ממנה" which is literally translated, "perhaps I will be built from her," an emphasis best reflected in the CSB and NIV translations.[39] This language suggests the further dehumanization of Hagar because it centers around Sarah's ambition at the expense of her slave, highlighting the fact that to Sarah, Hagar is not a person so much as an object to be utilized to achieve Sarah and Abraham's end.[40] Hagar is thoroughly exploited by her human masters' "human engineering."[41] One of the strengths of womanist interpreters is that they focus

[37] Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions," 246-7.

[38] The CEB, ESV, HCSB, ISV, KJV, NAB, NASB, NET, NKJV, NLT, RSV all reflect similar translation decisions. Many assume that the word שפחה, which could be translated as "maidservant," "slave-girl," or "handmaid" and is used six times in chapter 16 is intended to be demeaning to Hagar. However, in context, it appears as a means of orienting the reader to the tangled web of relationships and power structures involved in this situation. For more, see Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 103-105.

[39] The CSB says, "perhaps through her I can build a family" while the NIV states, "perhaps I can build a family through her."

[40] Bailey, "Hagar," 204. See also Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 78.

[41] Waltke, *Genesis*, 248.

on these power dynamics embedded in the text. However, as mentioned above, in spite of her circumstances, God intervenes to deliver her and is given a consolation strongly reminiscent of the Abrahamic Covenant in that they both promise descendants too numerous to count (Gen 13:16; 16:10).

The language goes even further because the same verb, בנה, appears in Exodus 1:11, "[The Israelites] built (ויבן) supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh." Like Hagar, an Egyptian, was objectified for her function in Sarah and Abraham's plan, the Israelites were a means of production to Pharaoh. In similar fashion to Genesis 16, despite their adverse circumstances, "the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread" (Exod 1:12).

The Exile of Hagar and Ishmael and the Exodus of Israel

Like the people of Israel who were exploited and then cast out of the land of Egypt, Hagar and Ishmael follow a similar pattern. The fact that Sarah refuses to even call Hagar by name, opting instead for "slave girl" (21:10) demonstrates a profound bias against her low social status.[42] Indeed, this is something the author(s) draw attention to when they first introduce Hagar in 16:1, "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar." Hagar's social status parallels the future contrast between Israel and Egypt in the opening chapters of Exodus. There is also shared language in describing Hagar and enslaved Israel in Egypt. Sarah "dealt harshly" with Hagar (16:6; ענה).[43] The word appears in Genesis

[42] Alter, *Genesis*, 99; Bailey, "Hagar," 221.

[43] The CEB, ESV, ISV, KJV NASB, NET, NKJV, NLT, NRSV, and RSV translate this as some variant of "dealt/treated harshly." The CSB, HCSB, and NIV go with the stronger, "mistreat."

15:13 to predict Israel's oppression in the land of Egypt, "Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be *oppressed* [ענה] for four hundred years." In continuity with this verse, the same word appears in the opening of Exodus to describe Israel's enslavement in Egypt where Pharaoh sets taskmasters over the people "to oppress [ענה] them with forced labor" (1:11). Given the strong textual relationship between Hagar and Israel, this seems to further a sense of solidarity between the two.

There is also a contrast between the two women in regard to fertility.[44] Where Sarah is barren, Hagar is fertile.[45] This reality is at the center of the story. This looks forward to the Egyptian midwives telling Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous" (Exod 1:19) and as a result, God increases their numbers (Exod 1:20).

In the Hebrew Bible, the wilderness is a place of significance. To some, like Moses in Exodus 3, the wilderness is the locus of divine self-disclosure. However, to others, the wilderness has a negative role. It is a place "in which one can be lose, perhaps forever. Most of the Israelites who left Egypt did not make it to the promised land."[46]

Hagar and Moses

The connection between the accounts is further strengthened by numerous parallels connecting Hagar and Moses, the leader of the Israelites in the Exodus. For example, they both flee people in positions of power: Hagar flees Sarah, her master while Moses flees Pharaoh after

[44] Cotter, *Genesis*, xxxi-xxxiii.

[45] This contrast is heavily drawn out in Muslim reinterpretations of the story.

[46] Cohen, "Hagar and Ishmael," 252.

he murders an Egyptian slave driver (Exod 2:11-15).[47] In Genesis 16:9, where Hagar is ordered to return to the camp of her masters and submit to Sarah's rule. This, according to Robinson is reminiscent of the command to Moses to return back to the land of bondage in Exodus 3.[48] Interestingly, Hagar encounters the angel of the Lord by a shrub (21:15) which is also similar to how the Lord appears to Moses in Exodus 3 when he reveals the divine name.[49] While the Lord reveals his name to Moses (Exod 3:13-22), Hagar gives God a name (21:13), "The God who sees me" (אל ראי).[50] The significance of Hagar bestowing a name on God is quite significant. First of all, she is the first person, male or female, to call God by name.[51] Secondly, she is a foreigner, a female of low social station, and an "illegitimate" line in the Abrahamic family showing that the God of Abraham is approachable and "seeks relationship with the outcast," a reality which will also be true when the Israelites are the ones who lack social status and power at the beginning of the book of Exodus.[52]

If Hagar and Moses are parallels, then it is also possible to see Sarah as a foreshadowing of the Israelites. When she finds herself helpless in her barren condition, Sarah takes it upon herself to create a remedy for the situation. This misplaced initiative is indicative of an event which takes place during the Exodus. While Moses is receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai (an integral aspect of God's promises to Israel), the people grow impatient. Given

[47] Robinson, "Characterization in the Hagar and Ishmael Narratives," 213.

[48] Ibid., 206.

[49] Ibid., 211.

[50] Ibid., 208.

[51] Blue, "A Closer Look at Hagar."

[52] Ibid. See also, Jose Maria Casciaro, ed., *The Pentateuch*, The Navarre Bible (Princeton, CT: Scepter Publishers, 2006), 98-99.

his delay, the people are not sure what has become of Moses (Exod 32:1) so, taking matters into their own hands, they pressure Aaron to make gods they can worship. The result is the infamous Golden Calf (32:4).[53]

It is not surprising that Genesis and Exodus are in such vigorous literary conversation. The parallels far surpass the Hagar and Ishmael story. Indeed, the following chart provides Earl and Dozeman's understandings of how the two books are related:[54]

Table 2. Literary Connections between Genesis and Exodus

Genesis	Exodus
The central concern is possession of the Promised Land	The central concern is possession of the Promised Land
The concern manifests itself in God' promise to Abraham	The concern manifests itself in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham
Locates the central aspect of Israel's identity in genealogy	Locates the central aspect of Israel's identity in the Exodus
Abraham is the main actor in God's redemption of the world	Moses is the main actor in God's redemption of Israel

Using an intertextual approach, it is clear that Hagar is more than just a secondary character. While Abraham and Sarah are the main focus of this portion of Genesis, Hagar's stories are not accidental. The names of the main characters, Hagar, Ishmael, and Sarah, all convey importance by connecting these episodes to a larger pattern in the Hebrew Bible, namely the Exodus.

[53] The Golden Calf becomes a recurring symbol of this misplaced initiative throughout the Old Testament canon. Jeroboam makes two golden calves (1 Kgs 12:28), one at Bethel and one at Dan after the division of the Northern Kingdom from the Southern Kingdom (c. 930 BCE). These become emblematic in the Deuteronomistic corpus and beyond of the failure of the Israelite people (2 Kgs 10:29; 17:16; Hos 10:5 see also 2 Chron 11:15; 13:8).

[54] Earl, *Reading Old Testament Narrative as Christian Scripture*, 283; see also T.B. Dozeman, "The Commission of Moses" in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretations*, T.B. Dozeman and K. Schmid, eds. (SBL Symposium Series 34; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 129.

Significance

As demonstrated above, there is a link between the Hagar and Ishmael story with the Exodus narrative. This fits with a canonical understanding of the book and the Pentateuch as a whole. As Sailhammer notes, "Another way to view the similarities [between narrative segments] is to see them as part of a larger typological scheme intending to show that future events are foreshadowed by events of the past."[55] The names of the characters in Genesis anticipate major components of Exodus. Hagar, the Egyptian, looks forward to Israel's status as a wondering nation in the wilderness, Sarah is representative of the Egyptian royalty who eject the Israelites from their land.[56] Ishmael's name is a reminder in their story that God hears Hagar's cries but it also looks forward to the day when God hears the cries of his people while they are enslaved. The names are significant because they look forward to the story of the Exodus. Furthermore, there are a number of other linguistic associations between the two stories. In proposing Hagar to Abraham, Sarah employs similar language that Pharaoh uses to speak about the Israelite slaves furthering the link between the stories.

Conclusion

A literary connection between two texts is only significant insofar as the relationship can enables the reader to engage in more nuanced interpretation which lines up with the author's

[55] Sailhamer, "Genesis," 37.

[56] It is important to note than when Hagar flees in Genesis 16, she encounters the angel of the Lord at a spring "on the way to Shur" (16:7). Shur is near Egypt and becomes a part of Ishmaelite territory (25:18). Moses and the Israelites had a significant encounter with water after journeying through the wilderness of Shur after the Red Sea miracle, the thirsty people find bitter and undrinkable water at Marah until Moses throws a piece into the water making it sweet (Exod 15:22-27).

agenda. While some, like R.R. Reno, have interpreted the Hagar and Ishmael story to be an etiology of some of Israel's geopolitical rivals and a reminder that even these antagonistic nations are results of divine activity with roles in God's plan.[57] Certainly, there are components of Reno's reading that are valid, though perhaps uncharitable. While Genesis consistently reminds its readers that God is in control of the events it records, this understanding requires one to have a more detached view of Hagar and Ishmael which the author does not seem to have. Instead, it seems as though the author is trying to make a point related back to the Abrahamic covenant and the subsequent descendants stemming from the promise to the Patriarch. In spite of the actions of Abraham and Sarah (even to the point where they encourage a similar kind of dehumanization that the Israelite people would fall victim to at the beginning of the book of Exodus), God is faithful to keep his promise to them in Genesis 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," even when Abraham and Sarah explicitly fail to live out this promise in their own lives.[58] Much like the rest of the book of Genesis, this is a story of reversal. A slave forced into surrogate motherhood and abused by her mistress is eventually provided for by God himself.[59] As Cotter states, "Power and its abuse are never central to God's story."[60] While Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch do function as an etiology for the nation of Israel as God's chosen people,

[57] Reno, *Genesis*, 167-68.

[58] Robinson, "Characterization in the Hagar and Ishmael Narratives," 208; Heard, "On the Road to Paran," 285.

[59] Heard, "On the Road to Paran," 285.

[60] Cotter, *Genesis*, 105; see also von Rad, 193. Cotter goes on to aptly apply 1 Samuel 2:8 to her, "He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor."

it goes far beyond that by demonstrating God's universal tendencies which transcend ethnicity.[61] Not only that, but the author(s) use this story as a reminder that God cares for and is intimately involved in the plight the weak and oppressed, something that will be demonstrated again when he delivers his own people out of bondage in Egypt through the Exodus (Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6).[62]

[61] Longman, *Genesis*, 1.

[62] Cotter, *Genesis*, 105-6; Robinson, "Characterization in the Hagar and Ishmael Narratives," 208.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

When it comes to Hagar and Ishmael, the history of interpretation shows a consistently adverse attitude towards the pair. Beginning in the Jewish tradition, the story, whether interpreted literally or allegorically, has been commonly viewed as a means of bolstering Sarah and Abraham's cause while denigrating Hagar and Ishmael. Acting as a bridge between his Jewish predecessors and the later interpretations of the Church, Paul applies the story to the debates of his day between Christians and the Judaizers. Most likely in an unintentional way, Paul reified the Jewish view in the Church as subsequent Christian interpreters have taken up a pattern of interpretation that elevates Sarah and Abraham while ignoring or maltreating Hagar and Ishmael. This tradition has found its way into modern interpretations in the form of moralistic readings where Hagar and Ishmael symbolize things that are counter-productive for the life of the believer while Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac represent God's will for his people's lives. The traditional understanding of the story has been disrupted by the relatively recent phenomenon of Womanist readings which bring a sense of dignity to Hagar that is often forgotten in other schools of interpretation.

As a result of the shortcomings of previous readings of Hagar and Ishmael, it is necessary for readers to approach the story with charity which brings dignity to the characters involved. Furthermore, in order to grasp the significance of Hagar and Ishmael, they must be properly understood within their canonical context and through the inner-biblical allusions in which they are the center. This requires using an approach which presumes a strong degree of literary unity within Genesis. When the stories are recognized as pieces of the larger puzzle of Genesis, it becomes evident that they are illustrative of God's concern for all people, even those outside the chosen Abrahamic line.

There are three significant inner-biblical allusions which perpetuate the message that God salvific acts are not exclusionary to the elect Abrahamic line. First, the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 21 parallels the sacrifice of Isaac which occurs in the following chapter. This connection enables the reader to see Hagar in comparison with Abraham, making her a protagonist on a heart-wrenching plight who is ultimately provided for by God.

The second inner-biblical allusion of import is Sarah's giving of Hagar to Abraham which resembles the Fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. By making this allusion, the authors highlight the folly of Abraham and Sarah's actions which are motivated by their own initiative rather than God's. Furthermore, even while Hagar is the one cast out as a result, there is a redemptive component to the story as she encounters the Angel of the Lord, receiving divine blessing and the promise of progeny using similar language as found in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15:5). In spite of Abraham and Sarah's actions, God provides for Hagar and Ishmael.

The final inner-biblical allusion involving Hagar is that her story depicts the Exodus told in reverse. She is an Egyptian slave of a Hebrew woman, whose name means "princess." She is exploited and used to "build up" her master (Gen 16:2). She is cast out of her home into the wilderness where she is saved only by divine intervention until she eventually comes to a land of her own. Furthermore, she resembles Moses, the leader of the Exodus while Sarah can be seen as a parallel to the uncooperative people of Israel. Both Hagar and Israel's stories involve reversals which occur through divine initiative. The fact that Hagar is used as a way to retell Israel's story brings special significance to her on both a literary and theological level. Literarily, her story foreshadows that of the Israelites. Theologically, this tight relationship between the two stories reflects God's concern for the poor and marginalized.

The stories of Hagar and Ishmael and the network of inner-biblical allusions centered around Hagar and Ishmael provide significance to their story that has been ignored or opposed by many Judeo-Christian interpreters over the centuries. When these important textual messages and parallels are neglected, it prevents readers from seeing clearly in a canonical way. Hagar and Ishmael are cogent reminders that God's intentions are universal, not bound to any particular ethnicity or family line. More than that, they show that God is faithful to his word even in spite of misguided human initiative.

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