

Allegorically Speaking in Galatians 4:21-5:1

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This study examines Paul's phrase "allegorically speaking" in Gal 4:24, suggesting that the following passage is not the literary genre of narrative allegory, a method of Greek rhetoric, or a method of interpretation known as "typology." Instead, the study examines another ancient allegorical technique that employed two literary devices to startle the reader and act as markers leading to the Hebrew Scriptures for deeper spiritual interpretations. Furthermore, because these allegorical markers are clustered together in Gal 4:24-28, one can recognize the literary structure. By identifying the method of Paul's argument and the literary structure of the passage, this study promotes further examination of the meaning of these verses by following the allegorical markers to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Key Words: Allegory, Galatians, Paul, Philo

The "allegory of Hagar and Sarah" in Gal 4:21-5:1 continues to challenge theologians, who have never agreed on its interpretation. There is no consensus on such important topics as main idea, the purpose for which Paul was writing this passage, or even which verses contain the conclusion. Such key terms and concepts as slavery, the two types of birth, purpose of the law, and nature of the inheritance have prompted significant dialogue and debate. Much of the problem lies in what Paul meant by ἄτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα: "This is allegorically speaking . . ." (Gal 4:24; NASB).¹

The function of an "allegory" has numerous possibilities, which may vary according to time and culture. The question lingers, "What

1. This translation of Gal 4:24 comes from the New American Standard Bible (NASB), because it most closely follows the Greek text. All subsequent Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

did Paul intend?" Many consider Paul's "allegorically speaking" a narrative allegory, a common genre in Classical Greek literature. As a fictitious narrative, it has characters, a plot, and a distinct beginning and end whose purpose is to portray a moral message.² Others suggest that Paul used ancient Greek methods of rhetoric to present an allegorical argument.³ Still others believe that Paul's method of argument was "typology," a device that views figures and events in the Hebrew Scriptures as foreshadowing a coming event, in this case Christ and his Church.⁴

In this study I will consider another ancient style of presenting an allegorical argument. Although recent research has examined this allegorical technique, scholars have not generally understood the specific literary devices used to achieve it. Nor have they acknowledged Paul's use of these allegorical markers. I find that Paul used two literary devices that act as markers and lead the reader to deeper aspects of meaning in the Hebrew Scriptures. I recognize the same literary devices in the work of two of Paul's contemporaries, Philo and Quintilian, and further note a reference in the Mekilta to early rabbinic teachers who interpreted the law allegorically. By recognizing this allegorical technique of startling markers and using their location to identify the literary structure, I suggest a reconsideration of the interpretation of Gal 4:21-5:1. Paul expected his readers to examine the Hebrew Scriptures for the deeper aspects of meaning that the markers suggest.

2. Although they do not use the term "narrative allegory," several commentators make this assumption. For example, when Dunnam refers to "the allegory," he means Gal 4:21-31. Hendriksen calls these verses an "instructive allegory." Guthrie explains that Paul "allegorizes" the OT incident of Sarah and Hagar, referring to Paul's retelling of the narrative as an allegory. Maxie D. Dunnam, "Sons and Heirs of God, Gal 4:1-31," in *Communicator's Commentary* (ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie; Waco, DC: Word, 1982), 10.94; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 179; Donald Guthrie, *Galatians* (Nashville: Nelson, 1969), 49.

3. Betz first suggested that Paul used an ancient Greek rhetorical "speech form" in this epistle, viewing Gal 4:21-5:1 as the last of six arguments (the *probatio*) that begin in 3:1. Others have expanded and refined Betz's original proposal. Hans Dieter Betz, *Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches of Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 113-14.

4. Typology is a common suggestion for the method that Paul used in this passage. Explains Perriman, "There appears to be a fairly broad consensus that, despite Paul's own use of the word ἀλληγορούμενα, the fundamental rationale of the passage is typological rather than allegorical." Andrew Perriman, "Rhetorical Strategy of Galatians 4:21-5:1," *EvQ* 65 (1993): 27. For examples of viewing the passage typologically, see F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 217; Walter R. Rohrs, "Typological Use of the OT in the NT," *Concordia Journal* 10 (1984): 204-16.

THE SEARCH FOR BIBLICAL ALLEGORY
IN ANCIENT SOURCES

Longenecker's extensive study of biblical exegesis in the apostolic period has stimulated interest in rabbinic exegetical practices that might have influenced Paul. Although Judaism of the early Christian centuries often took the words of the Hebrew Scriptures quite literally, Longenecker finds three classifications or categories of nonliteral interpretation. Besides *midrash* and *pesher*, allegorical interpretation was an acceptable method of exegesis, he explains, although he finds little evidence to define it.⁵

Feldman adds to a historical understanding of allegorical interpretation at the time of Paul. He notes the use of allegory in the first century C.E. because of references to *Dorshe Reshumoth*, a group of rabbinic teachers who interpreted the law allegorically. The *Mekilta* preserves most of these references, he explains, particularly (and distinctively) in its most ancient parts. Feldman suggests that the term used there for a "figurative" meaning (as contrasted with a "literal" meaning of the words themselves) corresponds to the Greek ἀλληγορία, the same term Paul used in Gal 4:24. Paul was a contemporary of the *Dorshe Reshumoth*.⁶

Philo, a Jewish contemporary of Paul in Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E.-50 C.E.), wrote allegorically about the Hebrew Scriptures. In fact, he used words similar to Paul when describing this method of presenting an argument. "All this is spoken allegorically," Philo explained (*Alleg. Interp.* 2.5). By "allegory" Philo meant the "inward sense of the passage" (*QG* 3.55--57). He contrasted this allegorical interpretation to the literal meaning, which he called the "plain letter" that requires no explanation (*QG* 3.28). Thus, a scriptural passage could have two meanings, as Philo explained, "This sentence also signifies . . ." (*Alleg. Interp.* 3.252).⁷

Philo's purpose in using allegory was compatible with that of Paul. Like the *Dorshe Reshumoth*, Philo used an allegorical method to elicit deeper spiritual meaning from the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e., the

5. Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999 [1975]), 18-30.

6. Arthur Feldman, *The Parables and Similes of the Rabbis: Agricultural and Pastoral* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1927), 3 n. 2. Explains Horowitz, the *Mekilta* is a written commentary on the Mishnah. Its sources lie, he believes, in times before the compilation of the Mishnah (ca. 200 C.E.), but its present written form and text were finalized one century, or in some cases, even two centuries later. George Horowitz, *The Spirit of Jewish Law: A Brief Account of Biblical and Rabbinical Jurisprudence* (New York: Central Book, 1963), 35.

7. *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (trans. C. D. Yonge; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993 [1854]).

Law). Philo also used three literary devices similar to those that Paul employed in his epistles. These devices stimulate what Philo called the "inward sense of the passage." One such allegorical device was typology. For example, Philo described two natures, one the master of pleasures and the other the slave to these passions, which he typified by Jacob/Esau and Ephraim/Manasseh (*Alleg. Interp.* 3.88-89, 90-93). Like Philo, Paul also explained, "Now these things occurred as examples [types]" (1 Cor 10:6). With a second device, Philo structured startling metaphors that used unexpected associations. For example, Philo said heaven is the mind and the earth is sensation (*Alleg. Interp.* 1.1). By the association of earth with sensation, Philo explained that he was speaking figuratively or allegorically. This is similar to Paul's statements, "Hagar is Mount Sinai" (Gal 4:25), and "these women [Hagar and Sarah] are two covenants" (Gal 4:24). Finally, Philo explained that speaking in an "allegorical manner" was "a kind of abuse of language" (*Alleg. Interp.* 2.10).⁸ The purpose of this abuse was to stimulate surprise and to use words to act as markers leading to deeper aspects of meaning. This "abusive technique" is particularly apparent in Gal 4:24-28.

However, there are significant differences between Philo, a Jew of the Diaspora, and Paul, who received his training in Jerusalem. Philo explained extensively the allegorical meaning of his metaphors, whereas Paul did not. An even more striking difference is Philo's close association with Classical Greek philosophy.⁹ As only one example, Philo asserted that speaking allegorically was "in accordance with the principles of natural philosophy" (*Alleg. Interp.* 2.5). Thus, Philo's *purpose* for "allegorically speaking" was compatible with Paul, and he used three literary devices that are evident in Paul's epistles. However, Paul did not draw heavily from Greek philosophy, nor did Paul accommodate his argument to Hellenistic thought and culture.

Therefore, although I acknowledge similarities between Paul's allegorical method and Philo's, especially in the use of certain literary devices, I encourage caution when comparing Philo with Paul. Paul's allegorical speaking was not a Greek philosophical method of searching for deeper spiritual meaning but most likely reflected rabbinic practices in first-century Judea.

8. Ibid.

9. David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 73. Perriman ("Rhetorical Strategy," 27-42) suggests that the Alexandrian branch of allegory that Philo's work represents, which drew heavily from Greek learning and accommodated Scripture to Hellenistic thought and culture, was more elaborate than the branch of Palestinian allegory to which Paul's work apparently belonged.

RECENT RESEARCH ON
ANCIENT ALLEGORICAL TECHNIQUES

Recent research has examined this ancient method of allegorical speaking, noting several literary devices to achieve the allegorical purpose of saying one thing but meaning another. For example, some now classify typology as a kind of allegory.¹⁰ Others define an allegorical device as one thing spoken in terms of another in a way that conveys no apparent meaning.¹¹ (Paul used this strange metaphor in Gal 4:24 when he said, "these women are two covenants.") MacQueen speaks of a third allegorical technique in the work of Quintilian, a first-century Latin rhetorician. According to MacQueen, Quintilian identified something "absolutely opposed to the meaning of the words,"¹² which is similar to Philo's description of this device as "a kind of abuse of language" (*Alleg. Interp.* 2.10). Fowl describes this third allegorical technique as a statement that either explicitly or implicitly counters conventional understanding about a text, a character, or an event.¹³ Paul used this kind of allegorical device in Gal 4:21-5:1, as I will demonstrate.

Many view typology as the allegorical technique that Paul used when he said, "This is allegorically speaking." Typology considers earlier persons, events, symbols, and places in the Hebrew Scriptures as "types" of what was to follow. In this sense, divine acts and inspired words of Scripture become prophetic. Fulfillment comes in the figure of Christ. Since allegory is a method of saying one thing but meaning another, typology is a kind of allegory. However, this study eliminates typology as the allegorical technique that Paul used in this passage, for several reasons. Typology is prophetic rather than surprising, puzzling, or ironic by nature, modifiers that characterize the other two allegorical devices. Moreover, Paul did not explain in this passage, as he did in his letter to the Corinthians, "Now these things occurred as examples [types]" (1 Cor 10:6). In fact, Paul did not use τύπος in any portion of his letter to the Galatians. Furthermore, the tradition of viewing the method in this passage as typology merely retains the

10. Paul K. Jewett, "Concerning the Allegorical Interpretation of Scripture," *WTJ* 17 (1954): 1-20, here 7; Stephen E. Fowl, "Who Can Read Abraham's Story? Allegory and Interpretive Power in Galatians," *JSNT* 55 (1994): 77-95, here 81. For Paul's use of typology, see 1 Cor 10:6-11; Titus 2:7; Heb 8:5.

11. Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), 2; Stephen L. Wailes, *Medieval Allegories of Jesus' Parables* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 36; Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 95.

12. John MacQueen, *Allegory* (The Critical Idiom 14; London: Methuen, 1970), 49. For further discussion of Quintilian's instruction on allegory, see p. 167 below.

13. Fowl, "Who Can Read?" 79.

simple meaning of Paul's words, since the application of typology has interpreted Paul's reference to Hagar and Sarah as pointing forward to Israel, Christ, and the Christian Church. Finally, the interpretation (that Paul used "typology" in this passage) has spawned a wide variety of conflicting theological interpretations—which raises the question of intended meaning.

I will now examine the two additional allegorical devices previously mentioned and will conclude that Paul used both of these devices following his declaration, "This is allegorically speaking." The first substitutes one word or concept for another with no apparent meaning. The second appears to contradict the Abraham and Exodus narratives. Paul intertwined the two devices, so the task of distinguishing between them is a delicate one.

FIRST LITERARY DEVICE IN GALATIANS 4:21-5:1: A METAPHOR WITH NO APPARENT MEANING

Paul declared, "These women are two covenants," a statement that follows his declaration that "this is allegorically speaking" (Gal 4:24). As this study has demonstrated, substituting one word for another in this way is an allegorical device for directing the reader to a deeper aspect of understanding than the most obvious meaning of the words conveys. I have pointed out Philo's use of this allegorical technique. I will also demonstrate that Quintilian was aware of it. The puzzling characteristic of this strange metaphor is its failure to use any recognized symbols, so the meaning is unclear and even somewhat startling.¹⁴

If Paul's declaration "these women are two covenants" is an allegorical device, then vv. 24-26 contain a total of five of these allegorical markers.

FIRST ALLEGORICAL MARKER: ONE WORD MEANS ANOTHER

Verse	One word	is or means	another word or concept
24b	the women		two covenants
24c	Hagar		Sinai covenant (thesis)
24c	Sarah (implied)		unnamed covenant (antithesis)
25a	Hagar /Sinai covenant		present city of Jerusalem (thesis)
26	our mother (Sarah)		Jerusalem that is above (antithesis)

14. To understand better the distinction between a metaphor and this allegorical manipulation of a metaphor, compare Paul's allegorical assertions ("the women are two covenants" and "Hagar is Mount Sinai") with similar constructions that are metaphors. For example, "you are the salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13) and "this cup is the new covenant" (1 Cor 11:25). The metaphors rely on recognized symbols ("salt" and "cup of wine"), whereas the allegorical construction is puzzling and even somewhat startling.

To summarize, one allegorical technique uses a word or concept to mean another word or concept in a puzzling way that has no clear meaning. First, Paul declared that the women were two covenants. Then he made two statements, each containing its own allegorical device, to produce a contrasting thesis and antithesis. This he did twice. Thus, Paul employed this technique five times in three verses of Scripture. Because this is an allegorical device, the plain meaning of the words is not what Paul intended.

SECOND LITERARY DEVICE: AN APPARENT CONTRADICTION

Quintilian (ca. 37-100 C.E.), a first-century Latin rhetorician, described both of the allegorical markers that Paul used in Gal 4:21-5:1.¹⁵ As I have previously noted, the first generally produces a series of metaphors that is different from a regular metaphor because it introduces an element of obscurity. I have concluded that Paul used a series of these obscure metaphors after announcing, "This is allegorically speaking" (as identified in the previous chart). The second type of allegory, explained Quintilian, says something "absolutely opposed to the meaning of the words," so the intended meaning is "contrary to that suggested by the words."¹⁶ This second type of allegory uses a puzzling contradiction to introduce an element of irony. Both types of allegory stimulate a startled reaction of surprise.

Two authors note this unusual technique of contradiction in the Pauline passage without associating it with allegory. Perriman explains that the manner in which Paul developed his argument in Gal 4:21-5:1 suggests "historical contradiction" that is "neither an accident nor an embarrassment but an important aspect of his argumentative strategy."¹⁷ Hays, on the other hand, notes Paul's "misuse of scriptures" in this passage, which he describes as Paul's "practicing hermeneutical jujitsu." An example, Hays believes, is the "shocking reversal" when Paul associated Hagar-Ishmael-slavery, in a "symbolic complex," not with the Gentiles but with Sinai and the Law.¹⁸

15. Explained Quintilian, allegory is one of many *tropes*, which are linguistic devices that artistically alter a word or phrase from its ordinary meaning to another. The most common trope, he instructed, is a metaphor. However, allegory is another distinct example of this linguistic device. See *The Institute Oratoria of Quintilian* (trans. H. E. Butler; LCL; London: Heinemann / Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966 [1921]), 300-303.

16. *Ibid.*, 334-35.

17. Perriman, *Rhetorical Strategy*, 36.

18. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 112-14.

Thus, Perriman and Hays have inadvertently noted Paul's second allegorical device in this passage, which Quintilian identified as the allegorical technique of saying something "absolutely opposed to the meaning of the words" and Philo described as "a kind of abuse of language."

The original readers of Paul's letter apparently comprised two distinct groups, so each would likely have responded in a different way.¹⁹ One was a group of non-Jewish Gentiles, and the other was a group of Jewish Christians.²⁰ These Jewish Christians were advocating circumcision as a traditional rite of entrance into the Jewish community and study of the Law for continuing participation in that community of God's people. Thus, it is not surprising that Paul referred to two specific narratives. The Abraham narrative relates to the rite of circumcision, and the Exodus account tells of God's giving the Law at Sinai. What is surprising is that Paul connected the themes of freedom and slavery to inheritance and observance of the Law (Gal 4:30; 5:1).

When Paul declared, "I speak these things allegorically" (Gal 4:24), the Gentile believers would likely have recognized this technique, as Quintilian evidenced by his first-century instruction on allegory as a rhetorical method. Philo's use of allegory also indicates that it was a familiar technique among Diaspora Jews, and the *Mekilta* suggests that it was used by rabbinic teachers in Judea. However, each of the two groups would have responded in a different way. Quintilian noted what would have been the most likely reaction of Paul's Jewish Christian rivals in the interfaith debate about circumcision and study of the Law. Explained Quintilian, the orator employs this allegorical contradiction to "disguise bitter taunts in gentle words by way of wit."²¹ The Gentile Galatians, on the other hand, probably considered the information an instructional device to educate them on the relevance of Jewish rites to their belief in Christ and their subsequent walk in that faith.

19. Paul was writing to Christians in Galatia, who were "turning to a different gospel" (Gal 1:6) under the influence of some people who were "trying to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal 1:7). This identifies two groups. Paul described those trying to pervert the gospel as "agitators" (Gal 5:12) and as "those who belonged to the circumcision group" (Gal 2:12). Thus, the first group likely comprised Gentile Christians to whom the "agitators" in the second group, Paul's Jewish rivals in an interfaith debate, were "preaching circumcision" (Gal 5:11; cf. 5:2).

20. Referring to his rivals in the debate about circumcision of Gentile proselytes, Paul first identified the "we" in Gal 2:15: "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners." Then Paul equated these same Jews in the next verse with belief in Christ: "We [Jews by birth] have come to believe in Christ Jesus" (Gal 2:16).

21. Quintilian, *Inst.*, 323-33.

The following list identifies five verses (Gal 4:24-28) in which Paul spoke of four concepts (A-D). Paul's statements (1-7) appear to contradict the Hebrew Scriptures regarding these concepts. A final startling declaration (8) appears in Gal 5:1. There can be little doubt that Paul's remarks would have stimulated a reaction of surprise.

SECOND ALLEGORICAL MARKER:
STARTLING AND CONTRADICTIONARY STATEMENTS

A. Concept: Covenant (the Law)

1. v. 24b "One woman [representing a covenant], in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai."

2. v. 25a "Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia."

Apparent Contradiction: Mount Sinai represents the covenant that God gave to the children of Israel. They are the descendants of Sarah, not Hagar.

B. Concept: Slavery

3. v. 24c "[Hagar is] bearing children for slavery."

4. v. 25b "[Hagar] corresponds to the present Jerusalem."

Apparent Contradiction: When God gave the covenant to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, the Law was connected with their *release* from slavery in Egypt. Furthermore, associating Hagar (the slave) with Jerusalem connects Jerusalem with slavery.

C. Concept: Freedom (and its contrast, slavery)

5. v. 26 "The other woman [Sarah] corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she [Sarah, who represents Jerusalem above] is free, and she is our mother."

Startling Statement: By referring to Sarah as "our mother," Paul included Gentiles as free. Also implied is the fact that Jews, who were still connected to the "now Jerusalem," were in bondage (v. 25).

D. Concept: Heritage and Inheritance

6. v. 27 Citation of Isa 54:1

7. v. 28 "Now you my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac" (repeated in v. 31).

Apparent Contradiction: Only the "free" descendants of Sarah are connected with the inheritance prophesied in Isa 54:1.

E. Concluding Concepts: Slavery, Freedom, Study of the Law, Implied Consequence

8. v. 5:1 "Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Startling Statement: The religious practice of studying the Law was considered an honorable obligation. However, Paul used another meaning of "yoke" that implied slavery.

In the concept of covenants, Paul contradicted the scriptural record of the descendants of Abraham. According to Paul's explanation, Hagar, the slave woman, allegorically represents the covenant that God gave to Israel at Mount Sinai. However, Israel descended from Sarah, and Hagar was Sarah's slave. Thus Paul, according to Bruce, "forcibly inverts" the scriptural record.²² Furthermore, Paul heightened the irony by associating the Sinai Law with Hagar (and thus with slavery). The

22. Bruce, *Galatians*, 218.

very notion that God's covenant with Israel was allegorically associated with the slavery of Hagar and had the effect of generating a condition of slavery on those who followed the Law would certainly have been startling. Paul's statements concerning freedom are equally surprising, though far more subtle. By use of the word "our" in reference to Sarah as mother, Paul included Gentiles. Furthermore, he associated anyone connected to the "now Jerusalem" with slavery. This would have been an outrage to Jews. Adding fuel to this fire, Paul introduced a clear reference to heritage and inheritance by referring to Isa 54:1.²³

Rejoice, you childless one, you who bear no children,
burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pangs;
for the children of the desolate woman are more numerous
than the children of the one who is married. (Isa 54:1)

This assertion is puzzling, since both the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint translation convey the notion of future abundance to the children of Israel after they return to Jerusalem from their captivity.²⁴ Even more startling, Paul connected only the "free" descendants of Sarah with the promised inheritance.

Thus, Paul clustered four contradictory and therefore startling concepts in Gal 4:24-28. I will demonstrate that these verses constitute the focus of Paul's allegorical argument. However, there remains one last surprising claim, which functions as a closure to the entire passage. In Gal 5:1 Paul exhorted, "Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." "Yoke" was a word used in Jewish terminology for the obligation to keep God's commandments as a loving response to God's great acts. Those urging the Gentile Galatians to be circumcised might well have been instructing them to "take the yoke of the Law" in an honorable sense.²⁵ Yet, the word has another meaning. In an opposite sense, it can be an imposed burden, like slavery, which is how Paul used "yoke" in Gal 5:1 (cf. Acts 5:10; 1 Tim 6:1). This one last startling statement would have thoroughly outraged Paul's Jewish rivals by its seeming criticism. Thus, Gal 5:1 acts as a closure to the passage that begins with Gal 4:21, in which Paul clustered a barrage of startling statements in vv. 24-28.

23. Betz, *Galatians*, 246; Charles H. Cosgrove, "The Law Has Given Sarah No Children (Gal. 4:21-30)," *NovT* 29 (1987): 219-35, here 231; cf. R. A. Cole, *Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 134; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 210. Paul also used the word for "inherit" (κληρονομεῖν) in his concluding remarks (Gal 4:30).

24. C. K. Barrett, "The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians," in Barrett, *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK, 1982), 154-70, here 164; Betz, *Galatians*, 248 n. 102; Fung, *Galatians*, 211.

25. *Ibid.*, 216-17.

Paul generated these startling statements with two literary devices that are examples of an ancient technique or method that would have produced a reaction of surprise, indignation, and even outrage by some readers. Paul referred to these statements as "allegorically speaking." I suggest that the puzzling nature of these allegorical assertions leads the reader to the Hebrew Scriptures to find deeper aspects of understanding such key words and concepts as freedom, slavery, the Law, heritage, and the promised inheritance.

USING ALLEGORICAL DEVICES TO IDENTIFY THE LITERARY STRUCTURE

There is a remarkable lack of agreement among commentators concerning the literary structure of Gal 4:21-5:1. The debate over which verses contain the introduction, the body of the argument, and its conclusion is quite lively. It is apparent that the main idea, the nature of Paul's argument, and the meaning of the final verses cannot be clarified without first identifying the literary structure. This study suggests that the literary structure of Gal 4:21-5:1 is evident because of Paul's placement of the allegorical devices.

Introduction	Gal 4:21-23	No allegorical devices
Focus of the Argument	Gal 4:24-28	Five obscure metaphors Four contradictory concepts
Conclusion	Gal 4:28-5:1	One allegorical device in 5:1 closes the passage

We will now examine the suggestion that the literary structure is evident because of the location of the allegorical devices.

Literary Structure: Introduction

²¹Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. ²³One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise.

There is general agreement that Gal 4:21 is the beginning of a new literary unit.²⁶ However, there is some question about where the introduction ends. Several commentators view Gal 4:24 as the end of the

26. Burton notes the abruptness of the introduction in v. 21, which elicits an excitement "calculated to arrest attention." H. N. Ridderbos (*The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953], 173) explains that λέγετέ μοι introduces a more commanding tone: "Tell me, you who want to be under the law." See also Ernest de Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1977 [1921]), 252.

introduction.²⁷ If the literary form were a narrative allegory, then the introduction would logically include v. 24, where Paul declared, "This is allegorically speaking." However, if the body of the literary unit clusters together numerous allegorical devices, as this study suggests, then Gal 4:24 belongs to the body of the argument because this one verse alone contains five allegorical markers (three strange metaphors and two concepts that appear to contradict the Abraham and Sinai narratives).

I suggest that Gal 4:21-23 alone is the introduction. Paul made no statement that seems puzzling or appears to contradict the Hebrew Scriptures. He announced that he was going to draw from "the law," that is, Scripture (v. 21). Then he posed a rhetorical question: "Do you not listen to the law?" "For it is written" introduced the lesson about Abraham, who had two sons by two different mothers (v. 22). Paul identified the status of the women (v. 22) and noted the nature of the birth of their sons (v. 23). At this point, the reader knows the topic that Paul has chosen from Scripture but does not yet know Paul's purpose or the nature of his argument. Although Paul knew he was presenting an allegorical argument, his listeners would not yet have been aware of his manner of presentation.

Literary Structure: Focus of the Argument

²⁴Now this is an allegory [this is allegorically speaking; NASB]: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. ²⁵Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷For it is written,

"Rejoice, you childless one, you who bear no children,
burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pangs;
for the children of the desolate woman are more numerous
than the children of the one who is married."

²⁸Now you, my friends, are children of promise, like Isaac.

As a beginning remark to the focus of his argument, Paul declared, "This is allegorically speaking." In the verses that follow, I have identified five obscure metaphors and four concepts that appear to contradict the biblical narrative. These are examples of two allegorical devices, which begin in v. 24 and continue repeatedly through v. 28. Examining these verses in light of the literary devices they contain, we are able to identify the focus of Paul's argument in Gal 4:24-28. Note that v. 28 summarizes the focus of the middle section. Heritage

27. Fung, *Galatians*, 204; Perriman, *Rhetorical Strategy*, 30-31.

and inheritance give substance and purpose to the concepts of slavery, freedom, and promise.

Literary Structure: Final Verses

²⁹But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. ³⁰But what does the scripture say? "Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman." ³¹So then, friends, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman. ⁵¹For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

In the final verses of this literary unit, Paul continued to speak in an allegorical manner. However, he began to give advice, both ending his pointed argument and introducing the advisory portion of his letter that followed (chaps. 5 and 6).

In the preceding allegorical focus of his argument, Paul highlighted the conflict that his Jewish rivals had precipitated concerning circumcision and study of the Law (the conflict of "persecution"; Gal 3:29). Paul demonstrated this tension by allegorically stimulating another conflict. The allegorical literary devices achieved this, and the result would undoubtedly have been outrage. Then Paul began to explain that the conflict he had stimulated by "allegorically speaking" was not the end of his message. There was a path to resolution. The message was still allegorical, but the purpose had become more advisory than startling (although surprise is still an element). "What does Scripture say? Drive out the slave and her child. . . ." This principle is both universal as well as applicable to the specific situation. Whatever it is that constitutes bondage (which is not descending from Hagar since Paul was speaking allegorically), that bondage will not inherit.

By repeating the concept of v. 28 in v. 31, Paul again startled and alerted his readers. "Now you, my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac (Gal 4:28). . . . So you, friends, are children, not of the slave but of the free woman" (Gal 4:31).²⁸ In these two seemingly repetitive verses, there seems to be a relationship between the conditions of freedom and slavery on one hand, and the promised inheritance on the other. Paul used οὐ γὰρ μὴ κληρονομήσει ("will not inherit") in Gal 4:30, citing Scripture to recount Ishmael's loss of an inheritance that Abraham then bestowed on "the child of the free

28. Bruce (*Galatians*, 225) first observed that v. 4:31 "repeats the sense of v. 28 in slightly different words."

woman. There is clearly some kind of relationship between freedom/slavery and heritage/inheritance.

Galatians 5:1 ends the final verses with one last startling allegorical device that acts as a closure. The grammatical construction reinforces this understanding. Paul's words resound with a commanding imperative (στήκετε οὖν): "Stand firm, therefore. . ." The reason for the imperative is the work of Christ, which the repetitive concept of freedom strengthens in a verb/noun construction: "For freedom Christ has set us free." The allegorical statement ("Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery") generates a strong closure to Paul's argument by contrasting the honorable "yoke of the Law" with a "yoke of slavery." Thus, Gal 4:29-5:1 constitutes the final verses of this portion of Scripture.

CONCLUSION

I conclude that the passage beginning in Gal 4:21 is not the literary genre of narrative allegory that is characteristic of Classical Greek literature, nor is it a method of Greek rhetoric. When Paul explained that he was "allegorically speaking," he meant an ancient method of argument that employed literary devices to mark and draw attention to key words and concepts embedded in the Hebrew Scriptures. Although typology is a method that artistically alters a concept from its proper meaning to another, similar in this respect to "allegorically speaking," Paul did not use typology in Gal 4:21-5:1. Instead, he employed two other linguistic devices to produce a reaction of surprise, indignation, and even outrage.

Recognizing the position of the resulting markers allows identification of the literary structure. The introduction to Paul's argument contains no allegorical devices (Gal 4:21-23). The focal point of the argument employs five obscure metaphors combined with four ironic contradictions (Gal 4:24-28). The concluding verses contain warning remarks (Gal 4:29-5:1). Paul closed his allegorical argument with one last outrageous irony: "Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Therefore, by identifying the nature of the allegorical method and the literary structure of the argument, I encourage further examination of the meaning of this passage in the same way that Paul encouraged his listeners. Key words lead to the Hebrew Scriptures, inviting a search for relationship and result. The allegorical markers point to the concepts of covenant (the "instruction" that God revealed at Mount Sinai), freedom, slavery, heritage, and inheritance.