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Edited by Jens Schröter (Managing Editor), Giovanni B. Bazzana, Jörg Frey, and Clare K. Rothschild

Please send manuscripts and editorial inquiries to:

Prof. Dr. Jens Schröter
Redaktion Early Christianity
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Theologische Fakultät
Unter den Linden 6
D-10099 Berlin
Germany
E-Mail: early-christianity@hu-berlin.de

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Elitzur A. Bar-Asher Siegal and Michal Bar-Asher Siegal

The Hebrew-Based Traditions in Galatians 4:21–31¹

Dieser Artikel schlägt vor, den Fokus für das Gesamtargument in Gal 4:21–31 auf Jes 54,1 zu legen. Der Gedankengang des Paulus wird offenbar klarer, wenn das Wort בעולה aus Jesaja in seiner späthebräischen Bedeutung als „nicht jungfräulich“ interpretiert wird statt in seiner gewöhnlichen biblischen Bedeutung als „die, die den Mann hat“, die sich auch in der Formulierung der Septuaginta (τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα) wiederfindet. Die vorgeschlagene Lesart löst einige interpretative Probleme, auf die manche Leser der Galaterpassage bereits hingewiesen haben, und erklärt insbesondere die argumentative Funktion des Jesajaverses. Die Annahme der späthebräischen Bedeutung stimmt außerdem mit weiteren Verwendungen midraschisch und semitisch basierter Tradition überein, die an anderen Stellen in Gal 4 zu finden sind. Die resultierende Lesart wird auf ähnliche Weise gestützt durch die etwa gleichzeitig entstandenen Schriften Philos von Alexandrien und gibt Aufschluss über die Existenz hebräischer Traditionen in der jüdisch-hellenistischen Welt.

Keywords: Gal 4, Paul, Isa 54, Philo, virginity, Hellenistic Judaism

1 Introduction

In Gal 4:21–31, Paul refers to the story of Isaac and Ishmael in Gen 21 to support his argument that gentiles do not need the works of the law. He interprets this narrative allegorically,² suggesting that the two sons of

¹ We wish to thank Nathan Eubank, David Lincicum, Tobias Nicklas and Matthew Thiessen for reading and commenting on this paper. This paper was presented at the department of Hebrew Language at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; The Stroum Center for Jewish Studies, University of Washington, Seattle; and the seminar of the Judaic Studies Program at Yale University. We are grateful for the helpful comments from the participants of these talks. This paper was supported by Israel Science Foundation grant “The Church Fathers and the Babylonian Talmud: Heretics Stories as a Reflection of Inter-Religious Dialogue” (no. 1199/17, Michal Bar-Asher Siegal).

² Paul himself uses the term “allegory” (ἀλληγορούμενα). This is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, and it does not fully correspond to the term’s use elsewhere in contemporary texts. On the proper description of Paul’s hermeneutical move (typology, allegory, or analogy), see, among others, R.Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 217–220; H.D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadel-

Abraham represent two different covenants: a covenant of slavery given to Israel, which parallels “the present city of Jerusalem,” and a covenant of freedom, which parallels “the Jerusalem that is above.”

Tell me, you who want to be under the law (ὕπὸ νόμου³): are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.⁴ His son by the slave woman was born according to (or “by”⁵) the flesh (κατὰ σάρκα); but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise (δι’ ἐπαγγελίας). These things may be taken figuratively (ἀλληγορούμενα), for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: this is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia⁶ and corresponds (συστοιχεῖ) to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free,⁷ and she is our mother. For it is written: “*Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman (τῆς ἐρήμου) than of her who has a husband (τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα)*” (Isa 54:1). Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise (ἐπαγγελίας τέκνα ἐστέ). At that time the son born according to/by the flesh (κατὰ σάρκα) persecuted the son born according to/by the Spirit (κατὰ πνεῦμα). It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s

phia: Fortress, 1979), 239; R.N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 209. On typology and allegory, see also F. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 186–202.

3 According to Betz, *Galatians* (see n. 2), 241, the word νόμος in this passage can be read as both Jewish law and Scripture itself.

4 On slavery and freedom under the law, see Gal 2:4; 3:26–28; 4:31; 5:1; and 5:13. See also Betz, *Galatians* (see n. 2), 242.

5 In the Greek of the New Testament, the preposition κατὰ followed by a noun in the accusative can mean either “according to” or “by means of.” See J.A. Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek New Testament*, §2595 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980). J.L. Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 435, offers the translation “as a result of the power of,” since “both the flesh and the promise/spirit are powers able to produce children.” See below for discussion of this term.

6 This verse, which stands at the heart of Paul’s allegory here, probably suggests that the word “Hagar” was used as a name for Mount Sinai. For the various textual problems in this passage, see F. Mussner, “Hagar, Sinai, Jerusalem: Zum Text von Gal. 4,25a,” *TQ* 135 (1955), 56–60; M.G. Steinhauser, “Gal 4,25a: Evidence of Targumic Tradition in Gal 4,21–31?,” *Bib* 70 (1989), 234–240; P. Borgen, “Some Hebrew and Pagan Features in Philo’s and Paul’s Interpretation of Hagar and Ishmael,” in *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism*, ed. P. Borgen and S. Giversen (Aarhus: Aarhus University, 1995), 151–164. On the location of Mount Sinai, see G.I. Davies, “Hagar, El-Heḡra and the Location of Mount Sinai, with an Additional Note on Reqem,” *VT* 22 (1972), 152–163; M. Hengel, “Paul in Arabia,” *BBR* 12 (2002), 47–66.

7 The word ἐλευθεράς can be translated both as “free” and, more specifically, as “free-woman.”

son” (Gen 21:10).⁸ Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

The core of this passage consists of the following argument: there are two communities; one is under the law, while the other is free.⁹ Though at present the community under the law persecutes the free community, in the future the situation will be reversed.

Paul’s argument explicitly relies on two biblical narratives: first, the story of Sarah and Hagar, the two women in the life of Abraham, and their respective sons, Isaac and Ishmael (Gen 16–21); and second, Isa 54:1,¹⁰ which is quoted directly in support of Paul’s argument (γέγραπται γάρ, “it has indeed been written”).¹¹ Paul’s basic allegory is clear. The slave woman

8 On the differences between the original verse in Genesis and the version cited here, see C.D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 248–251.

9 Some interpreters have read this passage as a statement of general difference between Jews and gentiles. The earliest is Tertullian, *Marc.* 5.4, 8; see also I. Pabst, “The Interpretation of the Sarah-Hagar-Stories in Rabbinic and Patristic Literature,” *Lectio Difficilior* (January 2003), http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/03_1/pabst.htm. However, recent scholars agree that Paul is talking about the historical circumstances of his Galatians audience, in particular. See S.J.D. Cohen, “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, ed. A.-J. Levine and M.Z. Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 332. S. DiMattei, “Paul’s Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21–31) in Light of First Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics,” *NTS* 52 (2006), 102–122, here 120–121, for example, emphasizes that Paul is *not* claiming that the Jews are now the sons of Hagar and the gentiles the true sons of Sarah. Rather, Paul is talking about the two *covenants* and asks his audience to choose the free one. While this reading neutralizes the anti-Jewish sentiment of the passage, this poses a problem for understanding Paul’s description of one group’s persecution of the other (see Martyn, *Galatians* [see n. 5], 445). On the question of the entity to which Paul is referring here (whether Judaism, which requires Torah observance, or the Jerusalem Church, which asks gentile Christians to become law-observant), see M.S. Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free: Paul’s Isaianic Gospel in Galatians*, BZNW 168 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 175 n. 161.

10 Isaiah is often quoted in the New Testament and its “influence is everywhere in the New Testament documents”; see S. Moyise and M.J.J. Menken, eds., *The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel: Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 1. In Paul’s writings specifically, “the most quotations of and allusions to Isaiah” appear in Romans, which cites Isaiah ten times (Rom 9–11). In Galatians, however, it is quoted only here. See J.R. Wagner, “Isaiah in Romans and Galatians,” *ibid.*, 117–132 (quote from p. 117). See also Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free* (see n. 9).

11 There is an extensive literature on Paul’s quotations of and allusions to Old Testament verses. See, for example, D.A. Koch, *Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums: Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus*, BHT 69 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986); D.M. Smith, “The Pauline Literature,” in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture, Essays in Honor of Barnabas Lindars*, ed. D.A. Carson and H.G.M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 267–276; R.B.

(Hagar) and the free woman (Sarah) in the biblical story, and their sons, represent a community under the law and a free community, respectively.¹² According to Galatians, the Genesis story supports the claim that only the sons of the free woman will have a share in God's future inheritance.

The wider context of the verse from Isaiah lends credence to the way it is used in Paul's allegory. In Isa 51:2, the prophet mentions Sarah, imploring his audience to "look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many."¹³ Later, Isa 54:10–12 talks of rebuilding a "new Jerusalem" of precious stones: "Afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will rebuild you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with lapis lazuli. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones."¹⁴

However, the text in Galatians contains additional elements whose sources in texts from Genesis and Isaiah are somewhat obscure. First, in addition to comparing the parentage of Isaac and Ishmael, Paul notes that the former was born according to/by the spirit and the promise (κατὰ πνεῦμα/ἐπαγγελίας), while the latter was born according to/by the flesh

Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture* (see n. 8); M. Silva, "Old Testament in Paul," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin, and D.G. Reid (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 630–633; and, more recently, S. Moyise, "Quotations," in *As It Is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture*, ed. S.E. Porter and C.D. Stanley, SBLSymS 50 (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 15–28; D. Lincicum, "Paul's Engagement with Deuteronomy: Snapshots and Signposts," *CurBR* 7 (2008), 37–67; J.R. Wagner, "Paul and Scripture," in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, ed. S. Westerholm (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2011), 154–171. See also the collected essays in *As It Is Written* (see above) and C.D. Stanley, ed., *Paul and Scripture: Extending the Conversation* (Atlanta: SBL, 2012).

12 Recently, the traditional identification of the non-Sinaitic covenant with that of Christ has been challenged. It has been read instead as the Abrahamic covenant or the Abrahamic covenant understood christologically. See Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free* (see n. 9), 174 n. 159. Furthermore, scholars have noticed that while Hagar's covenant is explicitly linked to Sinai, Sarah's covenant is not explicated further. Is it a new covenant in Christ, as per, for example, Betz, *Galatians* (see n. 2), 24–244; R.A. Cole, *Galatians*, TNTC 9 (London: Tyndale, 1965), 180–181; J. Rohde, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater*, THKNT 9 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1989), 195–196; R.N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1990), 211? An Abrahamic covenant, as per F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 218; F.J. Matera, *Galatians*, SP 9 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007), 175–176? Or a more nuanced approach proposed in Hays, *Echoes of Scripture* (see n. 11), 114–115; B. Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 331–332. See Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free*, 174 n. 159.

13 Wagner, "Isaiah in Romans and Galatians" (see n. 10), 130.

14 Martyn, *Galatians* (see n. 5), 440.

(κατὰ σάρκα). Second, he draws parallels between the two communities and two Jerusalems: the present-day city and the Jerusalem that is above. The text thus establishes the following set of parallel oppositions:¹⁵

Slaves: those who are under the law	The free people
Present city of Jerusalem	The Jerusalem that is above
The son of the slave woman, Hagar, who was born according to/by the flesh (κατὰ σάρκα)	Son of the free woman, Sarah (“the barren woman”), who was born as the result of a promise (δι’ ἐπαγγελίας)/born according to/by the spirit (κατὰ πνεῦμα)

As noted, these additional elements in the text do not seem to derive from the biblical story in Genesis in any obvious way. The birth of Isaac “according to the promise” presumably refers to the angels’ visit to announce Sarah’s pregnancy in Gen 18 (and maybe also the stress in Gen 21:1 on God’s word),¹⁶ but the parallel notion that Isaac was born “according to/by the spirit,” is a new detail. Furthermore, as noted above, Paul’s introduction of the citation from Isaiah with the words γέγραπται γάρ, “it has indeed been written,” indicates that it is meant to provide support for his argument; however, it is not immediately apparent how exactly the verse does so. As we will see below, attempts to draw a direct connection between Isa 54:1 and the story of Sarah and Hagar encounter serious obstacles.

This paper focuses on one of Paul’s additions to the Genesis narrative, in particular: the distinction between the son born by the flesh and the son born by the spirit. We will argue that the main purpose of the citation of Isa 54:1 is to provide this missing piece, the source for the central contrast between Ishmael and Isaac. A careful reading of this verse, we propose, will reveal the derivation of Paul’s statement that the son of Hagar was born by the flesh, while the son of Sarah was born by the spirit. The structure of the paper is as follows: we will first survey several previous treatments of this passage from Galatians, which identify textual difficulties and suggest possible solutions. After demonstrating various problems with these solutions, we will turn to our own proposal. In the final section of the paper, we will demonstrate that Paul’s reading of Isa 54:1 is rooted in a Hebrew-based tradition, which is also found in the writings of Philo of Alexandria.

¹⁵ For a more complete table see Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free* (see n. 9), 176.

¹⁶ Ancient and modern scholars have pointed out that Paul seems to ignore the fact that Ishmael’s conception was also divinely predicted in Gen 26:10. See Jerome, *Comm. Gal.* 2.4.22–23; J.B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1866), 177. See also A.T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul’s Technique and Theology* (London: SPCK, 1974), 91; Fung, *Galatians* (see n. 2), 205 n. 10.

2 Previous Scholarship on Gal 4:21–31

Scholars have written extensively on this passage and the hermeneutical problems it poses. Matthew Harmon goes so far as to say that “[o]n any list of difficult NT passages, Gal 4:21–5:1 would certainly rank near the top.”¹⁷ Apart from philological and textual difficulties, including numerous textual variants and two New Testament *hapax legomena* (ἀλληγορούμενα and συστοιχεί),¹⁸ and the theological issues arising from Paul’s use of Genesis passages commanding circumcision, to learn about the rejection of this exact law,¹⁹ the main issues emerge from the insertion of Isa 54:1.²⁰ Quotations from Isaiah appear frequently in Paul’s writings, and scholars consider them to be an indication of the formative place Isaiah held in the apostle’s theological framework.²¹ However, the role of this specific verse in its context in Galatians is unclear.

The association between Isa 54:1 and the narrative from Genesis apparently relies on the connection between the address “O barren woman” in Isaiah and the description of Sarah as barren in Gen 11:30. The turn to Isaiah also supplies Paul with “pairs of opposites with which he can supplement those he has already found in the Genesis stories.”²² But, is this the only connection between the two parts of Paul’s argument? Is the only function of the quote from Isaiah to indicate that the barren one, that is, Sarah, will rejoice in the future, or is it brought in order to add some new information to Paul’s depiction of the two covenants?

The combination of these two biblical sources, Genesis and Isaiah, is also problematic in various ways. In Isa 54:1, as translated in the Septuagint

¹⁷ Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free* (see n. 9), 173. See there, n. 156, for some of the many bibliographical references on this passage. For one of the contributions on this topic see DiMattei, “Paul’s Allegory” (see n. 9).

¹⁸ On these, see Betz, *Galatians* (see n. 2), 238–240, and his many bibliographical references there.

¹⁹ See Hays, *Echoes of Scripture* (see n. 11), 111–112, and discussion in the third chapter of M. Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

²⁰ The heavy use of Abraham traditions in Gal 3 and 4 suggests that Paul’s opponents might have also been using these verses in some way (see Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free* [see n. 9], 124, and references there, n. 3). Especially interesting is the observation that the Isaiah verse is actually found in the Palestinian triennial *haftarah* cycle corresponding to the reading of these very Genesis verses, making Paul’s allegory a Torah/*haftarah* midrash of sorts. If so, this passage supplies additional proof of the liturgical practice of Torah/*haftarah* reading already in the first century CE. See M. Callaway, *Sing O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash*, SBLDS 91 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 173–174, and DiMattei, “Paul’s Allegory” (see n. 9), 114 and n. 44.

²¹ Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free* (see n. 9), 11.

²² Martyn, *Galatians* (see n. 5), 442.

and quoted in Galatians, the barren woman stands in contrast to the woman with a husband (τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα, lit. “the one who has a man”). Hagar, as the non-barren woman, must therefore be identified as the woman who has a husband. As Harmon has noted, this is obviously, problematic, since Sarah is Abraham’s wife according to Genesis, while Hagar, her servant, is given to him only when the union with Sarah fails to produce children.²³ Karen Jobes further argues that it is odd to focus on Sarah’s early barrenness when it is her *son*, Isaac, who stands at the heart of the allegory:

One thing that is clear is that Paul’s argument depends upon the fact that both Hagar and Sarah did have a son by Abraham (and both were circumcised). Therefore it seems confusing to introduce the thought of barrenness by quoting Isa 54:1. Though Sarah had been barren for much of her life, Paul’s reference here is specifically to her as the mother of Isaac. Who then is this barren woman and how does she contribute to such an exegetical reversal? How is the barren one related to Sarah and Hagar? How is the barren one relevant to the Galatian Christians? These connections are not stated and are left to the inference of the reader. If, as many interpreters suggest, the barren one is Sarah, then it obviously must refer to her in that time of her life before she gave birth to Isaac. But this identification does not seem completely apt, for in the quotation the barren one is contrasted with the one “who has a husband.” It was Sarah, not Hagar, who was the wife of Abraham.²⁴

More generally, Jobes stresses that barrenness is not a significant theme in other parts of Paul’s argument: “Searching the larger context for clues as to how the idea of barrenness functions in Paul’s thought does not yield satisfactory answers. Nowhere else in Galatians does Paul refer to or allude to barrenness or to a barren woman.”²⁵

In light of these problems and apparent inconsistencies, most interpreters default to a very general explanation of the connection between Genesis and Isaiah in this allegory, without delving into a detailed analysis of the different parts of the analogy. Others either use their own judgment²⁶ or turn to general biblical theology rather than a detailed attempt to read Isa 54:1 in such a way as to complete the missing parts of the analogy.²⁷ C.K. Barrett offers a polemical historical background which underlies Paul’s use of Isaiah and forces him to use the Genesis story even if it does not align

²³ Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free* (see n. 9), 177.

²⁴ K.H. Jobes, “Jerusalem, Our Mother: Metalepsis and Intertextuality in Galatians 4:21–31,” *WTJ* 55 (1993), 299–320, here 302.

²⁵ Jobes, “Jerusalem, Our Mother” (see n. 24), 304.

²⁶ See survey in Jobes, “Jerusalem, Our Mother” (see n. 24), 303.

²⁷ Jobes, “Jerusalem, Our Mother” (see n. 24).

with the allegory he is trying to make.²⁸ Richard Hays relies on his theory of “literary echoes,” which obviates the need to complete all aspects of the analogy. He suggests that “the figurative effect of the echo can lie in the unstated or suppressed (transumed) points of resonance between the two texts.”²⁹ Louis Martyn simply notes that such inconsistencies are “characteristic of allegorical interpretation.”³⁰

Harmon attempts to provide an alternative understanding of Isa 54:1, which solves the difficulties in Paul’s allegory, particularly the description of Hagar as Abraham’s wife and the lack of scriptural basis for the claim that Ishmael’s conception was “by the flesh.” Harmon suggests that Paul reads Isaiah as describing Abraham and Hagar’s sexual relationship rather than their marital status.³¹ In support of this proposal, he cites the specific wording of the Septuagint: τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα, literally, “the one who has a man.” While this phrase is generally translated as “the one who has a husband,” Harmon, relying on Hermann Hanse’s entry in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*,³² argues that this expression can denote a non-marital, sexual relationship. If so, then the verse from Isaiah does not necessarily indicate that Hagar was Abraham’s wife, but rather that she had a sexual relationship with him, which culminated in the birth of Ishmael (“according to/by the flesh”).

Harmon’s proposed reading provides a plausible explanation for the description of Hagar, rather than Sarah, as Abraham’s “wife,” along with a biblical source for the claim that Ishmael was born by the flesh. However, there are still several problems with this suggestion. First and foremost, it does not provide support for the second, more essential part of the analogy: the notion that Isaac was born by the spirit. This reading of Hagar and Abraham’s relationship might shed light on Isaac’s birth, if only by implication: perhaps, unlike Hagar and Abraham, Sarah and Abraham *did not* engage in a sexual relationship. The verse from Isaiah would thus imply, if only by opposition, the idea of Isaac’s birth “according to the promise/spirit.” Even if this is the case, however, the expression τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν

28 C.K. Barrett, “The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians,” in *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann*, ed. J. Friedrich et al. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1976), 1–16.

29 Hays, *Echoes of Scripture* (see n. 11), 20.

30 Martyn, *Galatians* (see n. 5), 443.

31 Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free* (see n. 9), 180.

32 H. Hanse, “ἔχω,” *TDNT* 2 (1964), 816–832, here 817 n. 5. According to Hanse, this expression “implies more than a legal relationship, but for the most part it is used not for personal fellowship, but as a technical term for sexual intercourse: even outside marriage one may have a woman or a man.”

ἄνδρα still *can* connote marital status (even if it does not in this instance.) Hence, it seems problematic to contrast this expression with the description of Sarah, the legal wife of Abraham. In the following section we will challenge the linguistic foundations of Harmon’s reading. We will then propose an alternative solution for these questions. As will become clear, we still follow Harmon’s general reading of the verse from Isaiah, but we will propose a different understanding of the role it plays in Galatians.

3 The Interpretation of the Greek Expression τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα

Referring to Hanse’s dictionary entry, Harmon argues that the Greek expression τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα (the equivalent of the English “to have a man/woman”) can, at times, imply sexual intercourse rather than marital status.³³ Indeed, one encounters this meaning in classical texts and, more importantly, elsewhere in the New Testament and Paul’s letters. However, if we review the various sources cited by Hanse, it becomes clear that some of them do in fact describe marriage.³⁴ Only in two examples, both in 1 Corinthians, does this expression specifically indicate sexual intercourse:

(1 Cor 5:1) Ὅλως ἀκούεται ἐν ὑμῖν πορνεία, καὶ τοιαύτη πορνεία ἥτις οὐδὲ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ὥστε γυναῖκά τινα τοῦ πατρὸς ἔχειν.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the gentiles, that *one has his father’s woman*.

(1 Cor 7:2) διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἔχέτω, καὶ ἕκαστη τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα.

Because of sexual immoralities, let *each man have his own woman*, and let *each woman have her own man*.

The precise structure of these two verses is important. In both places, an adnominal possessive construction indicates that the person who is the object of the verb “to have” is married to someone, who appears in the genitive case or with a possessive attribute (τοῦ πατρὸς, “his father’s [woman]”; τὴν ἑαυτοῦ, “his own [woman]”; and τὸν ἴδιον, “her own [man]”). By contrast, the possession indicated by the verb ἔχω, “to have,” seems to imply sexual intercourse rather than marriage. One may conclude

³³ See also Fung, *Galatians* (see n. 2), 211 n. 36.

³⁴ Matt 22:28; Mark 12:23; Luke 20:28, 33; John 4:17; 1 Cor 7:29; and also Matt 14:4, read in light of the marriage mentioned in Mark 6:17–18.

that the construction “X has a man/woman” can have two distinct meanings in Greek: “X possesses the man/woman” (i. e., he/she is married to her/him), or “X has sex with the man/woman.”

According to Hanse and Harmon, Paul legitimately reads Isa 54:1 in accordance with the second meaning of this Greek construction. Since Hagar is the woman who “has a man,” the verse perforce means only that she had sexual intercourse with Abraham. However, it is still unclear what prompted the use of Isa 54:1 in this context and how exactly it is meant to establish the dichotomy between Abraham’s two sons, the one conceived by the flesh and the other by the spirit. It is also unclear which part of the Isaiah verse specifically prompted the description of Isaac as one conceived by/according to the spirit.

In the rest of this section, we would like to challenge the linguistic interpretation upon which Harmon’s reading is based. We will focus on the semantic mechanism behind the availability of two possible readings of the verse from Isaiah and the choice between them. We will show that, in fact, one cannot randomly choose between the two meanings of the relevant expression. Instead, we propose that the default meaning of the expression “to have a man/woman” is Hanse’s first definition (marriage); only in certain defined contexts, when the first meaning is pragmatically blocked, does the second meaning (sexual intercourse) become available.

While it might seem from the discussion thus far that such lexical ambiguity is unique to this specific Greek expression, it is in fact an example of a broader semantic phenomenon in Greek and cross-linguistically.

The expression τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα, “the one who has a husband,” is a token of the standard predicative possessive construction in Greek. The construction expresses that an object is possessed by someone/something, and it is the main predication of the sentence. Greek, like English, has a transitive construction with the verb “to have” (ἔχω in Greek),³⁵ in which the possessor is the subject and the possessed is the object. As we shall see, the two meanings of this specific expression exhibit the regular semantics of predicative possessive constructions in general, and these constructions in general do not entail possession. Possession is merely the default reading, which can be overridden by the context.³⁶ The common working hy-

35 For a review of the different types of predicative possessive constructions, see L. Stassen, *Predicative Possession* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); E.A. Bar-Asher Siegal, “From Typology to Diachrony: Synchronic and Diachronic Aspects of Predicative Possessive Constructions in Akkadian,” *Folia Linguistica Historica* 32 (2011), 43–88.

36 For preliminary discussions on the semantics of the predicative possessive construction, see E. Clark, “Locational: Existential, Locative, and Possessive Constructions” (paper

pothesis in linguistics is that languages share principles in how to interpret the meanings of expressions. Indeed, typological studies repeatedly reveal that predicative possessive constructions work similarly cross-linguistically, in terms of both their syntax and their semantics. There is no reason, therefore, from a linguistic point of view, to assume that Koine Greek would differ markedly from other languages in this regard, so long as there is no evidence to the contrary. Indeed, we will go further and provide support for our analysis from data in the New Testament itself.

To illustrate the argument that ownership is not necessarily part of the semantics of the predicative possessive construction, let us take as an example the English sentence “I have a car.” While this sentence usually implies ownership (“There is a car that belongs to me”), this is not the case with a sentence such as “Today I have my company’s car for a few hours.” In fact, the sentence “Today I have a car for a few hours” usually suggests the opposite: that the speaker can *only* use the car for a few hours, after which it must be returned to its owner. Similarly, the sentence “I have a pen” often indicates merely that the speaker has a writing instrument at his disposal. Thus, predicative possessive constructions do not necessarily designate ownership, but rather often indicate that the possessor can use the possessed item *as if she were its owner*.

In a vacuum, a predicative possessive construction conventionally implies ownership; only when the context directs otherwise do we interpret this construction instead as an indication of the ability to use the possessed item “like” the owner. Such an implication arises when the context makes clear that there is another owner or that the speaker’s ability to use the object is only temporary; for example, when one explicitly indicates that the object belongs to another owner (“I have my company’s car”), or when it is limited to a specific period of time (“I have a pen for a few minutes”).

The same analysis applies to the statement that a man “has a woman.” In most cases, this sentence implies some kind of permanent relationship, such as a wife or (in modern times) a girlfriend. However, in the following context, “He knows how to enjoy life; he already has a woman for the night,” the clear implication is that the man who is the subject of the

presented at the Universals of Human Language conference, Stanford University, 1978); J. Lyons, “A Note on Possessive, Existential, and Locative Sentences,” *Foundations of Language* 3 (1967), 390–396; T. Stolz, “To Be with X Is to Have X: Comitatives, Instrumentals, Locative and Predicative Possession,” *Linguistics* 39 (2001), 321–350; M. Herslund and I. Baron, “Introduction: Dimensions of Possession,” in *Dimension of Possession*, ed. I. Baron, M. Herslund, and F. Sørensen (Typological Studies in Language 47; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001), 1–26.

sentence will have intercourse with the woman but is not in a permanent relationship with her. Similarly, if it is said, “He has no shame; I hear that yesterday he had his father’s girlfriend,” it would be understood to indicate a single sexual event, since it is clear that someone else “possesses” the relevant man or woman.

As noted above, the working linguistic hypothesis is that languages share principles that determine how to interpret the meanings of expressions, across languages and time periods. Thus, we turn from our English examples to the New Testament, using the data mentioned earlier, which support a similar analysis for the Greek idiom under discussion here. Usually, the expression “to have a woman/man” means to own them, which connotes marriage. However, when we go back to the verses quoted above from 1 Corinthians, both sentences appear in contexts involving *πορνεία*, “sexual immorality.” The interpretation of the verb “to have” as a reference to sexual intercourse, rather than marriage, is suggested by the context, as in both cases it is clear that the relevant women or men are married to others (using the adnominal possessive construction). Hence, the predicative possessive construction here signifies that the possessor functions *as if* he were an owner, that is, engages in sexual intercourse. In other words, the same principles for the interpretation of the predicative possessive construction in contemporary languages apply to the interpretation of this expression in Koine Greek. We should only interpret this expression as a marker of its secondary “use of ownership” meaning (i. e., the sexual act) when the context leads us in this direction.

In light of this analysis, Harmon’s proposed understanding of Paul’s reading of Isa 54:1 is less appealing. The context in Isaiah provides no clear reason to read the Greek version of this verse as describing anything but a married woman. Nevertheless, we would like to follow the general direction of Harmon’s proposal. We agree that the quote from Isaiah is used by Paul to justify the distinction between the two sons of Abraham, one born by the spirit and the other born by the flesh. However, rather than relying on the meaning of the Greek expression *τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα*, as Harmon does, we will focus on the Hebrew term *בעולה*. We will suggest that we can understand Paul’s distinction between Abraham’s two sons if we suppose that his reading relies on the original Hebrew meaning of Isa 54:1, in a version close to the Masoretic Text (read in Hebrew or the Greek text). Additionally, we will argue that the tradition Paul preserves understands the word *בעולה* according to its semantics in the Late Hebrew lexicon.

We will first outline the development of the semantics of the root *בע"ל*, *B- 'L*, in the Semitic languages in general, and Hebrew in particular. We will

then support this reading of בעולה with other examples that show the Jewish traditions in the background of this entire passage of Paul's Galatians, alongside similar evidence of this Hebrew meaning in the writings of Philo of Alexandria.

4 בעולה in Late Hebrew

The root *B-ʿ-L* is found throughout the Semitic languages with the meaning of ownership. It appears in nouns such as *bēlum*, “lord, owner,” in Akkadian,³⁷ or with an additional specification in the Hebrew *bāʿāl*³⁸ and the Arabic *baʿl*,³⁹ meaning “husband.” In Akkadian, this root also functions in the verbal realm, with the verbs *bēlum*, “to exercise rulership; to be in authority,” or *buʿulum*, “to make someone a ruler, an owner.”⁴⁰ Similarly, in Biblical Hebrew, this root in the G-stem means “to be someone’s lord,” as in the following verse (Isa 26:13):

יהוה אלהינו בעלונו אדנים זולתך.

Lord our God, other lords besides you have possessed us.

As is the case with the additional meaning of the noun בעל (“husband”), this Hebrew verb also developed the connotation of marriage, and it often describes the act of consummating a marital relationship. Thus, in the case of the marriage of a captive woman, this verb describes the act of a man upon a woman by which she becomes his wife (Deut 21:13):

ואחר כן תבוא אליה ובעלתה והיתה לך לאשה.

Then you may go to her and perform the act of becoming her husband/her owner, and she shall become your wife.

As some of the dictionaries have noted, it seems evident that this act of ownership, by which a man becomes a husband, is sexual intercourse,⁴¹ as seems also to be the case in the following verse (Deut 24:1):

³⁷ CAD 2.191.

³⁸ HALOT 1.143.

³⁹ H. Wehr and J.M. Cowan, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (London: Harrap, 1976), 67.

⁴⁰ CAD 2.199.

⁴¹ It is interesting to note that this connotation is mentioned by lexicographers who were also Modern Hebrew speakers, since this is the meaning of this verb in Modern Hebrew. See M.Z. Kaddari, *A Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* [in Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2006), 114; similarly, A. Even-Shoshan, *The New Dictionary* [in Hebrew], 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1985), 1.183. Cf. HALOT 1.142, for whom the

אמ' רב שמואל בר איניא משמא דרב. אשה גולם היא ואינה כורתת ברית אלא למי שעשאה כלי. שנ' "כי בעליך עשׂיך יי' צב' שמו."

R. Samuel b. Inya said in the name of Rav: A woman [before marriage] is a shapeless lump and concludes a covenant only with him who transforms her [into] a [useful] vessel, as it is written: "For you maker is בועליך; the Lord of Hosts is his name."

Transforming a woman from a shapeless lump into a vessel is clearly a description of the act of penetration, and the rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud understand that the making of the woman is accomplished by the act of penetration, בעילה.

Returning to the form in Isa 54:1, בעולה is the feminine singular passive participle, which in Biblical Hebrew would generally mean "the one [fem.] being owned." In order to express the legal status of wife, Biblical Hebrew uses a special expression: בעולת בעל, "owned by a husband."⁴³

In our verse, בעולה stands in contrast to שוממה. The same opposition also appears in Isa 62:4:

לא יאמר לך עוד עזובה ולא רצך לא יאמר עוד שממה כי לך יקרא חפצי בה ולא רצך בעולה כי חפץ יהיה בך ורצך תבעל.

No longer will they call you deserted or name your land "the desolate one." Rather, you will be called Hephzibah [i. e., "my delight is in her"] and your land בעולה ["the one which is owned"], for the Lord will take delight in you and your land will be owned.

Both verses seem to express a contrast between two entities, one that has a lord and the other, desolate one, that does not.

In Late Hebrew, the terms used to describe a woman's marital status are מאורשה, "engaged," and נשואה, "married."⁴⁴ With the shift in the meaning of the root B-ʿL to indicate the act of penetration, the passive participle, בעולה, predictably came to indicate a physical state that stands in contrast to בתולה, "virgin." This contrast underlies the following source from m. Ketub. 1:6:

והנושא את [ה]אשה ולא מצא לה בתולים. היא אומרת. משארסתני נאנסתי. [נסתחפה] שדך. והוא אומ'. לא כי אלא עד שלא אירסתיך והיה מקחי מקח טעות. רבן גמליא' ור' אליעזר אומ'. נאמנת. ור' יהושע אומ'. אינה נאמנת ולא מפייה אנו חיים. אלא הרי זו בחזקת בעולה עד שלא תתארס והטעתו עד שתביא ראיה לדבריה.

One who marries a woman and finds she has no hymen [the sign of virginity]; she says, "I was raped after my inchoate marriage, and his field has been washed away." And he says, "No, but rather [you were raped] before I married you, and my purchase was made in error." Rabban Gamaliel and R. Eliezer say: She is to be believed. And R. Joshua says: We

⁴³ See, for example, Gen 20:3 or Deut 22:22. Cf. HALOT 1.142.

⁴⁴ A. Bendavid, *Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1967), 121.

do not live from her mouth, but she is presumed to have had intercourse before her inchoate marriage and to have deceived him, unless she brings evidence for her assertion.⁴⁵

The contrast in this passage is between a woman with an intact hymen (בתולין, often considered a sign of virginity in traditional societies) and a בעולה, “[a woman] who has had intercourse.” It clearly demonstrates how בעולה had become the antonym of בתולה by this period. Another example of this opposition is found in the rabbinic interpretation of Exod 22:15: “If a man seduces a virgin (בתולה) who is not pledged to be married (אשר לא אורסה) and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife.” Mekilta Derashbi reads:

בתולה. ולא בעולה.

“A virgin” – this means a woman who has never had intercourse.

Thus, a reader familiar with Late Hebrew, unaware of this historical development, could, and most likely did, read the form בעולה in Isa 54:1 as a reference to a woman who was not a virgin. They did so in the same way that the rabbis “misread” this Biblical Hebrew root in other places (including in the same chapter of Isaiah) according to its Late Hebrew meaning. Armed with this linguistic background, we can now propose a new way to understand Paul’s reading of Isa 54:1.

5 How Did Paul Read Isa 54:1?

Let us read Isa 54:1 carefully and consider the challenges it poses:

רני עקרה לא ילדה פצחי רנה וצהלי לא חלה כי רבים בני שוממה מבני בעולה אמר יהוה

Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of the בעולה says the Lord.

This verse employs three Hebrew attributions: עקרה, “barren”; שוממה, “desolate”; and בעולה, whose meaning stands at the heart of our discussion. It also includes two negated verbs: לא ילדה and לא חלה, both meaning “did not give birth.” Early and later interpretations of this passage defined these terms in various ways and determined the semantic relationships between

⁴⁵ We rely here on Robert Brody’s forthcoming translation of this Mishnah in the *Oxford Annotated Mishnah*, ed. H. Lapin and S.J.D. Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

them in this context.⁴⁶ The verse contrasts two of the attributes: שוממה and בעולה: רבים בני שוממה מבני בעולה says the Lord.” Meanwhile, the attribute עקרה, “barren,” seems to be parallel to שוממה, “desolate.” Interpreters of this verse have generally chosen one of these attributes as the point of reference for interpretation, that is, as *the* entity the verse is discussing. The identification of the other attributes then follows from this choice.

However, the parallelism suggested by the structure of the verse between עקרה and שוממה poses a serious challenge, since neither עקרה nor שוממה is a strict antonym of בעולה. At the same time, these two terms themselves, עקרה and שוממה, are not from the same semantic field. Different interpreters have dealt with this problem in different ways. Targum Jonathan, for example, puts the adjective שוממה at the center of its translation, while 2 Clem. 2:1–3 focuses on עקרה, the childless woman.⁴⁷

In light of this analysis, we suggest that the Late Hebrew meaning of בעולה stands in the background of Paul’s reading of Isa 54:1. In Gal 4, Paul identifies the עקרה, the “barren woman,” with Sarah. We propose that he reads בעולה as “a woman who had intercourse.” This is not, as Harmon suggests, due to the meaning of the corresponding Greek expression, but rather due to the widespread Late Hebrew meaning of בעולה. This attribution can thus be read either as an individual-level predicate (a description that is true throughout the existence of an individual), in which case עקרה is the equivalent of “virgin,” or as a stage-level predicate (a description that is true of its subject at a particular point in time), in which case it refers to a specific instance in which a child was conceived without the act of בעילה, “intercourse.”

Our explanation might then be the source for Paul’s notion that Isaac was born “by the spirit.” Since שוממה and בעולה are set in opposition to one another in Isaiah, שוממה could be read as “not בעולה,” that is, “a woman who has never had/did not have intercourse.” Furthermore, since שוממה parallels עקרה, both terms are read as “virgin” or “a woman who did not have intercourse.” We raise both options of stage-level and individual-level predicates, since in the case of Sarah, it would obviously be hard to claim

⁴⁶ For a survey of these and other interpretations of this verse, see E.A. Bar-Asher Siegal and M. Bar-Asher Siegal, “Rejoice, O Barren One Who Bore No Child: Beruria and the Jewish-Christian Conversation in the Babylonian Talmud,” in *The Faces of Torah: Studies in the Texts and Contexts of Ancient Judaism in Honor of Steven Fraade*, ed. M. Bar-Asher Siegal, T. Novick, and C. Hayes, JAJSup 22 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 199–220.

⁴⁷ Bar-Asher Siegal and Bar-Asher Siegal, “Rejoice” (see n. 46).

that she is a virgin in the sense of a woman who has *never* had intercourse. Rather, this description in reference to Sarah must indicate a woman who conceives without the sexual act. Below, we demonstrate that even the term virgin itself was used by Philo as a stage-level predicate, in this same sense.⁴⁸

The following scheme exhibits the data from Isa 54:1 and its “logical” conclusion:

It is given that,

- (1) the antonym of בעולה is a woman who did not have intercourse (lexical knowledge, i. e., its meaning in late Hebrew),
- (2) שוממה is equivalent to עקרה (parallelism in the verse),
- (3) בעולה is the antonym of שוממה (contrast in the verse).

Conclusions:

- (1) בעולה is an antonym of עקרה;
hence,
- (2) if בעולה is read as “non-virgin,”
then
- (3) עקרה means בתולה, “virgin,” or at least a woman whose specific conception did not result from sexual intercourse.⁴⁹

Returning to Gal 4, since Sarah is identified as the עקרה, she must be a virgin, based on our conclusions above. Since we know that she gave birth to Isaac, it must be the case that she conceived him “by/according to the spirit,” as Paul suggests. In this way, we can read Paul’s quotation of Isa 54:1 as a source for the idea that the son of the free woman, Sarah – the עקרה – was born by the spirit, while the son of Hagar – the בעולה, “the non-virgin” – was born by the flesh.

A point of clarification is required in order to support this proposed reading of Paul as depicting a non-sexual conception. We, therefore, dedicate the next section to this topic.

6 Non-sexual Conception

According to our proposal, κατὰ σάρκα translates as “by means of the flesh,” and κατὰ πνεῦμα as “by means of the spirit.” The implication is that

⁴⁸ Callaway, *Sing O Barren One* (see n. 20), 154, called this a model of “fruitful virginity”: “[W]hether literally in a woman or allegorically in a soul, barrenness functions as a passive and receptive object for divine initiative and grace.”

⁴⁹ Throughout the rest of this article, we will use the attribute “virgin” in its traditional sense and also as a stage-level predicate, indicating a specific instance in which there was no sexual intercourse.

one son was conceived via sexual intercourse, while the other was conceived non-sexually, by the spirit. Various scholars suggested a similar reading in Paul according to which this passage assumes a conception without intercourse. For example, Hans-Joachim Schoeps offers finding the roots of Paul's description of Isaac's divine birth in Hellenistic writings;⁵⁰ Daniel Boyarin goes back to the Genesis verses' lack of mention of Abraham's knowing of Sarah, his wife;⁵¹ and Matthew Thiessen found this reading in later medieval and nineteenth-century rabbis.⁵² However, these writers did not offer a linguistic and semantic basis for Paul's reading of the Isaiah verses.

The idea that Paul is proposing a non-sexual or virginal conception for Isaac has been suggested also by earlier interpreters of Galatians. Early writers, eager to see Sarah as prefiguring Mary and Isaac as a figure of Christ, read Paul's words, "by the spirit," as pointing to such a conception. For example, the fourth-century Latin writer Marius Victorinus wrote in his commentary on Galatians:

From this one can understand that Abraham had a son, not from their taking up bodily activity (*non ex adsumptione inter se corporum*), but based on the promise of God – if indeed the son of the free woman was born of a barren woman and conceived by a certain spirit, rather than by copulation.⁵³

Modern scholars mostly shy away from reading the notion of virgin birth into Paul's writings in general,⁵⁴ in part at least, because these interpre-

50 H.-J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 156–157.

51 D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 269 n. 44.

52 Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (see n. 19), 103–104.

53 Trans. S.A. Cooper, *Marius Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians*, OECS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 324.

54 Though not all. See, for example, D. Wenham, "The Story of Jesus Known to Paul," in *Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. J.B. Green and M. Turner (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 297–311, here 298–300; C.E.B. Cranfield, "Some Reflections on the Subject of the Virgin Birth," *SJT* 41 (1988), 177–190; J. McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 274–277; A.T. Hanson, *Paul's Theology and Technique* (see n. 16), 86–103; W.C. Robinson, "A Re-study of the Virgin Birth of Christ," *EvQ* 37 (1965), 198–212. See also Callaway's proposal (*Sing O Barren One* [see n. 20], 113), which references Philo's allegorical interpretation, in which the woman is allegorically read as the human soul, while the offspring of the virgin soul – the new and improved qualities it bears – are described as the byproduct of its having "received the divine seed" (see below). Callaway suggests that Paul's allegorical traditions about the barren one (the soul/Sarah) bearing children (the qualities/Isaac) through the divine seed/by the spirit, are likely to have stood in the background of the creation of the virginal conception traditions in

tations attempt to align Paul with Jesus traditions. They bear signs of holistic interpretations, reading the Gospels into Paul. Scholars such as F.F. Bruce stress that Paul does not explicitly mention Jesus and his virginal conception here in Gal 4:21–31.⁵⁵

Irrespective of any possible connection to the traditions of Jesus's virginal birth,⁵⁶ there is a strong case to be made that interpretive traditions found in this passage read the miraculous birth of Isaac in Genesis as an instance of non-sexual conception. Martin Dibelius,⁵⁷ for example, suggests that Paul's tradition regarding Isaac's birth fits in with other, contemporary traditions. Dibelius finds later rabbinic traditions that preserve interpretations in which God facilitates human conception, for example, by supplying Sarah with reproductive organs.⁵⁸ Dibelius also argues that in the allegorical writings of Philo of Alexandria (*Cher.* 13, 45), Isaac is described as being born through God's spirit alone.⁵⁹ In other words, Paul's depiction of Isaac's non-sexual conception is well-situated within contemporary

Luke's infancy story of Jesus. Others, however, such as F.J. Murphy, review of *Sing O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash*, by M. Callaway, *JR* 68 (1988), 453–454, here 453, labeled this statement as going "beyond the evidence," arguing that "[t]here is no real reason to posit a dependence of Luke on Paul here."

55 Bruce, *Galatians* (see n. 12), 217.

56 Some scholars read this passage as an intermediary stage in the development of the Matthean and Lukan narrative of Jesus's virginal conception. See the discussion in R.E. Brown et al., eds., *Mary in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 45–49.

57 M. Dibelius, *Jungfrauensohn und Krippenkind: Untersuchungen zur Geburtsgeschichte Jesu im Lukas-Evangelium* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1932), 1–78.

58 Gen. Rab. 47:2 (J. Theodor and C. Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba: Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary*, 2nd ed. [Jerusalem: Vahrman, 1965], 472): God fashioned for Sarah עיקר מיטריך. Dibelius translates this term as "ovary," while Albeck translates it as "uterus." Obviously, these are much later traditions (recorded in a rabbinic midrash edited in the fifth century CE), though they could, and often do, represent earlier traditions. Another source that might be relevant is a Talmudic passage which portrays the shape of the "coin of Abraham" as if he was a ruler: "What was the coin of Abraham our Patriarch? – An old man and an old woman on the one side, and a young man (בחור) and a virgin (בתולה) on the other" (B. Qam. 97b; cf. Gen. Rab. 39:11; S. Eli. Rab. 31:2). One can speculate that this is a depiction of Abraham and Sarah, and that the contrast refers to the crucial moment of the birth of Isaac. Notably Sara is depicted as a "virgin" and not as a "young woman." However, it must be admitted that the coupling of the attributions בחור and בתולה might be simply a borrow from Ezek 9:6.

59 This interpretation of Philo was criticized by P. Grelot, "La naissance d'Isaac et celle de Jésus: Sur une interprétation 'mythologique' de la conception virginal," *NRT* 94.6 (1972), 561–585. However, it is defended by R.H. Fuller, review of *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*, by R.E. Brown, *CBQ* 40.1 (1978), 119–120. See Brown et al., *Mary in the New Testament* (see n. 56), 48. Bruce, *Galatians* (see n. 12), 217, independently of Dibelius, refers to yet another Philo passage that strengthens Dibelius's suggestion (Philo, *Fug.* 167).

biblical exegesis. Therefore, this exegesis in Paul stands on its own, regardless of the Jesus virginal conception narratives. Dibelius himself makes a point of denying any connection between Paul's treatment of Isaac and Jesus's virginal conception:

Paul nowhere speaks of the miraculous birth of Jesus and clearly manifests the diametrically opposed direction of this interest: He lays decisive stress on the fact that Christ began his earthly existence like that of any other human being, though a natural birth.⁶⁰

Our paper is part of this scholarly trend attempting to unveil the interpretational background to the creation of Paul's Hagar-Sarah allegory, independent of the Jesus traditions. We suggest that Paul's exegesis, most crucially the connection of the Genesis narrative to Isa 54:1, is rooted in the notion that Isaac's birth was "by the spirit," that is, the result of a non-sexual act. As other scholars have pointed out, "the use of Isa 54:1 in the allegory is otherwise quite intelligible without the exploitation of the description of Sarah as 'desolate' in the sense that Dibelius understands it."⁶¹ Our contribution lies in the proposal that this passage is best understood by assuming a Late Hebrew background for the word *בְּעוֹלָה*. This reading is bolstered by the fact that this interpretation of the contrast between *κατὰ σάρκα* and *κατὰ πνεῦμα* provides a clearer understanding of Paul's use of Isa 54:1 and is supported by a similar interpretation that is found elsewhere, as will be shown below.

As noted above, according to this reading the preposition *κατά* should be translated "by means of."⁶² Some readers rely on other Pauline letters that also contrast *κατὰ σάρκα* and *κατὰ πνεῦμα*, most notably Rom 8. They suggest that this contrast merely indicates "natural" and "unnatural/supernatural" birth, as can be inferred from Rom 8:13.⁶³ According to this reading, Isaac's birth is unnatural due only to Sarah's age and the fact that Sarah's womb was already "without life" (as in Rom 4:19). However, one can easily read the contrast between "flesh" and "spirit" in both Romans and Galatians in a general literary sense, contrasting a bodily phenomenon with one involving the spirit (as is clear from Rom 8:4–5).

60 Dibelius, *Jungfrauensohn und Krippenkind* (see n. 57), 29 (trans. from Brown et al., *Mary in the New Testament* [see n. 56], 47 n. 81).

61 Brown et al., *Mary in the New Testament* (see n. 56), 49 n. 88. See *ibid.*, 48–49, where Rom 4:19 is brought as a Pauline tradition in which Abraham's paternity is apparently assumed. In theory, this poses a problem for Dibelius's suggestion here, assuming that Paul's views on Isaac's conception are consistent throughout his writings.

62 See above, n. 6.

63 See C.J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, with a Revised Translation* (Boston: Halliday and Company, 1854), 79.

Finally, it must be emphasized that our reading in Galatians, which draws a contrast between sexual and non-sexual conception rather than the general sense of natural and unnatural, satisfactorily explains the function of Isa 54:1 in Paul's allegory. As we saw, Paul indicates that this verse provides support to his reading in Genesis (γέγραπται γάρ, "it has indeed been written"), and according to our proposal, his support is for the understanding of "divine conception." If there is no claim for such a conception, it is unclear what is the function of the verse, and how it supports Paul's reading.

7 The Late-Hebrew Reading of the Verse Assumed by Paul's Reading

One might object to our proposed reading of Galatians on the grounds that it assumes Paul's knowledge of an interpretive tradition which relies on the Hebrew text of Isa 54:1 and its Late Hebrew meaning, whereas he quotes the Septuagint version of this verse in the Epistle.⁶⁴ Scholarly opinion on the extent of Paul's knowledge of Hebrew varies, and researchers offer diverging assessments of similar cases, where quotations from a Septuagint-like version of the biblical text depend on readings of the original Hebrew. Dwight Moody Smith, for example, writes:

The increasing appreciation of Paul's Jewishness in scholarship since the Second World War bespeaks the likelihood that he knew Hebrew, as does the fact that his biblical exegesis has closer affinities with Qumran monastics and rabbis, who knew Hebrew, than with Philo, who did not.⁶⁵ However that may be, Paul draws upon the LXX, or at least the tradition of Greek translation, when he cites Scripture. *That he wrote and spoke primarily to people who knew only Greek, and no Hebrew, seems to be a sufficient explanation of this fact. Such usage would also be commensurate with Paul's own experience and background as a native of Tarsus.*⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Paul's exact quotation of the Greek version of Isa 54:1 has prompted scholars to categorize Gal 4 as a Septuagint-based passage. For example, Hays, *Echoes of Scripture* (see n. 11), 306: "It is the Greek text of Isaiah, not the Hebrew text, that shapes the intertextual space under consideration." See also Martyn, *Galatians* (see n. 5), 441 n. 149 ("Paul follows a Greek text firmly in the Septuagintal tradition"); Betz, *Galatians* (see n. 2), 248; and M.C. de Boer, "Paul's Quotation of Isaiah 54.1 in Galatians 4.27," *NTS* 50.3 (2004), 370–389, esp. 370 n. 1.

⁶⁵ On Philo's knowledge of Hebrew, see below.

⁶⁶ Smith, "The Pauline Literature" (see n. 11), 273 (emphasis ours).

David Lincicum offers: “There is no compelling evidence to doubt Paul’s knowledge of Hebrew and/or Aramaic.”⁶⁷ Nevertheless, he suggests that Paul’s “almost exclusive proximity to the Septuagint” in some instances, alongside other cases where he quotes texts in a version closer to the original Hebrew, may stem from a “Hebraizing revision of the Greek text.”⁶⁸ Lincicum concludes:

That Paul’s citations for the most part evince a reliance on a Septuagintal text that has been partially revised toward the Hebrew, and that Paul has exercised some limited freedom in his reproduction of his Vorlage, are now well-established positions.⁶⁹

In any case, regardless of the question of Paul’s direct/indirect access to the biblical verses or his knowledge of Hebrew, it seems clear that one can make a solid case for Paul’s awareness of traditions of biblical interpretation that depend on some knowledge of Hebrew and that differ from those preserved in the Septuagint.

Galatians 4:21–31 is especially interesting in this regard, as the passage alludes to several additional ideas rooted in earlier, Jewish interpretive traditions. Consider, for example, the assumption that Ishmael persecuted Isaac: “At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born according to the spirit.” As scholars have noted, this is a midrashic tradition that does not explicitly derive from the biblical verses themselves.⁷⁰ It is based upon Gen 21:9: “But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking (מִצַּחֵק).” The rabbis read this word (meaning “mocked,” “jested,” or “teased”) midrashically to indicate persecution.⁷¹ Another element of this passage, Paul’s use of the motif of “the Jerusalem that is above,” also has roots in earlier Jewish traditions.⁷² It is not a great leap, therefore, to suggest that Paul reads Isa 54:1 in accordance with a Late Hebrew understanding of the word בְּעוֹלָה.⁷³

67 D. Lincicum, *Paul and the Early Jewish Encounter with Deuteronomy*, WUNT 2/284 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 53.

68 See also T.H. Lim, *Holy Scripture in the Qumran Commentaries and Pauline Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 163–164.

69 D. Lincicum, “Intertextuality, Effective History and Memory: Conceptualizing Paul’s Use of Scripture,” in *The Reception of Scripture in Paul and Pauline Tradition*, ed. F. Wilk and M. Öhler (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming).

70 R. Le Déaut, “Traditions targumiques dans le corpus paulinien? (Hebr. XI, 4 et XII, 24; Gal. IV, 29–30; II Cor. III, 16),” *Bib* 42 (1961), 37–43; Cohen, “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians” (see n. 9), 341; Betz, *Galatians* (see n. 2), 249–250; Martyn, *Galatians* (see n. 5), 444–445.

71 I.a. Tosefta Sota 6:6.

72 See survey in Martyn, *Galatians* (see n. 5), 440, and P. Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelations 21–22 in the Light of Its Background in Jewish Tradition*, WUNT 129 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 53–229.

Before providing external support for our proposal, we would like to note that this solution also solves the two major problems surveyed above related to the joining of the Genesis narrative and Isa 54:1:

(1) *The depiction of Hagar as Abraham's wife.* This problem only arises if בעולה is read according to the Septuagint version as “the one who has a husband.” According to our reading, Paul understood the verse to refer to “the one who had intercourse,” which is an accurate description of Hagar.

(2) *The fact that Sarah is called עקרה, “barren,” even after the birth of Isaac, and the absence of substantive engagement with the theme of barrenness in Paul's other writings.* According to our proposal, עקרה here does not mean “barren” but is simply the opposite of בעולה. In this context it means “virgin” or “a woman who has conceived without sexual intercourse.” Sarah fits this description, according to Paul, because she conceived Isaac “by the spirit.”

In the final section of our paper, we will demonstrate that Paul was not the first to read Isa 54:1 in this way. Philo of Alexandria relied on a similar understanding of this verse in his own allegorical reading of Isaiah, in which he, too, quotes the Septuagint version of the verse. Unlike Paul, however, Philo explicitly identifies the barren woman as a virgin. This piece of evidence provides the “missing link” in the interpretive tradition leading up to Galatians. We will argue that it is likely that both Philo and Paul are following an interpretive tradition based on a Late Hebrew background.

8 Philo of Alexandria

Philo of Alexandria (*Praem.* 153–161) offers two interpretations of Isa 54:1, the verse at the heart of our discussion.⁷⁴ The first occurs as part of a description of the state of the land of Israel at the advent of the Sabbatical Year, after years of mistreatment and neglect of Sabbatical laws:

⁷³ For other studies also showing Pauline knowledge of traditions found in rabbinic sources see, for example, B.D. Gordon, “On the Sanctity of Mixtures and Branches: Two Halakic Sayings in Romans 11:16–24,” *JBL* 135.2 (2016), 355–368, and N. Eubank, “Justice Endures Forever: Paul's Grammar of Generosity,” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 5.2 (2015), 169–187.

⁷⁴ We focus here on Philo's allegorical interpretations of Isa 54:1. Philo also refers allegorically to the figures of Hagar and Sarah in other passages, and scholars have debated whether Paul was aware of Philo's allegorical interpretation. Betz, *Galatians* (see n. 2), 239 n. 11, concludes that there seems to be no sign that he did in fact know of these traditions.

When the cities have been thus consumed by fire and the country made desolate, the land will begin to take breath and raise its head – that land so long roughly handled in the grip of the intolerable violence shown by the inhabitants, who chased the virgin Sevens into banishment both from the country and from their thoughts [...]. For this they themselves will receive the full measure of curses and penalties named above, but the land unstrung by the numberless mishandlings which it has undergone will now be relieved, disburdened of the heavy weight of its impious inhabitants. And when she looks around and sees none of the destroyers of her former pride and high name, sees her market places void of turmoil and war and wrongdoing, but full of tranquillity and peace and justice, she will renew her youth and bloom and take her rest calm and serene during the festal seasons of the sacred Seven, rallying her strength like a wrestler after his first bout. Then like a fond mother she will pity the sons and daughters whom she has lost, who in death and still more when in life were a grief to their parents. Young once more she will be fruitful and bear a blameless generation to redress the one that went before. For she that is desolate, says the prophet will have children many and fine, a saying which also is an allegory of the history of the soul.⁷⁵

The land, free of its usual agricultural burdens, of war and wrongdoing, will rejoice in their absence and recuperate and will bear a new generation without faults. Philo then offers a second, allegorical interpretation of Isa 54:1: the soul exhausted from its bad qualities is able to rid itself of them and develop new and good ones, and can rejoice even in its barrenness in anticipation of future, better qualities.

For when the soul is “many,” full that is of passions and vices with her children, pleasures, desires, folly, incontinence, injustice, gathered around her, she is feeble and sick and dangerously near to death. But when she has become barren and ceases to produce these children or indeed has cast them out bodily she is transformed into a pure virgin (ἀγνή παρθένος). Then receiving the divine seed she moulds it into shape and brings forth new life in forms of precious quality and marvellous loveliness, wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, holiness, piety and the other virtues and good emotions. Not only is it well that these goodly children should be brought to the birth, but good also is the expectation of this birth, the forecast cheering the soul’s weakness with hope. Hope is joy before joy, falling short of the perfection of the other yet superior to its successor in two ways, one that it relaxes with its unction the aridity of our cares, the other that it goes before as a harbinger of the plenitude of good which is to be.⁷⁶

In both interpretations of Isa 54:1, Philo reads the verse as depicting a single entity (rather than comparing two separate entities, as Paul does in Galatians). In the first reading, which identifies the woman in the verse with the land, the focal attribute is *שוממה*, “desolate”; in the second, allegorical interpretation, in reference to the soul, *עקרה*, “barren,” is seen as the heart of the verse.

⁷⁵ Trans. F.H. Colson, LCL 341, 409–413.

⁷⁶ Trans. F.H. Colson, LCL 341, 413–415.

In both cases, Philo brings a fourth adjective into play: virgin (παρθένος). The land is described as having missed the periods of Sabbatical cycles, referred to as “the virgin periods of seven years.” Later, however, it gets them back, as the land becomes “young again” and fertile. Similarly, Philo says of the soul: “but when it is barren and has no such offspring, or when it has lost them, then it becomes changed in all its parts and becomes a pure virgin.” Here Philo equates the barren soul to a virgin and consequently describes the process of healing as “receiving the divine seed.”⁷⁷ As mentioned above, it is important for our purposes to note that for Philo, being a “virgin” is a stage-level predicate. Virginity can actually be regained.

Both appearances of the notion of virginity in Philo represent Isaiah’s barren woman (or her allegorical referent) as a virgin and are likely to stem from the same interpretive process described above in Paul’s Epistle.⁷⁸ Like Paul, Philo, too, can only be understood if we assume that he is relying on the Late Hebrew understanding of בעולה as “a woman who had intercourse” or “non-virgin,” rather than “one who has a husband.” Since שוממה and בעולה are set in opposition to one another, a שוממה must be a non-בעולה, that is, a virgin. Since שוממה parallels עקרה, this term, too, must mean “virgin.” Let us review the scheme we presented earlier in order to

77 Philo’s interpretation here is often discussed alongside his allegorical interpretation of the story of the barren woman, Sarah, giving birth to Isaac in Genesis. Callaway ignores Philo’s first interpretation of the Sabbatical year and the land and focuses on the soul (as does Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free* [see n. 9], 179 n. 175).

78 Theoretically, one could suggest that Philo’s mentioning of virginity here is related to the verses in Isa 62:4–5: “No longer will they call you deserted or name your land ‘the desolate one’ (שוממה). Rather, you will be called Hephzibah [i. e., ‘my delight is in her’] and your land בעולה [‘the one which is owned’], for the Lord will take delight in you and your land will be owned (בעולה).” As a young man marries a young woman/virgin (בתולה).” In the Hebrew version of the verse, there are indeed similarities, in terms of vocabulary (שוממה and בעולה), with the above discussed verse in Isa 54:1. Thus since the Isa 62 verse, includes the word בתולה, “virgin,” it could have been Philo’s source for the incorporation of the term. We, however, do not follow this proposal for several reasons: It is clear that, for Philo, the crucial point is that the barren will have children and that she becomes virgin again. The verses in Isa 62 neither mention barrenness nor indicate a stage of changing into this state. These tropes only appear in Isa 54. In light of this, there is no reason to assume that the verses in Isa 62 played any role in Philo’s interpretation. Furthermore, if Philo did not read Isaiah in Hebrew, and used only the Greek translation of the Septuagint for this verse, it is even less likely that he would have connected the two verses, as the word בעולה is translated differently in both. While in Isa 54 it is translated with the Greek words τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα, “the one how has a man,” in Isa 62 the Greek translation has οἰκουμένη, “inhabited.” These translations are in significantly different semantic fields. Accordingly, through the lenses of the Septuagint, the only similarity between the verses is the appearance of ἐρημος, “desolate,” in both. We wish to thank Menahem Kister for raising this possibility to us.

trace the argument through to its logical conclusion, based on our lexical knowledge and the data from the verse:

It is given that,

- (1) בתולה is the antonym of בעולה (lexical knowledge),
- (2) שוממה is equivalent to עקרה (parallelism in the verse),
- (3) בעולה is the antonym of שוממה (contrast in the verse).

Conclusions:

- (1) בעולה is equivalent to עקרה.
בתולה

As in the case of Paul, scholarship is still undecided regarding Philo's knowledge of Hebrew.⁷⁹ Regardless of Philo's direct or indirect access to the biblical verses, however, we can at least offer this last example as additional evidence for his awareness of other traditions of biblical interpretation different from those preserved in the Septuagint.

The presence of this similar hermeneutical move in Philo strengthens our suggested reading of Galatians. Philo's explicit use of the word virgin, can unveil Paul's notion of Sarah's conception "by the spirit," as both read עקרה in Isa 54:1 as "virgin." We propose that these similar interpretations both rely on an interpretive tradition based on the word בעולה in the original Hebrew text of the verse. In addition, this tradition understands this attribute not according to its Biblical Hebrew meaning or its translation in the Septuagint, τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα, "having a man." Instead, according to our analysis, Philo and Paul read בעולה in its Late Hebrew sense: "a woman who was penetrated," or, in other words, "a non-virgin woman." The texts from Philo also provide support for the use of the attribution "virgin" as a stage-level predicate, which can be true of a woman at a specific time, even if she has had intercourse previously.

9 Conclusions

In this article, we have proposed a possible understanding of Isa 54:1, which underlies Paul's words in Gal 4:21–31. This reading, based on the Late Hebrew meaning of the word בעולה, "non-virgin," stands in opposition to the Septuagint's understanding of this word as "one who has a man." This

⁷⁹ See S. Daniel, "La halacha de Philon selon le premier livre des lois spéciales," in *Philon d'Alexandrie: Lyon, 11–15 Septembre 1966* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1967), 221–241, and, recently, T. Rajak, "Philo's Knowledge of Hebrew: The Meaning of the Etymologies," in *The Jewish-Greek Tradition in Antiquity and the Byzantine Empire: The Nicholas de Lange Festschrift*, ed. J.K. Aitken and J. Carleton Paget (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 173–187.

reading solves many of the problems pointed out by past readers of this passage. It also accords with other uses of midrashic and Semitic-based traditions in Gal 4 and finds support in a parallel tradition in the roughly contemporary writings of Philo of Alexandria.

Elitzur A. Bar-Asher Siegal

The Department of Hebrew Language
Language, Logic and Cognition Center
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Jerusalem, Israel
ebas@mail.huji.ac.il

Michal Bar-Asher Siegal

The Goldstein-Goren Department of
Jewish Thought
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
Beer Sheva, Israel
bsmichal@bgu.ac.il