Union Theological Seminary

HAGAR AND SARAH AND MARY AND ELIZABETH:
READING LUKE 1 WITH GENESIS 16/21

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1. Introduction

The Hagar-Ishmael story (Gen 16/21) has been called a text of terror.[1] It is the story of a slave woman given as a surrogate to benefit her mistress, abused by that mistress, and later discarded, banished with her son to certain death. Yet that same slave is visited by God twice, given her own promise, and uniquely in the Bible, gives God a name. Hagar is not only a passive recipient of abuse, she shows agency and participates in the story's conflict, something that some interpreters have used to blame her for the suffering she endures. The abusive mistress Sarah is herself put in danger by her husband Abraham, and gets her own miraculous chance at motherhood. A very puzzling God in this story favors Abraham and Sarah, but gives separate, lavish promises to Hagar and Ishmael on the side.

The story is one of great promise and joy coexisting with suffering, oppression, and harm. The tragedy is not only Hagar's oppression and suffering, but the unresolved conflict between the two women who are both victims of the patriarchal order. The conflict remains hanging in the legacy of peoples separated forever. At the heart of this story is Hagar and her remarkable encounter with God.

Luke's first chapter includes its own scenes of angel visits and pregnancies. It tells the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and the conception and birth of John, paired alongside Mary's conception of Jesus. At the heart of Luke's chapter, the stories intersect when Mary comes into Zechariah's home, meets with Elizabeth, and sings the Magnificat.

Inspired by the similar annunciation to Hagar in Gen 16 and Mary in Luke 1, this paper undertakes an intertextual reading between Luke's first chapter and the Hagar stories. We cannot know for certain that Luke intended to make reference to Genesis 16/21 in his first chapter, yet we will see that comparing them brings forward interesting echoes that open new possibilities for

[1] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 9-35.

reading in the Lukan story. Reading Genesis 16/21 and Luke 1 intertextually gives depth to what for Christians is often a highly mythologized text with characters coated in a fog of holiness. Reading the echoes of Genesis in the text brings out dramatic and character elements that may be otherwise missed.

Luke has not directly quoted Genesis 16/21, nor allegorized it as Paul does (Gal 4). Yet, he draws the reader into the world of Genesis in several ways. He echoes the language of the Septuagint in songs of praise and evocative phrases appearing in Luke 1. He invokes the name of Abraham through the voices of his characters. He presents the reader with characters that appear to parallel the characters in the Hagar story -- two women, two sons, a man, and an angel/God. He puts God's pronouncement of creation (Gen 1:3) into the mouth of Mary (Luke 1:38), as she consents to creation inside her body.

Luke's first chapter shows a world in which the kingdom of God has come. Luke tells a story in which the hanging threads of Genesis have been pulled together, the promise to Abraham, that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (12:3) has come to fruition. The meaning of this promise could be interpreted that Abraham and his descendants will be seen as an inspiration or role model, a people who other peoples will see and bless themselves.[2] To Luke, however, the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham has another meaning. It is not only about the salvation of the people of Israel (Luke 1:68; Acts 1:6), but about bringing the message of God to "all nations" (Luke 24:47), "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).[3][4] Paul earlier makes a

[2] Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary: Genesis 1-25A* (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2018), 193.
[3] Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke Vol 1: 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1994), 49, 63.
[4] Significantly, Luke places these quotations in the mouth of Jesus.

similar interpretation of the promise, declaring that the Gentiles had become ancestors of Abraham through Christ.[5]

Luke shows the arrival of this new world order most powerfully at the heart of chapter 1, in the meeting of the two women in Zechariah's home, while their unborn sons meet in the womb. Reading the text through Genesis 16/21 we can imagine the powerful ancestral figures of Hagar and Sarah meeting in a transformational scene of reconciliation and mutual recognition. Luke demonstrates through the prophecy of these women that God's saving power has come into the world, that the kingdom is here, that injustice will be brought to an end. The mother whose similar character was sent away is instead welcomed in, and sings.

Yet reading Luke side by side with the Hagar-Ishmael story adds nuance to this snapshot of embrace between two women. In a text where the characters parallel and echo each other internally to each text -- Hagar and Abraham, Mary and Zechariah -- we will see that this also occurs across the two texts. We will find that these inter-text character associations are complex, crossing over at times. On closer examination, Mary and Elizabeth look more like hybrids of Sarah and Hagar, pushing back on notions of their meeting as a neat resolution to the conflicts of those Genesis characters.

Comparison between these texts brings out the danger in Mary's unconventional pregnancy, and similarity with Hagar in getting an unplanned and unasked-for birth announcement from an angel. Looking at Luke 1 alongside the Hagar stories highlights Mary's risky and long trip to see her relative Elizabeth. We get a better sense of the power of Mary's song when reading it alongside Hagar's pronouncement to God, and in turn we better appreciate the power of Hagar's extraordinary theophany by reading backwards through Mary's song.

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[5] Galatians 3, Romans 11. While we know that Luke was aware of Paul because he wrote about him in Acts, we do not know if Luke knew Paul's epistles or was following Paul's interpretation as in these letters. See section, "Intertextuality in Luke," later in this paper.

Reading backwards also helps pull us away from the limiting and often harmful history of interpretation that we will explore, which has built up around the Hagar texts.

The Hagar-Ishmael story is one more just-so story in Genesis, of a broken, imperfect world that began when humans had to leave the Garden (Gen 3). This exilic text presents promises of hope and chosenness by God alongside the fractures and ache of an unfinished world. The Genesis context is one in which the promise is not complete, where the people of Israel are not living in peace, as an example to the nations, but rather under oppression of a dominating empire. Luke 1 appears to show the fulfillment of that ache and longing. Yet Luke's own context is also aware of the painful reality. The Lukan narrative will not proceed in a utopian way, as if the Roman Empire doesn't exist, the temple wasn't destroyed, and their messiah is still present with them. Once out of the Luke 1 cocoon, the story becomes much more conflicted, violent, and unfinished.

Even before we leave Luke's first chapter, we will see the narrative shift, as the story starts to move away from mothers and children to leaders and empire. In the end, we will see that these two texts are not so very different after all. Each holds its own difficult realities alongside the hope and desire for God's promises. We will end with more questions than firm conclusions. This textual comparison will invite the question, why do we try to make conflictual texts come out better? Does more work need to be done before we can get to reconciliation?

2. Reading Texts Together

Intertextuality

The concept of intertextuality was coined by Kristeva,[6] to describe "components of a textual system" (novel or other text), and the "transposition" of those components and "new articulation" of their meaning into a new text.[7] The term has since been widely adopted and used for concepts ranging from one work of literature directly influenced by and referencing an earlier one, to similarities and resonance between texts without any intentional relationship.[8] Intertextuality has included influence and echoing from non-literary sources such as visual art.[9] Indeed, Hays asserts that "all literature -- indeed, all human discourse -- includes elements of intertextuality."[10]

Links between sources can be easier to determine when direct references are made, as in a clear retelling of a previous story, or naming of an earlier source. Carr, building upon others, has suggested that in instances where there is a clear relationship between biblical texts, the term "influence" rather than intertextuality should be used.[11] Establishing connections between sources is more complex when the later text appears to resonate with the earlier source, echoing or paralleling it but not directly referring to it. If we lack any trace of the author's intentions, we may never know whether the text is to be read as relating to the other text.

Some would argue that even without direct and intentional influence, fragments of other sources will float in, and this is another valid type of intertextuality. Indeed, this sense of the

[6] Leon S. Roudiez, "Introduction," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, by Julia Kristeva, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 15.
[7] *ibid.*
[8] David M. Carr, "The Many uses of Intertextuality in Biblical Studies: Actual and Potential," in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010*, ed. Martti Nissinen (Boston: Brill, 2012), 509-517.
[9] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 237-270.
[10] Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 10.
[11] Carr, "The Many uses of Intertextuality in Biblical Studies: Actual and Potential," 523.

term appears to be closer to what Kristeva originally intended.[12] An author may not be "the full master of his text,"[13] parts of which may unwittingly communicate with earlier, or contemporaneous sources.[14] A recent, non-textual example occurred when Lady Gaga wore a large dove pin at the 2021 presidential inauguration, which some observers perceived as referencing the mockingjay pin from *The Hunger Games*[15] series.[16] Gaga herself denied purposely making the reference, but perhaps it doesn't matter.

Intertextuality in the Bible

Intertextuality within the Bible is a complex issue. The Old Testament (OT) itself is deeply internally interrelated, referring back to other parts of itself, looping forward and back in time. Newsom, referring to Mikhail Bakhtin's work, has noted that the OT is dialogic,[17] engaging in internal discourse with itself, and polyphonic,[18] expressing multiple voices and points of view. Using the book of Job as an example of this, Newsom asserts that such a multiplicity of voices renders that "the 'truth' about a difficult issue can only be established by a community of unmerged perspectives, not by a single voice, not even that of God."[19]

The book of Genesis contains this same type of polyphony, at least partially resulting from its composition. Our text in question, the Abraham cycle, contains layers of redaction from priestly and non-priestly authors. These stories were likely composed based on earlier oral and

[12] Roudiez, "Introduction," in *Desire in Language,* 15.
[13] Carr, "The Many uses of Intertextuality in Biblical Studies: Actual and Potential," 515.
[14] Carr, "The Many uses of Intertextuality in Biblical Studies: Actual and Potential," 514-515.
[15] A series of three dystopian novels with a female protagonist authored by Suzanne Collins, then made into movies starring Jennifer Lawrence.
[16] Laura Zornosa, "The mysterious case of the Lady Gaga inauguration bird and 'The Hunger Games,'" *LA Times*, Jan 20, 2021, https://www.latimes.com/lifestyle/story/2021-01-20/inauguration-lady-gaga-gives-twitter-hunger-games-vibes.
[17] Carol Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," *The Journal of Religion* 76, no. 2(1996), 291.
[18] Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," 296-297.
[19] Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," 298.

written traditions, carried into exile in Babylon, and pieced together during and post-exile.[20] This paper will not go into the different theories of Pentateuchal formation, except to say that Gen 16 and 21 contain material from mostly lay sources.[21]

Hays lays out categories of ways the gospels relate to the Hebrew Bible, from direct "quotations," to "allusions", to the most difficult to define "echoes."[22] Direct quotations are obvious, and typically signalled by a phrase such as "scripture says," or "as it is written."[23] Allusions may contain several words or a paraphrase of the original text, and may be less clearly noted by readers, but Hays asserts that a key factor is the awareness that the meaning of the text containing the allusion is greatly enriched by knowing the source text, and would be "opaque or severely diminished" without it.[24]

The most elusive to describe are echoes, in which the writer subtly winks at the source text by using one or two highly evocative words from it.[25] This may create an effect known as "metalepsis," a poetic term describing the effect on the reader of a fragment of an earlier text that creates a dialogic resonance between the text in question and its source.[26] Hays gives the example of Barack Obama invoking Martin Luther King, Jr. in his speeches, by using highly resonant and familiar words from King's earlier and famous speeches, such as "arc" and "bend."[27] Bakhtin has called such use of the other's voice, without direct presence of that voice, hybridisation.[28]

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[20] David M. Carr, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts of the Hebrew Bible* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 217-218.
[21] P material is included in 16:3, 16:15, and 21:3-5. Carr, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 189-198.
[22] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 10.
[23] *Ibid*, 10.
[24] *Ibid*, 10.
[25] *ibid*, 10-11.
[26] *ibid*, 11.
[27] *ibid.*
[28] Bettina Fischer, "Dialogic Engagement Between the Birth Stories in Luke 1 and 2 and Selected Texts from the Hebrew Bible: A Bakhtinian Investigation," *Scriptura* 94(2007), 131.

Hays argues that the gospel writers were all reading scripture backwards, reinterpreting the texts through the lens of what they had heard about the cross and resurrection.[29] Because of a frequent lack of awareness of the Hebrew Bible on which the New Testament is deeply based, individual Christians and churches today are prone to be "naively Marcionite"[30] as they read the gospels out of context, without recognizing even the direct scriptural references. Thus they may espouse wrong beliefs that the OT God is fear-based, while NT God in Jesus is all about love,[31] not realizing that so many of the love texts are direct quotes from that supposedly harsh OT.

Another problematic belief into which Christian readers may lapse is supersessionism, the idea that Christianity has "replaced Judaism and the people of Israel,"[32] that the "old" covenant has been superseded by Jesus. A more subtle version of this would be claims that New Testament texts solve problems or complete unfinished business exhibited by Old Testament texts. Indeed, the gospel writers were making such claims, and were explicit about them at times, as in Matthew's fulfillment citations. The problem comes in taking such readings in an ultimate and exclusivist way. It is a fatal error to take the gospel writers' backwards readings as the only valid way to read the Old Testament. It would be a similarly harmful error to imply that the key to fixing all of the problems of Hagar and Sarah is to read Luke's first chapter and heed its formula for harmony.

Another distinction to explore when exploring how texts create meaning in relation to earlier texts, is that of rabbinic midrash versus allegory. Behind allegory is the platonic idea that "external realities all have spiritual signifiers,"[33] that under the text, at a deeper level, the

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[29] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 4-5.
[30] *Ibid*, 5.
[31] *ibid.*
[32] Carr, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 5-6.
[33] Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1.

characters stand for larger, abstract concepts. Allegory seeks to find one, ultimate meaning hidden in the text. This can have the risk of closing off interpretation, and in the case of biblical texts, can have the reader conclude that an OT text was pointing to Jesus all along (supersessionism again).

Rabbinic midrash, in one description by Cohen, involves reading text "outside its local context," employing close reading of words or phrases in that text to make a connection to a different text "thereby creating both a new context and a new narrative..." which "is then read out of the original verse."[34] Rabbinic midrash, in contrast to allegory, pulls for a more open-ended dialog about the text,[35] raising questions and commentary that look not to replace the characters with abstractions, but to fill in the blanks within the text, to flesh out the characters and story even more. The way in which Luke appears to bring in Hebrew scripture to his gospel has been described as consistent with the tradition of midrash,[36] although this rabbinic tradition would not be developed until several centuries later.

What this paper will attempt in comparing and contrasting these texts is certainly not allegory nor precisely midrash. It comes closer to the latter, particularly in the sense of ending with more questions than answers, with a reading of the Lukan text that feels more filled in, but far from resolved.

Intertextuality in Luke

Luke is a single author book, yet rests on other sources, some of which are identifiable. It is generally agreed that Luke uses the gospel of Mark as a source. Less agreed is whether

[34] Aryeh Cohen, "Hagar and Ishmael: A Commentary," *Interpretation* 68, no. 3 (2014):248.
[35] Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 26-29.
[36] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 35.

Matthew and Luke also use a hypothesized Q sayings source.[37] Through the book of Acts we know that Luke was aware of the ministry of Paul, although we don't know if he knew Paul's letters since he never mentions them.[38] Thus, we cannot know whether Luke was aware of Paul's Hagar and Sarah allegory in Galatians (4:22-31). Nor do we know about his knowledge of other contemporary or earlier sources interpreting the Hagar-Ishmael stories. In terms of his use of the OT, it is important to keep in mind that Luke would have had access to the Greek Septuagint (LXX).

Hays notes that "Of all the Evangelists, Luke is the most intentional, and the most skillful in narrating the story of Jesus in a way that joins it seamlessly to Israel's story."[39] Compared to the gospel of Matthew, Luke uses direct quotations from scripture much less frequently.[40] Yet Luke strongly evokes the Hebrew Bible in several ways. He is frequently noted to use "the cadences of Israel's scripture,"[41] evoking expressions commonly used in the Septuagint,[42][43] for example, "on that day,"[44] "it happened that," "and behold."[45] These cadences are found particularly in Luke's infancy narrative.

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[37] Marion L. Soards, "The Gospel According to Luke," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, Fifth Edition*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, 1865-1916 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1865; Hays doesn't think so; *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*,13.
[38] Schenk makes the case that Luke was well aware of Paul and his influence is present in Luke's books; Schenk, Wolfgang, "Luke as Reader of Paul: Observations on his Reception," in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel*, ed. Sipke Draisma (Kamper: Uitgeversmaatschappiu J.H.Kok, 1989), 127-139; Adamczewski goes further, making dense intertextual links between Paul's Letter to the Galatians and Luke's gospel; Bartosz Adamczewski, *The Gospel of Luke: A Hypertextual Commentary* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016).
[39] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*,191.
[40] *Ibid*, 192.
[41] Amy-Jill Levine, "The Gospel According to Luke," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament, Second Ed, New Revised Standard Version*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Mark Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, 107.
[42] Joel B. Green, "The Problem of a Beginning: Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1-2." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 4 (1994): 67.
[43] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 7.
[44] Bettina Fischer, "Dialogic Engagement Between the Birth Stories in Luke 1 and 2 and Selected Texts from the Hebrew Bible: A Bakhtinian Investigation,"132.
[45] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 32.

The two annunciation stories in Luke 1 evoke similar stories found in the OT (1 Sam, Judg 13). In contrast to the fulfillment citations found in Matthew's gospel, Luke more subtly suggests that indeed Scripture is being fulfilled, using the words fill/bring to fullness (*pimplemi*; *plerophoreo*) fifteen times in Luke 1-4.[46] The notable reversal found in Luke 1, in which the second-born son of the lesser-status mother is favored, echoes numerous instances of younger-son-chosenness in Genesis -- Abel (Gen 4:4), Isaac (21:10), Jacob (28:1-5), Joseph (38:3,6,9), Zerah (38:27), Ephraim (48:13).[47][48]

Luke invokes the Genesis-Abraham cycle throughout his two books. Abraham's name is mentioned twenty-two times in Luke-Acts[49] -- more times than in the other three gospels. Green[50] has noted numerous structural, thematic, and narrative similarities between the Abraham story and Luke 1-2. Strangely, however, he gives only passing mention to Hagar's part of the Abraham text.[51]

In Luke 1, Luke never explicitly mentions Gen 16/21, but we will see that the Lukan text contains numerous similarities and textual echoes to the Hagar stories. This paper's reading of the two texts together does not map the Genesis characters neatly onto his story, creating new types or anti-types of the earlier figures. Rather the Lukan characters appear to relate to their similar counterparts in Genesis in complex ways. Sometimes Mary is like Hagar, but sometimes Elizabeth is too, while "Zechariah is like Abraham, but so is Mary."[52] With his embedded echoes

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[46] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*,192.
[47] Brigitte Kahl, "Human Culture and the Integrity of Creation: Biblical Reflections on Genesis 1-11," *The Ecumenical Review* 39, issue 2 (1987), 134.
[48] Brigitte Kahl, "Hagar Between Genesis and Galatians: The Stony Road to Freedom," in *From Prophecy to Testament: The Function of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. Craig A. Evans (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 224-225.
[49] Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke Vol 1: 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1994), 160.
[50] Joel B. Green,"The Problem of a Beginning: Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1-2." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 4 (1994), 68-71, 77-78, 83.
[51] Green,"The Problem of a Beginning: Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1-2," 69.
[52] Green, "The Problem of a Beginning," 76.

of the earlier text, Green asserts Luke signals that his story is not a new story at all, but "continuing an old one,"[53] a deeply familiar one.

[53] Green, "The Problem of a Beginning," 66.

3. Genesis and Hagar

Overview

As noted, Genesis itself is deeply intertextual, a complicated text stitched together over time, with multiple authors, referring to itself and retelling its own stories. The priestly and lay authors give vastly different opinions on issues like royal authority and how God acts, giving a complex viewpoint as the text appears in final redaction.[54] Intertextuality within the Hebrew Bible adds to the effect of the story. Part of what makes Hagar's story shocking is that God seems to disobey his own laws, condoning disinheriting the older son (Deut 21:15-17), and not aiding a runaway slave (Deut 23:16-17) but rather sending her back into slavery.[55] These laws were given later in the Bible chronology. But reading about God's behavior in this first book of Torah that contradicts what appears later can feel jarring. God's actions appear to flout the laws God gives to the people.

The literary world of Genesis reflects the historic context of this exilic text. The story looks back on a God-created ideal world (Gen 1, 2).[56] Humans take their own actions contrary to God's instructions, get Godlike wisdom and must be separated from God (Gen 3). Violence and conflict ensues between humans (Gen 4). There is a worldwide scattering of peoples and separation into different spoken languages (Gen 11). The ancestors work to settle in different lands (Gen 25:62; 25:18; 26:6; 37:1), make families (Gen 25:1-6, 12-15; 25:24-26; 30:3-24, 36:1-5, 40-43), wrestle with God (Gen 32:24-30). More separations occur. Throughout the book

[54] Yair Zakovitch, "Inner Biblical Interpretation," in *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*, ed. Ronald Hendel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 95.
[55] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Hagar: My other, my self," in *Reading the women of the Bible*, ed. Tikva Frymer-Kensky (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 230.
[56] David M. Carr, *Genesis 1-11: International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021), 16.

we read stories of how the world,[57] and the different descendents (*toledot*)[58] of the first humans came to be.

The center of the Abraham cycle is Hagar's annunciation,[59] with Hagar alone in the wilderness with God:

A. Prologue (11:27-30)

B.Abraham called to leave family of origin (12:1-3)

C.Wife-Sister story (12:10-13:1)

D. Separation from Lot (13:2-18)

E. Covenant with Abraham (14-15)

F. **Hagar and Angel (16:1-14)**

E'. Covenant with Abraham (17)

D'. Abraham contrasted with Lot (18-19)

C'. Wife-Sister story (20)

B'. Abraham called to let go of family of future: **Hagar/Ishmael banishment (21:8-21)**; Isaac sacrifice (22:1-19)

A'. Epilogue (22:20-24)[60]

The story of Hagar and Sarah is a story of separation of people,[61] of the future Israelites and Ishmaelites. It is a story filled with conflict, unlike the separation of Abraham and Lot (Gen 13:8-13). Yet it is more sympathetic to the people of Hagar than Lot's tale, which includes Lot's foolish choices (Gen 13:10-11; 19:15-25) and a family created from incest (Gen 19:30-38).

[57] Carr, *Genesis 1-11,* 15.
[58] *Ibid*, 15, 33-34.
[59] David M. Carr, "Genesis," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, Fifth Edition*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 39.
[60] Outline slightly modified from Carr, "Genesis" in *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 39. Boldface in B' added.
[61] Savina J. Teubal, "Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 248-249.

Hagar retells the Exodus story, with her own call from God, exodus, and wandering in the desert. As such, Hagar represents Israel in miniature.[62] Hagar's story is shared by all three Abrahamic traditions. She is variously seen as "us," as "other," and as mother by interpreters in these traditions. Interpreters tend to focus on parts of the story that support their view, while minimizing or muting what doesn't appear to fit.

Hagar in Interpretation

Josephus, Jewish historian (94 CE), depicts Hagar as a rebellious slave, whose wrong is "insolence" (*Ant.* 1.10.4). Josephus portrays God as a disciplinarian in the story, giving Hagar a conditional promise based on "self control" (*Ant.* 1.10.4) and knowing her place. Philo, Jewish philosopher and contemporary of Paul, makes the Genesis story an allegory of "minds" (*Congr.* 180). Sarah represents wisdom (*Congr.* 2), and Hagar the "lower instruction" needed to reach that virtue (*Congr.* 11-2, 15-18). Philo's allegory tries to show the value of both women, yet transforms the women into Platonic abstracts, with Sarah representing the more desired abstract.

Genesis Rabbah (3-5th century), asserting Sarah and Abraham as archparents of Israel, emphasizes God calling Hagar maid/mistress (*Gen. Rab*. 45.7.2) and minimizes the importance of Hagar's God-encounter (*Gen. Rab.* 45.7.4). Yet the rabbis also try to put a happier ending on the story, suggesting that Hagar is Keturah with whom Abraham reunites (Gen 25:1; Gen Rab 61.4.1). Third century church father Origen uses Paul's allegorical Hagar and inserts a typology, making Hagar the Samaritan woman in John 4 (*Homily* 7.48-50) who becomes the first Jesus-missionary in Samaria. In Origen's interpretation of Paul, Hagar represents the Synagogue

[62] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Hagar: My other, my self," in *Reading the women of the Bible*, ed. Tikva Frymer-Kensky (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 235-236.

(Homily 7.40,47), blind to the Gospel, whose eyes can be opened by Christ (*Homily* 7.54-55), turning her into Sarah/Church. Origen includes Hagar's God-event, but particularizes it into a reproach to Judaism and warning to his congregation, lest they too slip into "blindness" (*Homily* 7.55-57).

Medieval iconography takes such interpretations further. Statues and paintings of Ecclesia/Sarah and Synagoga/Hagar depict the two women as the Church and Synagogue. Ecclesia appears triumphant and wears a crown, upright with eyes open, a spear in her hand and a chalice in the other. Synagoga is bowed, de-crowned, blindfolded, holding tablets and broken staff.[63] The anti-Jewish, supercessionist message is clear. Oldradus de Ponte, 14th century papal attorney, mines Genesis 16/21 for proof texts justifying war against Muslims and Jews. In Ordradus' treatment, God literally declares Ishmael a beast (*Cons.* 72.98).[64] Hagar, "the accursed handmaiden," whose crime of "despising" Sarah justifies expulsion (*Cons.* 72.101),[65] is able to stand in for either Jews or Muslims as needed (*Cons.* 72.102-5; *Cons.* 87.136).[66] In Cons. 72 he also quotes explicitly the expulsion-verdict of Gal 4:30 to justify expropriation and displacement of the Muslim other.[67] These Christian interpreters have heaped otherness on Hagar, already marked in Genesis as woman, slave, foreigner, surrogate, and abandoned wife. They have generally erased Hagar's promise and special relationship with God. They have strangely and ironically linked proto-Israelite Sarah with Christianity, and Egyptian Hagar with Judaism.

Paul's letter to the Galatians (50's CE) is commonly seen as an anti-Jewish polemic against circumcision and Torah, with his allegorical Hagar representing Jews/Law.[68] Kahl,

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[63] Heinz Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art: An Illustrated History* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 45-49.
[64] Norman Zacour, *Jews and Saracens in the Consilia of Oldradus de Ponte* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 51.
[65] *ibid*.
[66] *Ibid*, 51-51, 57.
[67] *Ibid*, 57.
[68] Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary: Genesis 1-25A*, (Macon, GA: Smith

building upon others, has suggested another interpretation,[69] noting that with his Christ-encounter, Paul is not converted to a new religion, but rather called to bring the news of the God of Israel to the nations (Gal 1:16), his idea of completing the Abrahamic promise (Gen 12:3). In this interpretation, Paul's 'drive out the slave' rhetoric (Gal 4:30) does not address Judaism, but rather the us-them paradigm keeping "the present Jerusalem...in slavery" (Gal 4:25). That slavery is not to Jewish law but to Rome.

In Paul's late Second Temple context, Jews had a tenuous freedom to not worship the emperor but were always under the close watch of the Roman Empire. Through allegorical Hagar, Kahl asserts that Paul may be using the type of imagery seen at Aphrodisias,[70] with subdued nations depicted as women. He would replace compliance with Roman order masquerading as obedience to Torah (Gal 4:25) with love of the other as fulfilment of Torah (Gal 5:14; Lev 19:18), the freedom of being slaves to each other (Gal 5:13). It is worth noting that Paul's allegorical Hagar is a hybrid of Genesis Hagar and Sarah -- all at once representing Egypt/the nations/the other and Mt. Sinai/Jerusalem.[71] This paper's reading of Luke 1 with the Hagar story shares this characteristic of the main characters appearing as hybrids of the Genesis characters.

Islamic tradition traces its lineage to Abraham through Ishmael. The Hagar-Ishmael story is not included in the Qur'an, but is described in Hadith literature.[72] In these texts, Abraham is

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& Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2018), 302; Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Letter of Paul to the Galatians," In *The Jewish Annotated New Testament, Second Edition*, Amy-Jill Levine and Mark Zvi Brettler, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 383.

[69] Brigitte Kahl, "Hagar Between Genesis and Galatians: The Stony Road to Freedom," in *From Prophecy to Testament: The Function of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. Craig A.Evans (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 219-232.

[70] Brigitte Kahl, "Hagar's Babylonian Captivity: A Roman Re-imagination of Galatians 4:21-31," *Interpretation* 68(3):257-269 (2014), 264-5.

[71] Brigitte Kahl, "Hagar Between Genesis and Galatians: The Stony Road to Freedom," In *From Prophecy to Testament: The Function of the Old Testament In the New*, CA Evans, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 222.

[72] Riffat Hassan, "Islamic Hagar and her Family," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish,*

described as sending Hagar[73] away not because of Sarah's request, but at a command from God.[74] Abraham is portrayed as believing that to fulfill "the prophetic mission of building the House of God"[75] (at Mecca), he had to send part of his family to a distant land. Thus Hagar is viewed as "the pioneer woman who led the way to the establishment of a new civilization." Pilgrims making *hajj* ritually reenact Hagar's desperate search for water by running between the Safa and Marwa mountains as described in the *Sahi Al-Bukhari* (4:583).[76]

Contemporary feminist and womanist interpreters provide diverse commentary on Hagar. Simopoulos notes that groups of lay readers from different social locations alternately view Hagar as the younger woman, the divorced woman, the undocumented immigrant, or the exploited worker.[77] Trible labels the story a "text of terror," noting Hagar's trajectory from exodus to exile as echoing Israel's story, except that in this story God favors the oppressor rather than the oppressed.[78] Hagar is noted to be the first freed slave, first to meet an angel, and first divorced woman in the Bible.[79] God shows favor toward Hagar, but in the end chooses his covenant.[80]

Frymer-Kensky notes the strong parallels between Abraham and Hagar, and between Hagar's story and the exodus story.[81] She asserts that the story is not one of '"us" and "other," but rather "us" and "another us,"' declaring that Hagar is "the type of Israel" while Sarah is

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Christian, and Muslim Perspectives, ed. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 152-3.

[73] Hajar, or Hajira in Islamic tradition; Hassan, "Islamic Hagar and her Family," 149.

[74] Hassan, "Islamic Hagar and her Family," 153.

[75] *ibid*, 153.

[76] *Ibid*, 154-156.

[77] Nicole M. Simopoulos, "Who was Hagar? Mistress, Divorcee, Exile, or Exploited Worker: An Analysis of Contemporary Grassroots Readings of Genesis 16 by Caucasian, Latina, and Black South African Women," in *Reading Other-Wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities*, ed. Gerald O. West (Boston: Brill, 2007), 63-71.

[78] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 22.

[79] *ibid*, 50.

[80] *ibid*, 57-8.

[81] Frymer-Kensky, "Hagar: My other, my self," 232-233.

"both type and mother of Israel."[82] In contrast to Trible, Frymer-Kensky describes the Hagar story as being about "separation without denigration,"[83] emphasizing that Hagar and Ishmael are sent into freedom. Cohen reads the text from the different characters' point of view, pushing back on interpretations which conclude that God favors Sarah and Isaac over Hagar and Ishmael. She wonders whether "people cannot understand a logic of love that is not binary and supremacist"[84] and asks "Is then a tradition that reads one over against the other, misreading God's story?"[85]

Delores Williams takes the 200-year old identification and appropriation of Hagar by Black women as a valid source for theological and biblical interpretation.[86] She uses this story to push back on Black liberation theology's assertion that God is always on the side of the oppressed, noting that "God didn't liberate Hagar."[87] Rather, God meets Hagar in the wilderness to provide her with "survival and quality of life." Williams pays more attention to Hagar's second encounter with the angel and is less interested in her first theophany and promises from God. The cultural association between Black women and Hagar is so deep and strong in the Black community[88] that such readings cannot be ignored when approaching this text today. Tanner, writing as a white woman, takes Williams' reading and examines the story from the viewpoint of her "sister" Sarah, exploring and interrogating her own levels of oppression and

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[82] *ibid*, 236.
[83] *ibid*, 237.
[84] Cohen, "Hagar and Ishmael: A Commentary," 256.
[85] *ibid*, 256.
[86] Delores Williams, "Hagar in African American Biblical Appropriation," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 172-173.
[87] *ibid*,177.
[88] Fredrica Harris Thompsett, *In Conversation: Michael Curry and Barbara Harris* (New York:Church Publishing, 2017), 40-41.

privilege.[89] She concludes that “I cannot wait for my own oppression to end before I turn my concern to the much greater oppression of others.”[90]

The history of interpretation on Hagar has overwhelmingly emphasized her otherness. Even in affirming interpretations such as Williams’ womanist reading, her identity as oppressed outcast is emphasized more than that of matriarchal God-namer. While some writers have positioned her as a Biblical matriarch,[91] such readings are clearly aware they are against the grain.

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[89] Beth Laneel Tanner, “My Sister Sarah: On Being a Woman in the First World.” in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld,* ed. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 62, 66-68.
[90] *ibid*, 69.
[91] Susan M. Pigott, “Hagar: The M/Other patriarch,” *Review and Expositor* 115, no. 4 (2018), 513-528;Teubal, “Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries,” 235-250.

4. Luke's First Chapter

Overview

In contrast to Gen 16/21 with its tale of separation, Luke 1 tells a story of everything coming together, of the arrival of the kingdom of God, of the redemption of Israel. It is a theme he will continue into his story of the early Jesus movement, the book of Acts. Women characters, so prominent in Luke's first chapter, are featured throughout the two-volume work to an extent not found in the other gospels.[92] Luke's thesis of the kingdom of God bringing redemption to the lowly is placed in the mouth of Mary with the Magnificat.

Luke involves a similar set of characters to Gen 16/21, but centers his story not on the annunciation to Mary, but on the interaction between the two women and their unborn sons (Luke 1:39-45). Mary's story sits inside Zechariah and Elizabeth's story in this structure, and at the heart of Mary's story, Mary and Elizabeth connect and their stories meet:[93]

A. John's parents (1:5-7)

B. Zechariah annunciation (1:8-20)

C. Zechariah and people in temple, Zechariah silenced (1:21-23)

D. Elizabeth pregnancy (1:24-25)

E. **Mary annunciation** (1:26-38)

F. **Mary and Elizabeth and unborn sons (1:39-45)**

E'. Mary's song (1:46-56)

D'. Elizabeth gives birth (1:57-61)

C'. Zechariah and people, Zechariah regains speech (1:62-66)

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[92] Amy-Jill Levine, "Introduction," in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 1.

[93] Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: WB Eerdmans, 2002, 49. Descriptions slightly modified and bolding added in E.

B'. Zechariah's song (1:67-79)

A'. John's youth (1:80)

The boundaries of this structure are the beginning and end of Elizabeth's pregnancy. The very next verse is marked by mentions of the emperor and local governing authorities (Luke 2:1-2), noting the shift to a different narrative. But in the nine month period of "mother's and children's time"[94] (1:5-80), the women and their wombs are at the heart of the story.

Mary in Interpretation

The gospels may only give us "glimpses" of Mary,[95] but her tradition is longstanding and mythic in proportion. Traditions around Mary, revered as Holy Virgin[96] and God-Bearer (Theotokos)[97] stretch back to the early Church. The extra-canonical *Protevangelium of James* centers Mary's intense purity, from her pristine nursery, to upbringing in the Temple, to the preservation of her virginity even after giving birth.[98] Hymnody has elaborated on various images on Mary, from the delicate and pure rose,[99] to gentle and meek "maiden,"[100] to the suffering mother (*stabat mater dolorosa*)[101] at her son's cross.

Seim argues that Mary puts forth an example of ideal discipleship, in which ascetic purity is an integral part.[102] Mary Daly brings out the "power that the image of Mary has wielded in the

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[94] Brigitte Kahl, "Reading Luke Against Luke: Non-Uniformity of Text, Hermeneutics of Conspiracy and the 'Scriptural Principle' in Luke 1," in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 79.

[95] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 126.

[96] John of Damascus, "On the Divine Images," in *Readings in World Christian History, Volume 1: Earliest Christianity to 1453*, ed. John W. Coakley and Andrea Sterk (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 292.

[97] "Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon," in *Readings in World Christian History, Volume 1: Earliest Christianity to 1453*, ed. John W. Coakley and Andrea Sterk (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 175.

[98] Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 119.

[99] The Episcopal Church, *The Hymnal 1979* (New York: Church Publishing, 1985), #81 (Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming).

[100] *Ibid*, #265 (The angel Gabriel from heaven came).

[101] The Episcopal Church, *The Hymnal 1979,* #159 (At the cross her vigil keeping/*Stabat Mater*).

[102] Turid Karlsen Seim, "The Virgin Mother: Mary and Ascetic Discipleship in Luke," in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 89-90.

human imagination."[103] She noted that Mary has in some circles achieved nearly "God-like status" and that she carries memories of ancient Mother-Goddess images.[104] Daly further puts forth that the concept of a virgin mother has empowering potential for women, as a woman "not defined exclusively by her relationships with men,"[105] but rather as an image of "female autonomy."[106] So revered and sacred is Mary's virginity that any questioning of it could be considering anathema. When Schaberg suggested that the gospel infancy narratives could be read as supporting a narrative in which Mary was raped and Jesus was illegitimately conceived,[107] her car was set on fire.[108]

In Roman Catholic traditions, Mary is considered a powerful intercessor who is very close to Jesus. She is an icon who has been made personal in different Latinx cultures, for example, Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico.[109] Images of Mary are used to pray for and highlight contemporary crises, such as the shooting of Black men by police,[110] and the COVID pandemic.[111]

An important hinge in how interpreters regard Mary is her self-description of the "lowliness of his servant" (*tapeinosis*; *doule*; Luke 1:48). This would be better translated as the oppression or degradation of his (God's) slave,[112] closely identified with the oppression of the

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103 Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 83.
104 *ibid.*
105 *Ibid*, 84.
106 *Ibid*, 85.
107 Jane Schaberg, *The illegitimacy of Jesus : a feminist theological interpretation of the infancy narratives, expanded twentieth anniversary edition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006).
108 Frank Reilly, "Jane Schaberg, Raymond E. Brown, and the Problem of the Illegitimacy of Jesus," in *The illegitimacy of Jesus : a feminist theological interpretation of the infancy narratives, expanded twentieth anniversary edition, by Jane Schaberg* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 262.
109 Simon Coleman, "Mary: Images and Objects," in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. Sarah Jane Boss (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 400.
110 Mark Doox, "Our Lady of Ferguson," 2016, https://markdoox.com/work#/our-lady-of-ferguson-missouri-and-all-killed-by-gun-violence/.
111 Devin Watkins, "COVID-19: Pope offers prayers to Virgin Mary for protection," March 11, 2020, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/pope-francis-prayer-our-lady-protection-coronavirus.html.
112 Schaberg, *The illegitimacy of Jesus,* 95; Lukse Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 200.

people of Israel, for whom Mary is a stand-in as God's servant/slave (Luke 1:54). In Christian interpretation, however, *tapeinosis* has typically been spiritualized to emphasize Mary's humility and meekness before God.[113] In a parallel way to anti-Jewish readings of Hagar as symbolizing the synagogue, Mary's identification with the people of Israel has been read in a Christian anti-Jewish way, with Mary re-positioned as the *ecclesia* -- "the Jewish people, whose oppression and liberation are at issue here, are co-opted by the Christian church…."[114] Mary has become such a Christian icon, that readers have all but forgotten her Jewishness, and the Jewish context of her proclamation for Israel.

Images of Mary can be as varied as the world's cultures -- Mary is not seen as always Black or white, but the color of whatever community is claiming and celebrating her.[115] Williams has little to say about Mary in her discourse on wilderness theology, but she does include an intriguing image of "God's self-disclosure in a woman." Mary's conception by the Holy Spirit, Williams asserts, "in terms of African-American heritage from traditional African religions, one can say, 'The Spirit mounted Mary.'"[116] Lettsome asserts that Mary's song can be likened to African-American slave songs, songs holding both the suffering of the context of the enslaved and "hope for its highest antithesis"[117] in their freedom. Such a view must consider the uncomfortable evocation of the "happy slave" used as God's surrogate,[118] in Mary's self-naming as God's slave. Yet it also has the potential to "flip the slave language in the text on its head,"[119] recognizing her consent to God's plan and the liberation of which she sings.[120]

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[113] *ibid*.
[114] *ibid*, 200.
[115] Coleman, "Mary: Images and Objects," 400-409.
[116] Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 149.
[117] Raquel S. Lettsome, "Mary's Slave Song: The Tensions and Turnarounds of Faithfully Reading Doule in the Magnificat," *Interpretation* 75, no. 1 (2021), 12-14.
[118] *Ibid*, 14.
[119] *Ibid*, 11.
[120] *Ibid*, 16-18.

This very brief examination of the history of interpretation around Mary reveals a more mixed picture than that of the mostly-othered Hagar in interpretation. Mary's aura contains much power along with humble and chaste holiness. Yet her status as a Christian icon can also make it difficult to see her as a real character in the gospel story, a young, pregnant, Jewish woman living in Roman-occupied Galilee. Looking at the Luke 1 text itself, alongside the Hagar stories, will help peel Mary away from her Christian-icon veil. It is to this task that we turn next.

5. Luke-Genesis Close Intertextual Reading

Characters

The characters in Luke 1 appear similar to the characters in the Hagar-Ishmael texts: two women, a man, two sons, and an angel/God. In Luke's version, the sons are unborn, but nonetheless have important roles in the text. In contrast with Genesis, Luke has the older and barren Elizabeth conceive first (Luke 1:24), so the older son is born to the older woman. In this comparison, we will observe that the characters parallel and cross back upon each other, with their closer counterparts to Genesis sometimes one character, and sometimes the other.

Immediately upon introducing Zechariah and Elizabeth (1:5), Luke meets the reader with two phrases recollecting Hebrew scripture.[121] He describes the couple as "righteous (*dikaioi*) before God" and "living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord" (1:6), emphasizing them as faithful followers of Torah. The reader may be cued from this powerful term "righteous" to associate Zechariah with Abraham (Luke 1:6; Gen 15:6). Yet, this pious priest is presented as one who doubts, apparently in contrast to Abraham, who believes and obeys (12:4; 15:6; 17:23; 22:1-14). Zechariah questions the angel and is silenced (Luke 1:18-20) for nine months.

Elizabeth's description not only includes her righteousness but her connection to the line of Aaron (1:5). Mary, in contrast, is introduced with no credentials of her own (1:27), only that her espoused husband is a descendant of David (1:27). Mary is likely poor, a peasant young woman from a small town in the Galilee (1:26). Her relationship with Elizabeth (Luke 1:36) suggests she too may be from a priestly heritage.[122] But this is not what Luke chooses to emphasize. Young Mary is the "relative" of the older Elizabeth, perhaps not an equal

[121] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 32.
[122] Levine, "The Gospel According to Luke," 111.

relationship, but a much less hierarchical relationship than that of Sarah and her "slave-girl" Hagar. Hagar's slave status is named no less than eight times, by Sarah, Abraham, and God (Gen 16:2,3,5,6,8; 21:10,12,13). Mary self-describes herself as slave (*doule*) twice in this story (Luke 1:38, 48), but a slave to God, not to another human.

Elizabeth, like Sarah, is barren (Gen 11:30; 16:1; Luke 1:7), and like Sarah, has her barrenness reversed through the intervention of God and at an announcement of an angel (Gen 18:9-10; 21:1-6; Luke 1:13,24). Both experience the shame of barrenness and the joy of restoration to fertility (Gen 21:6-7; Luke 1:25). Mary and Hagar will not seek pregnancy, but it is imposed on them -- by Sarah (and Abraham; Gen 16:2-4), or by God (Luke 1:34-35). Mary, the younger and less-distinguished character in Luke 1, will give birth second, to the younger and more favored male child. Elizabeth, the older, barren, more auspicious character, will give birth first, to the less favored (yet still important) child. Mary and Elizabeth's order of conception and childbirth thus crosses over from their similar Genesis characters (Gen 4:4-5; 21:12; 27:30-38; 37:3; 41:38-45).

Luke structurally pairs Mary with Zechariah. Both have similar annunciations (Luke 1:8-20, 26-38), and both sing prophetic songs (Luke 1:46-56, 67-79). Yet Mary is contrasted with Zechariah in that she is shown as obeying (Luke 1:38) and Zechariah as doubting (Luke 1:18). Similarly, in the Genesis text Hagar is paired with Abraham in several ways. Both have sons announced to them by an angel (Gen 16:7-14; 18:1-15). Abraham gets promises from God (Gen 12:2-3; 13:14-16; 15:1-6; 17:1-8), and Hagar gets her own promise (Gen 16:10),[123] making her annunciation distinct from other Bible women's angel visits. Hagar does not only get a prophecy about her son-to-be, but also a promise that she will be a matriarch. In this way she is quite parallel to Abraham.

[123] Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 2: Genesis 16-50* (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 10.

The Hagar-Abraham parallels go further. God tells Hagar to “return” and “submit” to slavery (Gen 16:9), using the same word (*anah*) used to show the Egyptians oppressing the people in Exodus (1:11-12). God tells Abraham that his people will endure 400 years of oppression (*anah*; Gen 15:13).[124] Later, Hagar is sent into danger which imperils her son, and God rescues Ishmael (Gen 21:14-19). Abraham, having sent away Hagar and Ishmael, will then be asked by God to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:1-2). At the last moment, God will rescue Isaac (Gen 22:9-14).

Can these Hagar/Abraham parallels tell us more about the Mary/Zechariah parallels in Luke 1? Like Ishmael and Isaac, both of the sons in Luke 1 will be imperiled. John will be put in prison (Luke 3:20) and killed (Mark 6:17-29), and Jesus will be executed (Luke 23:1-46). Mary and Zechariah both will not only see their son in danger, but witness his death. But these events occur outside the safety of this text.

John’s small role in Luke 1 is to highlight Jesus. He’s still in the womb but already playing his part. Jesus, perhaps just an embryo at this point, has neither speech nor action in the text, but is already being celebrated with the title Lord (Luke 1:43). In Gen 21, Ishmael has a negative interaction with Isaac, playing/mocking/laughing with him (21:9). Ishmael plays/laughs, and this action casts the family out of the home. The younger sons are favored in Genesis and Luke, echoing a theme that occurs throughout Genesis (Gen 4:4-5; 21:12; 27:30-38; 37:3; 41:38-45). Our two texts resonate with each other more strongly than these other Genesis stories, however. Ishmael, the older and less favored son, gets his own promise too (Gen 16:12), as does John (Luke 1:14-17).

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[124] Kathleen M. O’Connor, *Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary: Genesis 1-25A* (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2018), 229.

God does not appear directly as a character in Luke 1. He sends his messenger (angel; Luke 1:11,26-28) to speak with Zechariah and Mary. God in Luke 1 "fills" Elizabeth and Zechariah with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41,67). This is in contrast to the Abraham cycle, where God himself speaks with Abraham (Gen 21:12-13), hears the voice of Isaac (Gen 21:17), opens Hagar's eyes (Gen 21:19), even gets into a three-way back-and-forth with Sarah and Abraham about whether Sarah laughed at his promise to her (Gen 18:12-15). God appears much more proximate with humans in our Genesis passages in comparison to Luke 1.

Indeed, the contrast between Zechariah and Abraham could be attributed not to significant differences in the two male characters' behavior, but to God's response. In the Abraham cycle, Abraham has intimate conversations with God. He laughs at God's pronouncement (Gen 17:17), and he questions God (Gen15:2). Perhaps the bigger contrast is in how God tolerates such discourse. In Luke, we have a God who does not get in as close, but sends messengers and speaks by filling humans with his Spirit. A God who does not accept questioning by people, even the most righteous, but demands complete faith and obedience. Abraham's initial response of falling on his face in laughter to God's promise of a child for Sarah would seem to show doubt, that Abraham is questioning or even testing God.[125] Yet Luke has the angel rebuke Zechariah for his mild question (Luke 1:19-20), rendering him speechless until he proves his faith (Luke 1:63-64).

Thus it is an open question as to whether Zechariah is presented as the opposite of Abraham, or whether it is God who is being portrayed differently in Luke's chapter. Luke's God is distant and powerful, taking no dissent from humans. We could consider the role of Jesus, the "Lord" (Luke 1:43) in Elizabeth's pronouncement, and conclude that in fact God is actually quite

[125] Itzhak Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis: The Non-Absolute God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 117.

close to the human characters in this text, inside Mary's body. Not only very close but very vulnerable, an unborn child. But even so, Jesus in this passage is silent, and solely an object of adoration and praise. The God of Luke's first chapter is a God of immense power, enough power to bring the heavenly kingdom to earth and God's people.

Unplanned Pregnancy and an Angel

The Hagar and Mary stories contain similar speeches given by the angel to each woman:

> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus (Luke 1:31).
>
> And the angel of the LORD said to her,
> "Now you have conceived and shall bear a son;
> you shall call him Ishmael,
> for the LORD has given heed to your affliction (Gen 16:11).

Both of these scenes have been compared to other birth announcement scenes (1 Sam 1:1-18; Judg 13:2-7),[126] and there are indeed strong resonances with those stories of conception. Yet the Hagar and Mary scenes stand apart in that these two women are not infertile women who plead with God for pregnancy. Rather, God comes to each of these women to announce a pregnancy which neither woman sought out. Schottrof argues that it is Elizabeth's story that parallels Hannah's, a "childless woman who gives birth to a son who is important for the life of his people."[127] Mary, on the other hand, is in the tradition of "God taking sides with debased women who then become prophets."[128] This description could fit Hagar too. The situations of these two young women characters differ greatly from a woman unable to conceive whose prayers are answered.

[126] Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 2: Genesis 16-50,* 10; Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke Vol 1: 1:1-9:50,* 111.
[127] Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters,* 191.
[128] *Ibid*, 181.

Hagar's and Mary's stories both describe unwanted, or at least unplanned pregnancy. For Hagar, consent to this pregnancy is not mentioned and is not considered relevant. She is given as a surrogate to Abraham (Gen 16:3-4), to make a baby for him and Sarah (Gen 16:2). For Mary, the pregnancy, happening before her hometaking with Joseph (Luke 1:34), could be dangerous if she were to be seen as carrying an illegitimate child. She and any suspected father of the child could face being stoned to death (Deut 22:23).[129] Hagar's and Mary's annunciations are uniquely linked as cases in which the woman's pregnancy itself, rather than being unable to conceive, is what puts her in potential danger.[130]

Looking at Mary's situation alongside Hagar's illuminates just how precarious it is. Hagar, a pregnant woman, a runaway slave, alone and without provisions in the wilderness,[131] meets the angel who gives her promises conditional on returning to oppression (Gen 16:9-10). Hagar is told that God will multiply her offspring -- her offspring, not Abraham's -- giving a clue that the child she is carrying will be hers and not Sarah's. Says Frymer-Kensky, "Hagar will have a glorious progeny who can never be exploited or subjected -- if she voluntarily goes back to be exploited."[132]

The angel tells Mary that Jesus will reign over a heavenly and earthly kingdom (Luke 1:32-33), invoking the house of Jacob (Israel) and throne of David (the united kingdom) and the title Son of the *Most High*. That title for God comes up in Genesis, in a song of praise after Abraham saves people in battle (14:18-20),[133] the only part of Torah that mentions Jerusalem.[134] Like Hagar's promise, Mary's promise comes with serious conditions. The promise of a son who

[129] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 23.
[130] Schaberg, *The illegitimacy of Jesus,* 100-101.
[131] O'Connor, *Genesis 1-25A,* 239.
[132] Frymer-Kensky, "Hagar: My other, my self," 230-1.
[133] Levine, "The Gospel According to Luke," 111.
[134] Carr, "Genesis," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 31.

will rescue Israel is predicated on Mary accepting a high-risk pregnancy, carrying stigma, shame, and potential deadly consequences.

Hagar is told her son will be in conflict with others (Gen 16:12). If we read Hagar as standing in for Israel in the passage,[135] it is not a warning or accusation, but more of a historical statement. Israel indeed would be in conflict and under oppression over and over in the course of the history told in the Hebrew scriptures, as was true in the exilic context of Genesis. Reading historical context into Luke, this prophecy about Ishmael continued to be true of Israel in Jesus' time, and in Luke's time. Ishmael's description could also fit as a portrayal of Jesus himself -- in conflict with his fellow Jews (cf. Luke 4:29-29; 5:21,30; 6:2), at odds with the Roman occupiers and ultimately executed by them (Luke 23-24), and advocating against family ties (Luke 8:19-20; 12:52-53; 14:26). The prophecy can be read in a fully positive way, telling that no one would ever enslave Hagar's son or his people -- he would be a fighter, fierce and free.[136] Such a description too would suit both John and Jesus.

Both women consent to these dubious honors. Mary's consent is explicitly in the text (Luke 1:38). Mary gives assent to the angel, saying *genoito*, the same word used by God in speaking the world into being in the LXX (Gen 1:3),[137] consenting to allow creation to happen inside her. Hagar is not asked for consent from Sarah and Abraham when she conceives. But she does apparently consent to God's command and promise for Ishmael given to her in the wilderness, by returning to Abraham's home and slavery. Hagar makes an astonishing statement as well, becoming the only character in the Bible to give God a name, *El-roi*, God of seeing (Gen

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[135] Frymer-Kensky, "Hagar: My other, my self," 236; Phyllis Trible, "Hagar: The Desolation of Rejection." in *Texts of Terror,* by Phyllis Trible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 28-29.
[136] Pigott, "Hagar: The M/Other patriarch," 518-19; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 10-11.
[137] Brigitte Kahl, personal communication.

16:13).[138] In each of these passages, in which the main character has mostly been silent while listening to God, each woman says just a few, very powerful words.

Mary's statement of consent echoes Gen 16 in another way. She refers to herself as slave (*doule*), as Hagar is addressed as slave by the angel. This self-label will come up again in Mary's song (Luke 1:48). But Mary, in contrast to Hagar, is a slave not to humans but to the Lord, a much more exalted type of servanthood described in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 49:3; 50:10; 52:13; Joel 2:29) and in Acts where Peter quotes the prophet Joel (Acts 2:18).[139] Hagar's obedience to the angel's order to return brings her black into actual slavery, to Abraham and to Sarah, who has already abused (oppressed; Gen 16:6) her.

The non-consent of Hagar to becoming pregnant by Abraham brings a further spotlight to the impact of Mary's consent to the angel. We get little information about Hagar's impregnation, "And he went in (*bo'*; Gen 16:4) to Hagar, and she conceived (*harah*)" the text tersely says. The brevity of it has the sense of the possible brutal nature of this non-consensual act. There is likewise an undercurrent of violence in the angel's statement to Mary, that the Holy Spirit will "come upon" (*eperchesthai*) her, and "the power of the most high" will "overshadow" (*episkiazo*) her (Luke 1:35). This first verb (*eperchesthai*) is used elsewhere by Luke in Acts (1:8), where Jesus tells the disciples that the Holy spirit will come upon them, but it is also used in several instances in which violence or danger is implied (Luke 11:22; 21:26; Acts 8:24).[140] The second verb (*episkiazo*) in the LXX generally connotes an attack, something negative like illness, evil, curses, an invading army or robbers (eg., Gen 42:21; Lev 14:43, Judg 9:57; Job 21:17).[141] Yet it can also have a positive sense, of the coming of God's power or justice (1 Kings

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138 More will be said on Hagar's statement in the section, Songs of Praise and Victory.
139 Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 38.
140 Schaberg, *The illegitimacy of Jesus,* 105.
141 *Ibid*, 105.

11:7; Job 23:6; Isa 32:15-16).[142] In the New Testament, the verb connotes protection, as when Peter's shadow heals people (Acts 5:15), or the cloud surrounds the disciples during the Transfiguration (Luke 9:34).[143] Thus these terms include senses of danger and protection, of the power of God and of violent attack.

Schaberg controversially claims that the text gives evidence for Mary becoming pregnant in the conventional way, possibly by rape. She investigates Mary's "lowly" state (*tapeinosis*; Luke 1:48), determining that Mary's shame is directly tied to her illegitimate pregnancy. Pushing back on this claim, Schottroff notes that Mary's fate is closely associated with the people of Israel,[144] suffering under the *Pax Romana*, and that dismissing the suffering of Mary and her people due to political and economic factors as part of her *tapeinosis* is to ignore significant context and "depoliticize" the Magnificat.[145] She further notes that in ancient times as now, "the humiliation of poor women includes sexual humiliation,"[146] thus, Mary's degradation on the basis of her pregnancy, which could be presumed illegitimate, is not exclusive to her degradation on the basis of her poverty.

To Schottroff, interpreters appear to choose a heavenly "Father" for Mary's child, reinforcing patriarchal norms, or an earthly father who is absent from the text. She poses a third option, that the text poses the possibility that a woman can procreate without a male partner[147] (divine or human). She asserts, "An analysis of patriarchy has to critique both the notion of divine conception and enlightened biology."[148]

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[142] *Ibid*, 106.
[143] *Ibid*, 106.
[144] Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters,* 192-193.
[145] *Ibid*, 199.
[146] *Ibid*, 201.
[147] *Ibid*, 194-5.
[148] *Ibid*, 199.

Hagar is impregnated without being asked, but later does consent to the angel's command to return to slavery and harsh treatment. Mary consents to a vaguely dangerous-sounding overpowering by the Holy Spirit. Wenham asserts that "Both Hagar and Mary stand as examples of women who obediently accepted God's word…."[149] Through Mary's annunciation, we can notice echoes of the annunciation of Hagar. This part of Luke's text brings to the fore strong resonances between Mary and Hagar, and between Ishmael and both of the Lukan sons, John and Jesus.

A Circular Trip

From the introduction of Sarah and Hagar's relationship, we see power inequity and conflict. Sarah uses Hagar to try to build herself up, "taking" and "giving" her slave to Abraham (16:2-3). When Hagar conceives, she looks "with contempt" on Sarah (Gen 16:4). The translation might be better rendered as "her mistress became slight in her eyes,"[150] implying less than overt contempt, but simply less esteem and admiration by Hagar, who might now feel she is on more equal footing with her mistress.

The word used for what Hagar does is *qalal*,[151] the same word used by God when he promises Abram he will "bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse (*qalal*) you" (12:3). We do not get God's opinion of all this pregnancy plotting, Sarah's complaint to Abram, and Sarah's punishing (oppressing, *'nh*) Hagar (16:5-6). The use of this word implies that God might approve of Hagar's punishment for "cursing" Sarah, the wife of the promise. Whether God approves or not, and how much Hagar participates in the conflict is left ambiguous. But what is

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[149] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 13.
[150] Phyllis Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 39.
[151] O'Connor, *Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary: Genesis 1-25A*, 238.

clear is that this interaction results in Sarah oppressing Hagar, using the same word used for Egypt's oppression of Israel,[152] after using Hagar's body to further her own goals.

Sarah's oppression is what drives Hagar into the wilderness (Gen 16:6) to meet God, and to get her own promise. Hagar's circular trip in Gen 16, out to the wilderness and back into the household of Abraham and Sarah, parallels the trip Mary makes after her angel-encounter. Mary is met by the angel at home (Luke 1:26-28), then goes on a significantly long journey to meet Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-40). The text does not say that the angel tells her to take this solo, likely dangerous trip, which must have taken a few days.[153] Yet the trip must happen almost immediately after the angel's visit, since Elizabeth is in her sixth month of pregnancy (Luke 1:36), Mary stays three months (Luke 1:56), and Mary leaves before the baby is born (Luke 1:57).[154] Mary goes out "with haste" (Luke 1:39), while Hagar "flees" (Gen 16:6). Mary enters a safe and welcoming place, while Hagar rests near a spring and is greeted by an angel. Mary returns home, while Hagar returns to her "home" in captivity. Each returns to their place with new knowledge -- Mary's knowledge is from Elizabeth (Luke 1:42-45), Hagar's is from God (Gen 16:10-12).

We don't hear about Mary telling her family, or Joseph, before setting off on this trip. Women did not travel alone in ancient times. Mary was risking being robbed, beaten, raped.[155] Would there have been an element of doing something rebellious or indecent implied too? Thinking of the passage in connection with Hagar's fleeing really brings that question to the fore. Would it seem like Mary was running away after she got this perplexing news from the angel?

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[152] Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," 40.
[153] Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke Vol 1: 1:1-9:50,* 133-134.
[154] Kahl, "Reading Luke Against Luke," 79.
[155] And not only women faced such danger, Cf. Luke 10:30.

Mary's perilous situation is again highlighted when compared to Hagar's -- a pregnant woman, a runaway slave, alone in the wilderness.

Mary's travels in Luke 1 parallel Hagar's travels in Gen 16. Yet as we move away from the annunciation passages in Luke 1 and Gen 16, the echoes in Luke are less straightforward. It is as we get to this core of the Lukan narrative with Mary and Elizabeth that the characters become more complex, not matching one to one with their similar Genesis characters but switching roles at times.

<u>It is not About the Man</u>

In the passage at the heart of Luke's chapter, Mary enters "the house of Zechariah" to greet Elizabeth. But Zechariah is totally silent at this point, having been admonished by the angel for his doubt about Elizabeth's pregnancy (Luke 1:19-20). Similarly in Genesis 21 it is noted that Ishmael is the child Hagar "had borne to Abraham" (Gen 21:9). The men are signifiers for the women in these passages. Yet both men are also silent in these passages.

Abraham takes many actions in the Gen 21 passage. He gives Hagar provisions for the trip, but also expels her himself (Gen 21:14) despite his concerns. He is silent, but his actions are significant. He is sending Hagar away, possibly to her death. At the same time, he is freeing his slave and giving her possession of the child she gave birth to for him and Sarah.[156] Does Zechariah have any role in the Luke passage? Presumably, silent Zechariah is still present in his house. Although greeted by Elizabeth, Mary must have been welcomed in, at least passively, by Zechariah. It is the opposite action of Abraham in the Genesis passage. But perhaps we should not make too much of it, because he is essentially a non-entity in this part of the story. One

[156] Presumably Abraham could have sold Hagar and Ishmael rather than sending them away. Frymer-Kensky, "Hagar: My other, my self," 235.

imagines him, silently going to work in the Temple, coming home, retreating to a corner of the home. Perhaps he and Elizabeth devised hand signals for communication during his months of being unable to speak.

In each of these passages, there is a man, but he is not the main focus. In the case of Zechariah, in this heart of Luke's chapter, he is a completely absent presence. Once Mary enters Zechariah's home, "the two women converse without the presence of any male character (other than their unborn babies)."[157] The scene is compatible with the Bechdel Test,[158] in which a film or literary work depicts two women having a conversation which is not about a man.

Elizabeth contrasts to Hagar

Elizabeth hid herself in the home (Luke 1:24). It is not clear why. After bearing the shame of barrenness (Luke 1:25), one would think she might strut around, feeling more elevated in status, as Hagar felt when she conceived. Did she require bed-rest because of being pregnant at an advanced age? Or is this another place where the story crosses over? We can see a contrast here between Hagar, the first to conceive in the Genesis story, who apparently did strut a little (Gen 16:4), and Elizabeth, first to conceive in the Luke 1 story, who modestly secludes herself in her extraordinary pregnancy.

Elizabeth's seclusion makes Mary's journey even more compelling. How could she know of Elizabeth's hidden pregnancy, except by the angel's telling her (Luke 1:36)? It is only through the strength of her faith in the angel's pronouncement that she makes the long journey to see her relative. In this way, Mary is much more of an Abraham in this passage than is Zechariah.

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[157] Bauckham, *Gospel Women,* 51.
[158] Also called the Bechdel-Wallace Test, a test of women's representation in film and fiction. The requirement is that the work contain two women characters, that they must speak to each other, and that the subject of the conversation must not be a man. The term was coined in 1985 and named after cartoonist Alison Bechdel, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bechdel_test#:~:text=The%20Bechdel%20test%20(%2F%CB%88b,be%20named%20is%20sometimes%20added.

Inside the Home/Womb

Mary enters the home, and much interaction between the women follows. Elizabeth's reaction to Mary's unborn son sits in stark contrast with Sarah's reaction to Hagar's son (Gen 21:9-10). John, inside Elizabeth, "leaped in her womb" at the sound of Mary's voice (Luke 1:41). Sarah saw Ishmael, "playing with her son Isaac" (Gen 21:9). The word playing in Hebrew is similar to laughing (*mesaheq*; literally "making him laugh"), a play on Isaac's name (laughter; *yishaq*),[159] suggesting he might be laughing/mocking, "Isaacing," with Isaac. Sarah clearly perceives the behavior in the vein of mocking, and finds it threatening to her and to Isaac, because it leads her to call for Hagar's banishment (Gen 21:10). The concern is that Ishmael should "inherit" along with "my son Isaac" -- again we are keyed in to what will come, that Sarah at this point does not consider Ishmael, the son she more-or-less planned to be created as hers, to be her son.

In contrast, Elizabeth interprets her baby's kick as a "leap for joy" (*agalliasis*). This is an unusual word for joy, used by Luke in one other place (Acts 2:46),[160] where the followers of Jesus eat together with gladness (*agalliasis*). Elizabeth makes the most zealously positive interpretation possible. Certainly it is easier for her to attribute positive intent to her own baby residing in her own womb, than for Sarah to positively interpret the behavior of her son's rival. Sarah attributes bad intent to the child she wanted for herself, until she got a better option from God. Sarah may be regretting her own actions and their unintended consequences, Ishmael may indeed be laughing at rather than with Isaac, we don't know. But this different interaction between the sons, and different interpretation by the older mother, makes the scene go very

[159] Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," 43-44.
[160] *Accordance* software.

differently from here. John and Jesus, in two different wombs, interact joyously, in vivid contrast to Ishmael and Isaac, and Rebekah's unborn twins (Gen 25:22).[161]

Elizabeth's greeting includes a word that is rare in the NT and in the LXX, *eulogemene* (1:42). This same title "blessed" is given to Jael after killing Sisera (Judges 5:24) and to Judith after she kills Holofernes (Judith 13:18).[162] Yet Elizabeth is not praising Mary for killing a foe, but simply for the presence of her unborn child and recognition of that child by Elizabeth's own unborn son. Elizabeth's blessing is strong and effusive -- she cries out/yells in a loud voice (*megas krauge*). Although no daring act of executing enemies has occurred, there is the signal that the people have been delivered once again, that a victory has occurred through Mary's pregnancy. Elizabeth then gives Mary the exalted title, "mother of my Lord" (Lk 1:43), quite a contrast to Sarah's title for Hagar, "this slave woman" (Gen 21:10). John's leap of joy to Jesus has initiated high blessings by Elizabeth, contrasting strongly to Ishmael's playing which leads to calls for expulsion by Sarah.

Hagar's banishment leads her back to the wilderness with her son, who will nearly die of thirst (Gen 21:15-16). But the angel returns to meet Hagar, shows her water, and tells her to "lift up" her son (Gen 21:18). Hagar's second God-encounter echoes Luke's description of Mary getting up (*anistemi*; Luke 1:39), and her pronouncement that God has lifted (*hupsoo*) the lowly (Luke 1:52).

Hagar struts, possibly even "curses" Sarah (Gen 16:4); whereas Elizabeth quietly hides herself (Luke 1:24). Sarah oppresses pregnant Hagar (Gen 16:6); Mary feels compelled to see Elizabeth and affirm her pregnancy (Luke 1:39). Sarah sees the sons playing and interprets it in

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[161] The unborn twins Jacob and Esau "smash" each other inside the womb. The word used implies serious violence; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 175.

[162] Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke Vol 1: 1:1-9:50,*136-7; Bauckham, *Gospel Women,* 59. The parallel with Judith is intriguing in that Judith makes sure to say that in luring her target to her, she only used her looks: "he committed no sin with me, to defile and shame me" (Jdth 13:16).

the most negative light, then calls for the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:9-10). Elizabeth feels her son's kick and interprets it in the most positive light, and praises Mary and her unborn son (Luke 1:41-45). The characters cross over in these comparisons and contrasts just as they cross over in the order of their pregnancies and in which mother is favored.

In Genesis 16/21 the interactions between the two women are fraught with conflict at every turn. Power imbalances are evident, for the brief time in which Hagar has the upper hand with her new pregnancy, and for the majority of the story where Sarah has the power and uses it against Hagar. In Luke 1 the interactions are notably free from conflict; mutual affirmation and accompaniment characterize the relationship between the women in this text. This gynocentric scene in the home is the high point of the Luke chapter, the most joyous scene of mutuality, praise, and prophecy. Luke's text in this scene makes a stark and dramatic contrast to the scene of banishment, indirect, violent speech, desolation and near-death between Sarah and Hagar in Gen 21.

Songs of Praise and Victory

Mary's song takes up the majority of the passage between Mary and Elizabeth. It is the overarching theme and thesis of Luke's entire gospel, with its reversals (1:51-53). In it, Mary again asserts her status as slave (*doule*) to the Lord (Luke 1:48). She invokes the ancestor Abraham and the promise (Luke 1:55), and God's "servant Israel" (1:54).[163]

Mary's song closely evokes Hannah's song of praise, delivered when Hannah leaves her three-year-old son Samuel with Eli the priest (1 Sam 2:1-10). It also evokes other strong women in the Hebrew Bible who sing songs of praise to God -- Miriam (Exod 15:19-20), Deborah (Judg

[163] The word for servant here is not slave, but *pais*, which has more the connotation of child; Kahl, personal communication.

5:1-31), and Judith (Jdth 16:1-17).[164] Elizabeth makes her blessing to Mary, and Mary sings her own victory song. The thing is done. The mighty have been crushed and the lowly are raised. The kingdom is here.

Mary's song also echoes back to Abraham, to the song Melchizedek sings in his honor after Abraham's victory over Canaanite kings (Gen 14:18-20):

> "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth;
> and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"

Again, we come back to this singular place in the Torah where Jerusalem is mentioned, to a song of praise sung to Abraham that evokes Mary's song.

Hagar's "you are *El-Roi*" could be thought of as her song of praise after being given a promise by God. It is a simple statement, not a fully-developed song. But there is a lot in that statement. You are a God of seeing. If God chose a name for Abraham and Sarah (Gen 17:5,15), Hagar chose a name for God. She names God as one who sees, who sees a pregnant woman, a surrogate mother, a foreigner, a runaway slave, alone and vulnerable in the wilderness. In contemporary terms, we would say that Hagar *felt seen* by God. Hagar names God who has "looked on the lowliness" of a runaway slave (Luke 1:48), who sees oppression and suffering.

Mary's song has elements of several of these other songs, and echoes of Hagar's second wilderness experience (table). Mary's song takes Hagar's naming a step further. Hagar names God who sees oppression, while Mary sings of God ending oppression.

My soul magnifies the Lord; and my spirit rejoices in God my savior. (Luke 1:46)	My heart exults in the Lord; my strength exults in my God. (1 Sam 2:1)
He has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant (1:48)	You are *El-Roi* (Gen 16:13).

[164] Levine, "The Gospel According to Luke," 111.

For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. (1:49)	blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand! (Gen 14:20)
His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. (1:50)	But to those who fear you you show mercy. (Jdth 16:15)
He has shown strength with his arm (1:51)	Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power -- (Exod 15:6)
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones (1:52)	The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength (1 Sam 1:4)
And lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things (1:52-3)	"Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast" ...She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. (21:18-19).

This feeling of victory, of safety, will last for three months with the women in the home and sons in the womb (Luke 1:56). For the younger woman's first trimester and older woman's last, they will share their pregnancy. Unlike Sarah and Hagar, Mary and Elizabeth will not be put into a dangerous situation by the man in the text.

The kingdom has come. But Zechariah's speech and song, and John's birth, signal that the text will leave the home/womb. The text will soon step out of women and children's time,[165] back to emperor's and men's time (Luke 2:1-3). Back to the reality of Jesus' time, and of Luke's. But first, Mary leaves for home, pregnant, and the man finally gets to speak.

The Man Speaks in Public what the Women Spoke in Private

Mary has exited the scene, and the home goes from private, intimate space to a reception space for "neighbors and relatives" (Luke 1:58-59). Zechariah demonstrates his faith by naming his baby with the name chosen by God (Luke 1:62-63), and his speech is restored (Luke 1:64). This scene signals that we are rapidly transitioning away from Mary and Elizabeth, from a

[165] Kahl, "Reading Luke Against Luke," 79-80.

gynocentric focus, as the neighbors and relatives do not listen to Elizabeth's opinion on the child's name, but seek confirmation from the father (Luke 1:59-62).

Zechariah's praise to God as his speech returns (Luke 1:64) becomes a full song of his own (Luke 1:68-79), echoing some of the same themes of the Magnificat. His opening line echoes Mary's opening (Luke 1:68), strongly evoking Mary as standing in for Israel.[166] Verses 68-75 herald the coming of the Messiah, from David's line (Luke 1:69), invoking again the Abrahamic promise (Luke 1:73). The majority of Zechariah's song extolls not his own son, but Mary's son who has come to save the people "from the hand of all who hate us" (Luke 1:71) so that they "might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness" (Luke 1:74). Rather than the mighty being brought low, the reversals of Mary's song and Hannah's (1 Sam 2:4-8) Zechariah's song emphasizes God's saving power so that the people may freely worship.

The next verses of the Benedictus report on John's prophesy and paving the way for Jesus (Luke 1:76-77). Then Zechariah returns to the coming of the Messiah (Luke 1:78-79) and the turn from darkness to light for the people, the final line about guiding the people's feet, echoing a line from Hannah's song (1 Sam 2:9).

Zechariah's song is a statement of hope for the people of Israel. It may be read as a statement of hope for Mary, as she makes her way home on her own. Yet this prophecy is not nearly as radical as what has just been uttered by Mary in the home. Zechariah brings into public the message that Mary sang in the home with Elizabeth. But in this transition out of mother's time, the true depth of the message is not told. In a crowd where some of "the mighty" may be listening, Zechariah keeps the message to one of being able to worship God in peace.

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[166] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 43.

Imperiled Sons Outside the Womb

The women in Luke 1 are safe while in the home. However, the sons who must leave the womb do face danger, just as their Genesis counterparts do, with Abraham sending Ishmael away and nearly sacrificing Isaac. John is arrested by Herod. Jesus ends up crucified by Roman authorities.

The angel's proclamation about Ishmael to Hagar has echoes in Simeon's statement to Mary in the temple, saying Jesus is "to be a sign that will be opposed" (Luke 2:34). There are echoes of Ishmael in descriptions of the child John and the child Jesus:

> God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow (Gen 21:20).
>
> The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly in Israel (describing John; Luke 1:80).
>
> The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him (describing Jesus; Luke 2:40).

The note about John echoes the wilderness part of Ishmael. The note on Jesus echoes the part about God being with Ishmael. Jesus' portrayal by Luke in the rest of this gospel, and the angel's statement in Luke 2:34, has great resonance with the angel's statement to Hagar about Ishmael. Indeed, Jesus ends up fighting with temple merchants, with religious authorities, and with Roman authorities who eventually kill him.

6. Conclusion

I have chosen to read Luke's soaring proclamation of the kingdom through the song and testimony of two women alongside a text of painful conflict and separation between two women and two peoples. As stated earlier, we don't know whether Luke intended to relate his first chapter to the Hagar-Ishmael story, and this paper has not provided enough evidence to say that Luke was trying to compare or contrast these similar characters and their actions to the Genesis characters.

Nor is it valid to narrowly look at scenes between the two women characters in each text and conclude that the Genesis text is violently conflictual while the Lukan text is warmly utopian. Reading them together has troubled that simplistic contrast. As we have seen, Genesis includes Hagar's singular naming of God and God's promises to her and Ishmael. Meanwhile, Luke's positive vision breaks down quickly even as we near the end of chapter one. We see the crowd ignoring Elizabeth's speech and turning to her husband to learn the name of their child. We hear Zechariah's song, more cautious and measured than Mary's. We can sense the encroachment of the "real world" of patriarchy and empire into the narrative as we leave the scene in the home.

Looking back at Hagar and Sarah, after having attempted to peel away some of the voices of interpretation, should make us think harder about separation and reconciliation. Why is it that we sometimes want to rush toward reconciliation, to make hard stories come out all right? Perhaps there is more work to be done before Hagar and Sarah can stop fighting, or even before Mary and Elizabeth can be together outside the confines of Zechariah's house.

God's Kingdom and the Emperor's Kingdom

The scene between Elizabeth and Mary in the home is a powerful witness to God's kingdom. Mary declares that the mighty are cast off their thrones and the suffering of the oppressed has ended. But Luke knows that's not the reality, so the story must proceed from this cocoon. This scene in which the characters appear to be in sharp contrast with their counterparts in the Hagar-Ishmael story, in which sons and mothers are apparently reconciled, will rapidly move forward to a narrative containing much conflict.

Luke is working within two different frames of reference, the kingdom of God here and now (Luke 6:20-26), and the kingdom as not-yet -- anticipated but still struggling under an oppressive earthly reality. Kahl describes Luke's text as "bilingual."[167] The story is interpreted very differently depending on whether one reads with the eyes of his stated male reader Theophilus, presumably comforted by a more "orderly," Rome-compatible story, or the eyes of female reader "Lydia," the disciple depicted in Acts (16:14-15), who would read for a counter-cultural message of liberation from Roman oppression.[168] Luke, writing his books after the destruction of Jerusalem, was well aware that the kingdom had not yet arrived, that the promises to Israel had not been delivered. He is holding the promise in tension with the reality, giving the reader glimpses of the promise while not ignoring the reality. Luke's first chapter is the exemplar of this kingdom, the illustration of what will occur throughout his story only in brief glances.

[167] Brigitte Kahl, "Reading Luke Against Luke: non-uniformity of text, hermeneutics of conspiracy, and the 'scriptural principle' in Luke 1," In *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, edited by Amy-Jil Levine, (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 71.
[168] Reading Luke against Luke, 83-87.

Thus, Mary is declared "blessed" (1:42) in chapter 1, but unlike Jael (Judges 5:24) or Judith (Judith 13:18-19), she will not appear triumphant after having conquered enemies with a tent-peg or sword. Rather, she will see her own son's body nailed to a cross (Luke 23:33), and a sword will pierce her own soul (Luke 2:35). In empire-world, the little Mary has, and the hopes of the people (Luke 24:21), will be taken away as Jesus is crucified.

The world of Luke 1, the kingdom-world, is a world in which a woman utters stunning prophecy that turns the world upside-down (Luke 1:46-55). And we get glimpses of this world as Luke's gospel proceeds. These kingdom-glimpses show a world where a sinful woman is the ideal host (Luke 7:36-50), where a Samaritan is the ideal neighbor (Luke 10:29-37), and where two women are put forth as complementary halves of Jesus' formula for discipleship (Luke 10:38-42). In the world of empire, women are ignored and marginalized (Luke 24:10). But in God's kingdom, women can utter prophecy, while the man in the home can only silently observe (Luke 1:39-56). God's kingdom showing itself through women's agency, or the righteous behavior of a hated foreigner, might be as surprising to readers as God speaking and making promises to a foreign slave-woman, and that slave-woman giving God a name.

Each of our comparison texts presents a different way of holding the pain of present realities while also offering profound hope to its readers. Genesis promises abundant blessings to Abraham if the people can remain righteous and faithful through years of trial (Gen 15:13-14). In addition to this foretelling of suffering, there are cracks in this promise, of separation, of wrongs committed on the path to chosenness. Luke's echoing of the Genesis story in Luke 1 signals that God is still at work on the promise and creation of God's kingdom, that God's story continues.[169] Yet the kingdom-world depicted in Luke 1 cannot be sustained. The narrative must march on, ultimately to the reality of the cross. The fact that these texts continue to move readers and speak

[169] Green,"The Problem of a Beginning," 82-83.

to us shows the power of this tension. If these texts had simply presented a false fairy-tale picture, or only presented the devastation of human violence, they may not have continued to speak to readers over time and to today.

Hagar and Sarah and Mary and Elizabeth

Looking at Mary through the lens of Hagar brings out the real fragility of her situation and danger of her circular journey. Looking back at Hagar after reading Mary brings out Hagar's brief but powerful song of praise, and her special relationship with God.

Genesis 16/21 presents a story of conflict between two women, while Luke 1 describes a reciprocal, mutual relationship. Yet we cannot straightforwardly contrast the relationship between these two women, because this reading does not come to the conclusion that one character maps simply onto another. Rather, Mary and Elizabeth each represent hybrids, Hagar-Sarah's. The older, higher-status woman conceives first. The younger, "lowly" woman has the favored son. In part, Elizabeth acts like the anti-Hagar, hiding her pregnancy rather than appearing prideful. She also acts in part like the anti-Sarah, welcoming and affirming Mary rather than exiling her. They are neither complete types nor anti-types of their Genesis foremothers.

If we return to a womanist reading of Hagar as Black and Sarah as white, Luke 1 does not therefore become a neat story of racial unity. Rather, it becomes a non-binary story, where Mary and Elizabeth are both Black and white. Perhaps not a story where categories are erased, where "there is neither Jew nor Greek," but where dual identities are present and embodied in each person. In such a world, a mother cannot misinterpret the playing of a son or send that son away -- because the son is part of her own body.

Separation and Reconciliation

The intimacy and mutual affirmation of Mary and Elizabeth stands in stark contrast to the emotionally charged looks, harsh treatment, running away, and banishing between Hagar and Sarah. It is highly tempting to jump from the scene of separation to the scene of reconciliation, to paper over the one with the other. But not so fast. Mary and Elizabeth's scene is fleeting in the arc of the larger story. They sing together, wait together as their pregnancies progress, but then they separate, and never encounter each other again through the story.

Looking back at Hagar and Sarah, we might question whether their separation is actually part of the terror of this text. After all, it is their separation that allows each to flourish in their different locations. Sarah gets her wish, for the son of her own body to have the family inheritance. Hagar in turn sees Ishamel's promise fulfilled, gains her freedom, and becomes a matriarch in her own right.

Panning out into the broader context of the Lukan text complicates the meeting in the home. Mary exits the scene of Elizabeth's companionship to a future where she will ultimately become a symbol of a new religion, separated from the community of priestly descendant Elizabeth. Luke's message of unity through the message of God extending to the world (Acts 1:8) will eventually be flipped, as Christianity becomes the religion of the Empire. Luke's quote from Acts will be co-opted as a motto promoting violent Christian conquest against Jewish and Muslim siblings.[170] It would seem that the two women have ventured very far from their cozy scene in the home.

The desire for a happier ending for Hagar and Sarah, for all that they represent, is human and understandable. Yet it is also a touchy issue, particularly in these times of intense division, in which voices on one side appear to be calling for premature closure in order to avoid

[170] Zacour, *Jews and Saracens in the Consilia of Oldradus de Ponte,* 50.

accountability. Douglas writes, "To get to a future without the divides that separate, we must strive not for reconciliation but justice. Reconciliation follows justice, not the other way around."[171] Perhaps separation is necessary for Hagar and Sarah. There can be no justice where one woman is still enslaved, the always second-and-subordinate wife, where one woman will always be considered the foreigner. Likewise there can be no justice where one son, the son of that same enslaved woman, must by law be the favored one, leaving out (mocking?) the other son. Perhaps justice requires separation in this case, and perhaps God knew this all along (Gen 21:12-13).[172]

Indeed, we may need to question our wish for reconciliation for Sarah and Hagar at all. It is a wish from a standpoint of privilege, of white, Christian privilege. Perhaps this reading has pointed to the need for close examination of our narratives, from different perspectives. Perhaps it has pointed to the need to do the difficult and painstaking work of truth-telling and working for justice -- a risky and arduous circular path, like Hagar's and Mary's -- before jumping to a happy resolution of our divisions. Only after these steps can we hope for any of these four women to be able to meet and embrace each other.

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[171] Kelly Brown Douglas (New York), March 28, 2020, comment on David Brooks, "A Christian Vision of Social Justice," *New York Times*, March 19, 2021.
[172] Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis,* 72, 85, 141-142.

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