

lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed." It is the equation of Jesus with the paschal lamb, almost certainly already traditional by the time Paul wrote, that rids his little allegory of the odor of arbitrariness. If Jesus is the passover offering, then all those who are "in Christ" (to use a Pauline idiom) must be continually in the moral equivalent of the state of high ritual preparedness for Passover. Indeed, if the lamb/Christ has already been sacrificed, as the tense of the verb at the close of v 7 indicates, then such preparedness is doubly urgent, for the festival has begun though the leaven remains—an intolerably dangerous situation.

Given the threefold equation of the paschal lamb, the beloved son, and Jesus that we found lurking beneath the surface of the Gospel of John, we should not be surprised to find Paul identifying his Christ not only with the passover offering but also with Isaac, the beloved son par excellence of the Hebrew Bible (the only Bible Paul knew). Indeed, the boldness with which Paul projects Jesus (and the Church) into the story of Abraham is a midrashic tour de force that has affected Jewish-Christian relations ever since:

¹³Christ ransomed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree," ¹⁴that the blessing of Abraham might be extended to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

¹⁵Brothers, in human terms I say that no one can annul or amend even a human will once ratified. ¹⁶Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his descendant. It does not say, "And to descendants," as referring to many, but as referring to one, who is Christ. (Gal 3:13–16)

Paul's midrash in v 16 turns upon his interpretation of the morphologically singular collective noun *ûlēzar' ākā* (Greek, *kai tō spermati sou*) in Gen 13:15 and 17:8 as therefore semantically singular as well: not "to your offspring" in the sense of many people but "to your *one* offspring," whom Paul identifies as the Christ.

The association of the individual Isaac with the collective noun *zera'*, "offspring," is familiar from the Book of Genesis. Recall God's reassurance to Abraham when Sarah insists on the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael: "Whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring will be continued for you" (Gen 21:12). It is as though Abraham's offspring through Ishmael are not really his *zera'*, or at least not in the same way as those descended from his beloved younger son, Isaac. A discussion in the Talmud cites this verse to explain why the *balakbab* obligates Jews but not Edomites to practice circumcision:

"For it is in Isaac that offspring will be continued for you." Then the descendants of Esau should be obligated! "In Isaac"—not all of Isaac. (*b. Sanh. 59b*)¹²

In other words, because the Edomites, though descended from Isaac's son Esau, are not included within the subgroup of Isaac that the rabbis here think the preposition "in" implies, they are not included in the Abrahamic covenantal act that is circumcision. Abraham's real offspring are those descended from Isaac alone. Whereas Gen 21:12 excludes the Ishmaelites from the status of Abraham's prime lineage, the Talmudic discussion uses the same verse to exclude the Edomites. Both passages, however, presuppose the association of Isaac and the singular collective noun, *zera'*, "offspring."

It is precisely this association that Paul ruptures when he glosses "and to your descendant" in Genesis with the words "who is Christ" (Gal 3:16): the beloved son to whom and about whom the ancient promises were made is no longer Isaac but Jesus, no longer the Israelite patriarch in whom the future of the Jewish nation is prefigured but the messiah of Christian belief whose mystical body is the Church. Paul's midrash on the one word *ûlēzar' ākā*, "and to your descendant(s)," exemplifies a familiar and uneventful Jewish exegetical technique.¹³ But in it loom the future separation of Christianity from Judaism and their crystallization as mutually exclusive traditions.

Once Jesus has displaced Isaac, it follows that the promises and blessings that had been associated with the beloved son par excellence in Genesis must be available instead through the Christian messiah. This is, in fact, the implication of Paul's first clause in Gal 3:14, "that the blessing of Abraham might be extended to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus." In the Hebrew Bible, the exact words "blessing of Abraham" occur only in Gen 28:4, in a passage in which Isaac, having directed Jacob to avoid intermarriage, pronounces upon him the Abrahamic blessing of progeny and land (vv 1–4). It is surely relevant to Paul's purpose that this passage has to do with Isaac's confirmation of Jacob as his—and Abraham's—rightful heir. It is surely no less relevant that part of the Abrahamic blessing is that Jacob shall "become an assembly of peoples" (v 3). Given Paul's motivation in composing his letter to the Galatians, a passage like this must have held an enormous appeal for him. For his dominant purpose in this letter is to argue that Gentiles can inherit the status of descent from Abraham, and all the promises that go with it, without having to convert to Judaism (and become circumcised). The idea that the blessing of Abraham should entail that Jacob/Israel "become an assembly of peoples" fit Paul's polemical intentions beautifully. As he read Gen 28:1–4, it almost certainly implied precisely the possibility for which he was doing battle—that by be-

coming Christian, Gentiles could have the best of both worlds, retaining their non-Jewish identity and yet falling heir to the promises to Abraham.

“That the blessing of Abraham might be extended to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:14a) recalls another passage in Genesis as well, one much more focused on the relationship of Abraham and Isaac. This is the second angelic address toward the end of the story of the aqedah:

¹⁵The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶and said, “by Myself I swear, the LORD declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one, ¹⁷I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes. ¹⁸All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves [alternatively, “be blessed”] by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.” (Gen 22:15–18)

In chapter 14, I observed that the effect of this speech is to make the blessing to Abraham contingent upon the aqedah. Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac has become a foundational act, indeed the essential foundational act for the existence and destiny of the people Israel. As Paul read this text through his own particular christological lenses, the key point would probably have been this: it is the father’s willingness to surrender his beloved and promised son unto death that extends the blessing of the Jews to “all the nations of the earth.”

The equivalent for Jesus of the binding of Isaac is, once again, his crucifixion. It is undoubtedly this that underlies Paul’s citation of Deuteronomy 21:23 (Gal 3:13). The law therein forbids allowing the impaled body of a person executed for a capital offense to remain on its stake overnight. The words that Paul (or the translation from which he is working) renders as “cursed be everyone who hangs upon a tree” are probably more accurately translated “an impaled body is an affront to God.” In positioning this clause before his mention of the blessing of Abraham (v 14), Paul develops a polarity between the curse that, in his view, comes from biblical laws and the blessing that comes from biblical promises. This, too, befits one of his central objectives in composing the letter to the Galatians—to argue against those apostles who maintained that the laws of the Torah were still valid and in no way voided by the Christian revelation. Though far from an antinomian, Paul rather consistently associated the laws of the Torah with sin, curse, condemnation, and death, all of which are antithetical to those things he associated with Jesus. In the juxtaposition of Gal 3:13 and 3:14, we can thus hear a recapitulation of the whole movement of Pauline salvation history: from curse to blessing,

from law to spirit and faith, from Israel to the Church, from the crucifixion to the blessings contingent upon it—ultimately, to use language not yet available in Paul’s time, from Judaism to Christianity.

Nils Dahl has made the intriguing suggestion that the combination of the aqedah with the law of the impaled criminal in Gal 3:13–14 turns upon the equation of the man hanging on the tree in Deut 21:23 with the “ram caught in the thicket” of Gen 22:13. More problematic is Dahl’s conclusion, that “here there is an element of typology, but the ram, rather than Isaac, is seen as a type of Christ.”¹⁴ If Paul does see a foreshadowing of his Christ in the ram, the ram, in turn, derives its significance for the history of redemption only from its status as a stand-in for Isaac. For the extension of the blessing of Abraham to the nations that is so important to the apostle to the Gentiles is a consequence not of Abraham’s sacrifice of the ram, but of his unflinching resolve to obey the command to offer his beloved son.

But even to speak of a typology of Isaac and Jesus here (rather than one of the ram and Jesus) has its difficulties and must be attended by important qualifications. An Isaac-Jesus typology does indeed develop in early Christian literature,¹⁵ but it must not be projected into texts that move in another, and much more radical, direction. For Gal 3:13–14 cannot be detached from vv 15–16, and v 16 makes clear that Isaac does not foreshadow Jesus at all. Rather, Paul argues that the “descendant” who is the heir of the promise to Abraham is *not* and *never was* Isaac or the Jewish people collectively. His whole point about the putative semantic singularity of the word “and to your descendant” is to connect the promise with Jesus alone. The descendant of Abraham who is Isaac has disappeared from the story altogether. Paul never mentions his name. If Gal 3:13–16 is still to be seen as a typology, it is a typology of such intensity that the antitype has dislodged the archetype: in Paul’s theology Jesus has so thoroughly displaced Isaac that even Genesis testifies not to the second of the Jewish patriarchs, but to the messiah of Christian belief. Paul’s Jesus does not *manifest* Isaac. He *supersedes* him.

None of this is to deny that Isaac can function typologically in Paul’s thinking. He is most explicitly a type, however, not of Jesus but of the Church, and it is in his interpretation of Isaac’s conflict with Ishmael, and of Sarah’s with Hagar, that we see the full boldness of Paul’s appropriation of the traditions in Genesis about the beloved son:

²¹Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the freeborn woman. ²³The son of the slave woman was born naturally, the son of the freeborn through a promise. ²⁴Now this

is an allegory. These women represent two covenants. One was from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; this is Hagar.²⁵ Hagar represents Sinai, a mountain in Arabia; it corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery along with her children.²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is freeborn, and she is our mother.²⁷ For it is written:

“Rejoice, you barren one who bore no children;
break forth and shout, you who were not in labor;
far more numerous are the children of the deserted one
than of her who has a husband.” [Isa 54:1]

²⁸ Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of the promise.²⁹ But just as then the child of the flesh persecuted the child of the spirit, it is the same now.³⁰ But what does Scripture say?

“Drive out the slave woman and her son!
For the son of the slave woman shall not share the inheritance with the son” [Gen 21:10]

of the freeborn.³¹ Therefore, brothers, we are children not of the slave woman but of the freeborn woman. (Gal 4:21–31)

In this allegory, Hagar, the Egyptian slave woman, represents two closely related images of bondage. The first is the site of the giving of the Torah, Mount Sinai, which, lying somewhere between the land of Israel and Hagar’s homeland, suggests the slave woman’s abortive flight to freedom and her reenslavement (Genesis 16). The second is the earthly Jerusalem, where, in Paul’s time, some form of Torah observance was normative for the Church. The first great innovation in Paul’s reading of Genesis is this identification of Hagar’s slavery with Torah. It bears mention that in rabbinic literature, Torah and Mount Sinai often represent true freedom (and the other positives that Paul associates exclusively with Jesus).¹⁶

The other mother in Paul’s allegory is obviously Sarah, the freeborn woman whom he associates with a heavenly Jerusalem not obligated by the Torah. Sarah’s infertility, miraculously overcome in accordance with God’s promise, leads Paul to associate her son Isaac with promise and spirit. This, in turn, makes Hagar’s son Ishmael, born through the altogether natural means of surrogate motherhood, a “child of the flesh.” The rivalry of Ishmael and Isaac, and of Hagar and Sarah (Gen 21:9–10), is thus allegorized into a stark opposition between slavery, Torah, and flesh, on the one hand, and freedom,

promise, and spirit, on the other. Ishmael’s persecution of Isaac, attested in ancient Jewish interpretation of Gen 21:9,¹⁷ thus becomes a figure for those Jewish Christians who opposed Paul’s message of a Torah-less Gospel and sought, instead, to evangelize the Galatians into Torah-observant Christianity. It was this that Paul considered a perversion of the Gospel and urged his Galatian correspondents to avoid (Gal 1:6–9; 5:1).

The second major innovation in Paul’s allegory of Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac, lies in his association of Sarah and Isaac with a Torah-less religion, that is, with a form of Judaism in which the injunctive dimension of the Torah has been voided. If we had only Gal 4:21–31 and lacked the antecedent Pentateuchal texts, we would never have guessed that it was actually *Isaac’s* descendants rather than Ishmael’s who stood at Mount Sinai and received what in Pentateuchal and later Jewish thinking alike is regarded as the incomparable blessing that is the Torah of Moses. With his reading of Genesis 21, Paul thus effects a startling inversion, one fraught with significance for the future character of the Church and, needless to say, for its relation to the Jews into our own day.¹⁸ The literal descendants of Sarah and Isaac have become the moral and spiritual progeny of Hagar and Ishmael. Isaac has ceased to be the first critical link in the great chain that will lead from Abraham to redemption in the promised land. Instead, he has become a type for the possibility of a spiritual life of freedom apart from the Torah—more than that, in contradistinction to the Torah, which Paul now reinterprets as fleshly and enslaving rather than spiritual and liberating, as the rabbinic tradition would continue to conceive it. For, whereas in the Pentateuch Mount Sinai is the first great *destination* of those freed in the Exodus (Exod 3:12), in Paul’s Gospel Mount Sinai is the point of *departure* for the exodus, the equivalent of the house of bondage. “For freedom Christ set us free,” he concludes his allegory; “so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1).

In the post-Enlightenment world, this freedom from Torah is often used to reinforce the portrayal of Paul as a universalist, a person, that is, to whom ethnic identity is of no account. Similarly, Paul’s critique of Judaism as he knew it (or reconstructed it after his conversion) is seen as premised upon an opposition to particularism and exclusivism and a corollary affirmation of the natural dignity of all humanity, regardless of whether the individual is Jewish or Greek, slave or free, male or female (Gal 3:28). This line of thought has traditionally served powerfully to reinforce an image of Judaism as separatist, exclusivistic, and chauvinistic, in contradistinction to Christianity, which is thought to be integrationist, inclusive, and non-particularist. That this rejec-

tion of particularism should have fueled the lethal fires of anti-Semitism is one of the larger ironies of modern history.

A consideration of Pauline and other early Christian theology in its historical context immediately casts this convenient polarity into grave doubt. For in Paul's lifetime and for a significant period thereafter, it was actually Judaism that was the larger community, spread throughout the known world, with influence even in the centers of power, and attracting converts and semi-converts. The Christian Church, by contrast, was a very new sect, small and beleaguered. To attribute godliness and freedom to the Church—and especially, as Paul did, to the Torah-less subgroup within it—was hardly to strike a blow for universality and inclusiveness.

The allegory in Gal 4:21–5:1 shows us a different and more historically plausible picture of Paul. His point there is anything but the oneness of the human family or the irrelevance of belonging to Abraham rather than to the nations. He does not argue that Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac, are ultimately one, nor that the distinction between Jew and Gentile has, through the Christ, yielded to an affirmation of their common humanity. All to the contrary, it is a point of capital import that it is Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, rather than Adam, the father of the human race, whose blessing Paul seeks to appropriate exegetically for the Church (Gal 3:29). In Paul's theology, one of the prime consequences of the Gospel is a grafting of the Gentiles onto the tree of Abraham *in place of the Jews*, who have been lopped off but are to be re-engrafted in the eschatological future when God's rage against them comes to an end (Rom 11:11–29).¹⁹ Whereas Christian universalists like to imagine Paul's christology as offering a way out of Jewishness and into an undifferentiated humanness, the actual thrust of the theology of the apostle to the Gentiles is the reverse: the undifferentiated humanity that is the nations of the world, the "wild olive shoot" as Paul disparagingly terms them (v 17), can, through the Christ, become the equivalent of the Jews. Thus and only thus can they shed their worthless Gentile status and attain the only status that Paul thinks has value in the sight of God—the status of Isaac, the son promised to Abraham and conceived outside the course of nature, in contradistinction to Ishmael, the son of his wife's slave, conceived through the natural and perhaps not altogether honorable means of surrogate motherhood. Pauline ecclesiology is premised upon the possibility and the legitimacy of borrowed ethnicity—a very different thing from universalism or inclusiveness for its own sake.

For Paul, then, participation in the Christ is the equivalent of conversion to Judaism, but it is more than that: it is also the *only* means of conversion to Judaism, for the Jewish means—acceptance of the Torah and its command-

ments, symbolized in men by circumcision—have, in Paul's mind, ceased to be efficacious. For reasons that remain unclear, Paul insists that the two modes of conversion to the status of children of Abraham must not be combined: contrary to the Gospel of his opponents, Paul demands that a Gentile who comes into the Christ must not become circumcised and practice the Torah. To do so is to forfeit the precious status of the promised son—Isaac—and to fall into the carnality and subjugation of the offspring of Abraham whom Isaac displaced and superseded—Ishmael, son of Hagar the Egyptian slave-woman. The division between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, between Israel and the nations, and between those (of whatever origin) who have accepted the Torah and those who have not, has become the division between the baptized and the unbaptized, between the Church and the world, between those who have accepted the Gospel and those who have not. But in both the Jewish and the Pauline frameworks, the issue turns upon the question of which community can lay just claim upon the status of Abraham's beloved son. This could not be more different from the way modern universalists approach such matters.

At first glance, Paul's elaborate allegorical reading of Genesis 16 and 21 appears so forced as to suggest utter arbitrariness. The apostle to the Gentiles has, it would seem, a theological message to get across, and his choice of the rivalry of Isaac and Ishmael and their respective mothers as his proof-text is without an anchor in the text itself. I submit that the matter is quite the opposite: Paul focuses on Isaac's right of inheritance because, in his mind, the Church is to be identified with Isaac on grounds altogether independent of the particular texts about the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael. For, as we have seen, Paul believes that Jesus was the promised son of Abraham that Jewish tradition had (and has) always interpreted as Isaac. Moreover, Paul points out on more than one occasion that the Church is the body of Christ and individual Christians should therefore view their relation to each other on a biological analogy. "For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function," he writes to the Roman Christians, "so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another" (Rom 12:4–5; cf. 1 Cor 12:27). Now if Jesus is the true Isaac, and the Church is the body of Jesus, it follows as night the day that the Church, when it turns its attention to Genesis, must see itself in the role of Isaac, that is, as the promised son of the freeborn woman who, with God's full endorsement, demands nothing less than the expulsion of the rival claimant to her husband's estate. Given the controversy in which Paul finds himself embroiled as he writes to the Galatian churches, it is natural for him to associate that rival claimant with the apostles who preached a rival Gospel to his own—a

Gospel, that is, that included the observance of the Torah and thus demanded circumcision as an entrance requirement for male converts. The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael thus could be pressed into service in support of Paul's own uncompromising insistence that fidelity to the Christ and practice of the Torah are incompatible. Indeed, Paul's allegory is intended to make the Torah itself endorse this very message—to set the *theological message* of the Torah against its own *commandments*. “Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?” (Gal 4:21).

To attempt a comprehensive explication of the story of Jesus of Nazareth as it appears in the New Testament lies beyond the purview of our inquiry. What has been essayed here is an analysis of some of the ways in which the earliest Christian writers utilized the longstanding Jewish traditions about the beloved son to interpret the life and career of their departed master. Jesus' execution at the onset of Passover rather naturally led to an identification with the paschal lamb, and, given the already ancient associations of the aqedah with Passover and, by implication, of the same lamb with Isaac, this identification, in turn, drew in its train an ensemble of Isaac traditions that the earliest Christian authors sought in various ways to redirect to Jesus. Much early christology is thus best understood as a midrashic recombination of biblical verses associated with Isaac, the beloved son of Abraham, with the suffering servant in Isaiah who went, Isaac-like, unprotesting to his slaughter, and with another miraculous son, the son of David, the future messianic king whom the people Israel awaited to restore the nation and establish justice and peace throughout the world.

In the hands of Paul, a person whose influence on the subsequent Christian tradition it is difficult to overemphasize, the identification of Jesus and Isaac assumed an especially forceful and far-reaching statement. In one Pauline formulation, verses that in their biblical context refer with utter clarity to Isaac were reconceived as referring to Jesus exclusively. The latter thus becomes the promised seed of Abraham and the man through whose impalement the patriarchal blessing is extended to the nations. Isaac himself becomes a type of the Church, the individual members of the body of Christ, defined now in stark opposition to those obligated in the practice of Torah. In the case of Gentile Christians, this means those who would seek to change their status through circumcision and the other commandments incumbent upon Jews. The effect is to drive a hard wedge between the Abrahamic and the Sinaitic moments in the history of redemption. Sinai becomes a symbol not of freedom, but of enslavement, the destination not of the descendants of the freeborn matriarch Sarah, but of the offspring of her Egyptian slave Hagar. As the younger son Isaac displaced his older brother Ishmael, so, in Paul's

thinking, does the new community, the Christian Church, displace the senior community from whom they received the Scriptures. The Jewish people are to undergo the spiritual equivalent of Ishmael's fate of expulsion into the wilderness of Sinai. It is no small irony that to argue this position, Paul had no alternative but to rely on the Jewish Scriptures—the only Bible he knew or could imagine—and to utilize exegetical procedures that the rabbis would use, with at least equal dexterity, in the defense of the inseparability of Abraham's life from subsequent Jewish experience, the continuing validity of the Torah, and the spiritual vitality of the Jewish people when they, at whatever cost, heed the voice of Sinai.

There is another sense, however, in which Paul and the ongoing rabbinic tradition stand in profound agreement. In insisting against so many of his fellow Christians that Torah in its injunctive, nomistic dimension is incompatible with the Gospel, Paul (whatever his perception at the time) helped ensure that the two communities would be separate. The community of Torah and the community of Gospel would appeal to the same Scriptures (until the New Testament documents would themselves be reconceived as biblical) and seek to practice virtues that overlap to a high degree. This is as we should expect from traditions that each revere the memory of Father Abraham. But, as we shall see in the next chapter, in laying claim to their Abrahamic status, Judaism and Christianity necessarily replicate the dynamics of the patriarchal family of Genesis seeking to establish a prime lineage in the face of an unexpected and disquieting segmentation. Their appeal to their common root in Abraham ensures that Judaism and Christianity will be mutually exclusive.