

## SUBVERTING SARAH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT GALATIANS 4 AND 1 PETER 3<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*Sarah, wife of Abraham and mother of Isaac, occupies an important place in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible. A few direct and indirect references to her are found in the New Testament also, but it is soon noticed that she is appropriated in quite different ways by the New Testament authors. These different portrayals of Sarah are related to the authors' distinct purposes as well as the differences in their use of Scripture. The comparison of Sarah's portrayal in Gal 4 and in 1 Pt 3 renders interesting results, requiring further explanation of differences which amount to more than addressing distinct epistolary exigencies. Attention to the two documents reveals that while their use of Scripture adhere broadly to the prevailing norms, Gal 4 and 1 Pt 3 differ in the rationale for their references to Scripture, the authors' interpretive interests and the ideological settings of the documents. However, amidst these differences the role of Sarah in Genesis is not only subverted, but also serves to support certain subversive elements in Galatians and 1 Peter.*

**Key words:** Gender, Patriarchy, Hermeneutics, Allegory, Household codes, Interpretative interests; Ideology

### 1. Introduction

The presence of a person as important as Sarah in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible comes as no particular surprise, since she was after all the one to whom Jewish people would trace their matrilineal descent: "Sarah, mother of nations" (Schneider 2004). Our modern perception and frame of reference should nevertheless not deceive us in taking the female presence outside of and to some extent detached from her home – and the public acknowledgement of a married woman – for granted in a patriarchal world. Nevertheless, apart from her role as consort or wife of Abraham, Sarah occupies an important position in the biblical narratives.<sup>2</sup>

Sarah's portrayal in the New Testament sees her deployed in important roles, but neither the particular ways in which she was appropriated, nor these portrayals as such, are without some ambivalence. At first glance, it could be noted that her presence is somewhat unexpected in the New Testament epistolary material, especially her generally positive depiction, given the epistles' propensity for specificity and, of course, given the patriarchal context of the time. On the other hand, references to Sarah is not that surprising considering that she was the wife of the patriarch, the father of faith, and therefore carried the responsibility of bearing him a child, a responsibility which was accentuated because of the particular role in which Abraham himself was portrayed. But again, while Sarah's ultimate responsibility to provide a lineage is reflected in the New Testament documents as they at

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<sup>2</sup> Cf, however, also the patterned literary presentations of women in the Hebrew Bible as described by Brenner (1986:257-273).

times recount the compromising situation Sarah found herself in because of her sterility, there is more to how Sarah was presented in the New Testament.

In the end, Sarah is mentioned only on a few occasions in the New Testament, but in interestingly different ways. While the distinct portrayals of Sarah are obviously related to the particular purpose of each document, these references can also – if only partly – be explained with reference to the variance found among the New Testament documents' appeals to Scripture. Comparing Sarah's portrayal in Gal 4 and 1 Pt 3 shows that the explanation of differences needs to include but go beyond distinct epistolary exigencies.<sup>3</sup> While their use of Scripture adhere broadly to prevailing norms and practice, Gal 4 and 1 Pt 3 differ in the rationale for referencing Scripture, their interpretive interests *and* the ideological settings of the documents – these concerns will be addressed after briefly reviewing Sarah's portrayal in Genesis, Galatians and 1 Peter. Moreover, the subtle (and less subtle) subversion of Sarah's portrayal in Genesis, and her consequent subversive appropriation in the New Testament, will be traced throughout the presentation.

## 2. Sarah, Wife of Abraham, in the Hebrew Bible<sup>4</sup>

In the patriarchal world of the Bible, bolstered by endogamous marriage practices and patrilineal descent, it is difficult to reflect upon Sarah without considering her in relation to Abraham.<sup>5</sup> The New Testament documents show more than a fleeting acquaintance with the Abraham narratives of the Hebrew Bible, generally according him the mantle of father of faith in the New Testament. However, the interests of the New Testament representations of Abraham are soon exposed, showing their reliance on a committed traditional appropriation of the biblical texts of Genesis rather than a studious concern with the full extent and implications of the narratives of the Hebrew Bible on Abraham's character: A male figure that stood to lose nothing, having already left his native land and the empty house of his father. "God's call is hardly inopportune" (Fewell and Gunn 1993:40).

At times Abraham appears as a "silent, acquiescent, and minor figure in a drama between two women" (Trible 1984:11), and whose response to God's promise entailed minimal risks for considerable benefits.<sup>6</sup> Leaving aside (the then still) Abram's motives for responding positively to God's call – faith, trust, ambition, sense of responsibility, and so on – there is no evidence of including his family and especially his wife in the sharing of the blessing, although Sarai would evidently be vital to actualise the blessing. In fact, it is

<sup>3</sup> Space does not allow discussion of the introductory questions concerning Galatians and 1 Peter. Suffice it to claim that Galatians is seen as one of Paul's authentic letters, addressed to the early Christian churches found by Paul in central Asia Minor and most central Anatolia (so Betz). It was most probably written in the early fifties (50 or 51 CE), although its provenance remains a puzzle: Ephesus, Macedonia, Corinth and even Rome have been suggested. Galatians is a short and confrontational letter, probably representing the early phase of a dispute with adversaries relating to the relationship between theological issues and socio-political matters such as the identity of the community, within the context of first-generation followers of Christ. 1 Peter was most probably written in the period between 73 and 92 CE, pseudonymously and from Rome by an early Christian group formed around the name and legacy of the apostle Peter. 1 Peter is directed to members of this group dispersed through Asia Minor.

<sup>4</sup> Cf an earlier discussion in Punt (2006b).

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Sarah's role is circumscribed in her role as legitimate wife and mother of the male successor rather being presented as individual in her own right (cf Yee 1992:981): "The chief aspiration which informs these women's being ... is biological motherhood and its benefits" (Brenner 1986:264). Schneider presents a different perspective, and concludes: "Thus, Sarah becomes not just the wife of the patriarch; instead, the Deity chooses Sarah as surely as Abraham, especially in terms of continuation of the promise" (Schneider 2004:129).

<sup>6</sup> As Brueggemann (1982:119) somewhat anachronistically puts it, "an index of what we crave: well-being, security, prosperity, prominence".

only when Sarai became Sarah (“princess”) that she was explicitly included in the divine promise, to which Abraham responded with incredulous laughter. Nothing shocked Abraham more in his acceptance of God’s promise than Sarah’s inclusion in it (Fewell and Gunn 1993:40-41, 47; cf Davies 1995:105-108).

The irony amidst Sarah’s marginalisation is how it affected her behaviour towards others, in particular the few over which she exercised authority.<sup>7</sup> In the same way that Abram traded Sarai for security and wealth in Egypt,<sup>8</sup> Sarai herself later traded the sexuality and maternity of the slave, Hagar, for her own security (Gen 16), and so the victimised became the victimiser. “For Sarai, Hagar is an instrument, not a person. The maid enhances the mistress” (Trible 1984:11). When Sarai’s plan to ensure a lineage through her slave led to unexpected complications, an indifferent Abram withdrew from Sarai’s harsh and revengeful treatment of Hagar, which is so effective that Hagar flees into the desert. “The struggle between the women is a regular power struggle, unaffected by love inasmuch as it is centered round motherhood and its attendant benefits” (Brenner 1986:272).<sup>9</sup> Still, apart from this incident, Sarah’s life in Genesis marks her as worthy of becoming the mother of the nation, and although her secondary place to Abraham was inscribed by patriarchy, her behaviour often subverted both her and Abraham’s roles and aspects of such twists and turns in the Hebrew Bible narratives surfaces in the New Testament as well.

### 3. Sarah in the New Testament<sup>10</sup>

Women’s stories of motherhood in Genesis are primarily about the nation of Israel over against other nations in a promise-focussed quest.<sup>11</sup> The promise, which according to the

<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew Bible’s narratives on the matriarchs develop according to a relatively fixed literary paradigm where the legitimate wife is paired with another, rival co-wife with characteristics not present in the former (Yee 1992:981; cf Brenner 1986). However, later interpreters found Hagar’s maltreatment difficult to explain, and so e.g. Philo in his generally positive portrayal of Sarah, carefully avoided Sarah’s mistreatment of Hagar and Ishmael in his literal interpretation, dealing with it only allegorically (cf Niehoff 2004:429).

<sup>8</sup> In a less than positive portrayal of Abram in their return to Egypt when famine struck (Gen 12), he showed fewer morals than Pharaoh in putting Sarai up for grabs, ostensibly because of the danger her beauty could cause him, and so incurring the favours and riches of the Pharaoh. While safety and certainly economic gain seems to be prime considerations for his actions, Abram showed little concern for Sarai as a partner to the divine blessing, much less an integral part in realising it. In fact, through his “sense of exclusivity” and distrust of God’s protection, Abram has interfered with God’s plan. Underlining his failure to appreciate Sarai’s value, the earlier fearful Abram rallied at great personal risk to the defence of Lot in Gen 14, and the participant of Egyptian riches later declined the king of Sodom’s offer of wealth. A similar pattern is again present in Gen 18-20 where Abraham deemed Lot more worthy of risk and trouble than his own wife (Fewell and Gunn 1993:42-45).

<sup>9</sup> Hagar returned to Abram and Sarai at God’s instruction, but not before she also received a promise, even if an ambivalent one and secondary in all respects to the promise made to Abram, except that she too will have a mighty lineage. Ishmael will also be blessed, but it is through Isaac that God will renew the covenant (Gen 17:19-21; Fewell and Gunn 1993:45,48).

<sup>10</sup> Cf also Punt (2006a; 2006b). Four direct references to Sarah are found in the NT: Rom 4:19 re the contrast between Abraham’s faith and Sarah’s womb; Rom 9:9 re the promise situated in Sarah’s son; Heb 11:11 re Sarah’s conception and faith; and 1 Pet 3:6 re Sarah’s obedience; Gl 4:21-5:1 is clearly about Sarah although she is referred to as the “free [woman]”. The conspicuous absence of Sarah in Stephen’s account of the history of Israel (Ac 7:2-53) is difficult to explain. Abraham is mentioned 73 times: Mt (7); Mk (1); Lk (15); Jn (11, all in chapter 8); Ac (7); Paul’s letters (19; Rom (9); 2 Cor (1); Gal (9); Heb (10); Jas (2); 1 Pt (1). Van Rensburg argues that references to Abraham’s children would include Sarah of necessity (cf Rm 9:7; Jn 8:39), and refers also to Is 51:2 who juxtaposes Abraham as father and Sarah as the one who gave birth (Van Rensburg 2004:257).

<sup>11</sup> The gender politics is determined by the *male* God who takes initiative and enable/empower the *female* of the patriarch to ensure his (God’s and the patriarch’s) promises and lineage. However, the *male* God challenged

Hebrew Bible came from God, concerns Israel that is to become a great nation. The importance of the promise potentially sidelines interest in these women, and the significance of what they do or what happens to them and their children, to matters of secondary nature. On the other hand, and not without some irony, women as mothers are first and foremost caretakers of the promise,<sup>12</sup> granting matriarchs a vital role in the patriarchal narratives. It follows that their babies, their children are more than offspring but are those who will move, claim or lose the promise<sup>13</sup> (Fewell and Gunn 1993:89-90; Osiek 1998:426).

Many of the tensions generated by powerful women in a patriarchal context reverberate through the New Testament which picks up on the traditions regarding Sarah,<sup>14</sup> albeit with varying emphases. "The New Testament supplies several proof texts that the Christian community has used to shape its understanding of Sarah and her character" (Schneider 2004:131).<sup>15</sup> While Rom 4:19 focuses on her barrenness in contrast to Abraham's faith in God's promises,<sup>16</sup> and 1 Pet 3:6 sees in Sarah's behaviour a legitimization of patriarchy and women's submission to their husbands, Heb 11:11 emphasises Sarah's own faith, making a positive connection between her faith and her ability to conceive in her old age. In other texts Sarah is instrumental for describing the relationship between Jewish and Gentile followers of Christ, and also Jews as such. Rom 9:6-9 insists that not all descendants of Abraham are eligible to be called his children, and in Gal 4:21-5:1 this tension reaches break point and harbours anti-Judaic tendencies when Sarah is claimed as mother of the Christian community rather than of the Jews who are portrayed as children of the slave woman Hagar.

In this discussion the focus is on Sarah's portrayal in Galatians 4 and 1 Peter 3, which respectively emphasised her leading socio-historical role in determining the identity of believers, and her role in grounding a distinctive but exemplary socio-cultural profile. In both instances, Sarah's specific portrayal not only grounded a particular claim and stance, but in the process also subverted other, traditional positions.

### 3.1 Sarah in Galatians

Galatians 4 provided an alternative, allegorical reading intent on a contemporary if dissident understanding of the Genesis narrative, challenging the notion that Jews belonged to the lineage of Abraham through their physical descent from Abraham and Sarah. Such a radical

the quick fix solution of the *male* patriarch in conceiving a child with his concubine. Fewell and Gunn implicate the male God as much as the male patriarch.

<sup>12</sup> Initially God addressed women (Sarah; Hagar; Rebekah) directly but no more after Rebekah and especially the birth of Jacob or Israel. Following the lead of Rebekah who ensured Jacob's inheritance of the choice land and prosperity to the detriment of Esau, Israel's mothers will from now on attend to the promise (Fewell and Gunn 1993:89-90).

<sup>13</sup> Abraham later married again and had other children too (Gen 25:1-4) but the promise underwrote the contrast between Sarah and Hagar, and their sons. Cf Dunn (1993:245).

<sup>14</sup> An interesting intertext is Sarah, the daughter of Raguel in the book of Tobit. She was to become the wife of Tobias after all 7 her husbands were killed by the demon Asmodeus on their wedding night. In her patriarchal setting she also maltreated her servants because they blamed her for being unable to keep a husband (Tob 2:9-9) – creating an interesting parallel with the biblical Sarah's harsh treatment of Hagar. Cf Yee (1992:982).

<sup>15</sup> Schneider (2004:124-133) argues that the NT is prominently responsible for a prejudiced reading of Sarah, in contrast to her portrayal in Genesis; on the other hand she admits to both not being a "specialist in the New Testament", and coming to "preliminary" conclusions after taking the NT "at face value".

<sup>16</sup> Hoppin (2004:154-155) explains how Sarah's prominent and assertive role in steadying the lacklustre and at times weak conduct of Abraham has been translated away through androcentric concerns, and how this was done to retain the patriarchal image of Abraham.

hermeneutical shift made Paul dependent on a disposition of trust towards the interpreter, that the Galatian churches would accept Paul as faithful interpreter of Scripture (cf Fowl 1994:77-95; cf Stanley 2004:130-135). In essence, Paul's retelling of the origin of Abraham's children rests on a comparison of his two wives,<sup>17</sup> Sarah and Hagar.<sup>18</sup> Paul's sublime appeal is through his hermeneutical procedure in which the example of Abraham is treated as typical and normative, concentrating on scriptural texts which emphasised that Israel's special place with God is relativised (Dunn 1990:203).

The importance of employing the traditions about Abraham and his house is evident in Galatians, regardless of the debate about whether the "opponents" also used this tradition in their arguments,<sup>19</sup> compelling Paul to refute it. The centrality of promise (evpageli,a) in Galatians (cf 3:6-29), and indeed in the whole Pauline corpus where Jesus is connected to the line of Abraham,<sup>20</sup> obliges Paul to use this tradition. The significance of the promise emerges also in the initial contrast between the two modes of birth: kata. sa,rka (according to the flesh)<sup>21</sup> is initially set against dia. th/j evpageli,aj (through the promise) and only in 4:29 is the expected contrast, kata. pneu/ma (according to the spirit), found. In the promise, the supernatural nature of Isaac's birth is recorded, and more importantly, the birth is portrayed as being preceded by and associated with the promise (Ebeling 1985:234). Gal 4 shifts the emphasis from Abraham to his two wives (and the distinction between them), made into types of freedom and slavery:<sup>22</sup> Sarah rather than Abraham now assumes the role of progenitor of the nation of believers (cf Martyn 1990:175)!

In Paul's allegorical reading only Hagar mother of Ishmael and Isaac son of Sarah are named. Sarah is not mentioned by name, but referred to as the *evleuqera*, the free woman or wife; Hagar is mentioned by name in the New Testament in Gal 4 only. This discrete identification points towards the emphasised features in Gal 4.<sup>23</sup> The first is that the threat comes from a slave woman, who regardless of bearing a child to the patriarch, remained with her offspring caught up in slavery. And secondly, the promise is in the form of the child born through the promise, enacting the covenant of faith, and a life of freedom. The claim to inheritance can only be made by those who are descendants of the patriarch: Ishmael was technically the first-born, but because Isaac was the one born "through the promise", he stood to gain it all.

<sup>17</sup> Cf Cyprian's *Testimonia* (1.20) for other instances of comparing wives: in the case of Jacob's 2 wives, Leah represents the synagogue and Rachel (mother of Joseph) the church; with Elkanah's 2 wives the church is deemed to be symbolised by Hannah, mother of Samuel (and another messianic figure).

<sup>18</sup> In Gen 25:1 another wife is mentioned, Keturah, and the names of 6 sons Abraham had with her. Scholars differ about the nature of the claim (biographical or literary, and the latter probably in order to associate certain peoples with Abraham), the chronology involved regarding its placement in the life of Abraham (e.g. before or after sending Hagar away in Gen 21), and so on (cf Wenham 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Jobes (1993:300, 318) claims "the story of Abraham was evidently a persuasive part of the Judaizers' argument". Cf e.g. the assumptions of Buckel (1993:184) and Tamez (2000:267) based on the argument of Barrett (1982:154-170); cf Dunn (1993:243). Such readings might not evade the accusation of mirror reading.

<sup>20</sup> The contrast with the Johannine appropriation of the Abraham narrative is apparent, where Jesus is portrayed as not being on par with but actually preceding Abraham (e.g. Jn 8:39; 8:53; 8:58).

<sup>21</sup> "Flesh" in Paul often signifies the negative in human existence, but could be more polyvalent in this context. In the Abraham-narrative the weakness of human sexual appetite, the longing for an heir, and the attempt to bring about the fulfilment of God's promise could be in view. In the Galatian context, flesh would further emphasise Paul's adversaries focus on circumcision, as well as reliance on physical descent as indicative of inclusion in the promise (Dunn 1993:246-7). Cf Martyn (1990:180-184).

<sup>22</sup> Freedom is of course an important concept in Pauline thought, functioning as a metaphor for the new age inaugurated through the Christ-events; conversely, the old age prior to Christ is characterised by bondage and decay. Cf Verhey (1984:107-108).

<sup>23</sup> Rather than being an indication of the audience's familiarity with the narrative (so De Boer 2004:375 n18).

The picture is filled out with the emphasis on Sarah being *steira* (sterile) in Gal 4:27 (cf Heb 11:11), which would have been considered a decided and considerable disadvantage by women of biblical times given a socio-cultural context where fertility was emphasised and considered of ultimate importance. Matters such as lineage, posterity, future of clans and now also in Sarah's case at a theological level in Genesis, the blessing of God was affected by the fertility or otherwise of women.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.2 Sarah in 1 Peter<sup>25</sup>

Sarah makes a surprise appearance within the household code of 1 Peter, concluding – and justifying – the call upon Christian wives to submit to their husbands (3:1), while her conduct, even more surprisingly, is portrayed as impacting also on men – and potentially destabilising gendered societal norms. The broader socio-cultural setting is highlighted in 1 Pet 3:7<sup>26</sup> which contains elements which may suggest pagan criticism of Christian women, as the author instructs Christian husbands to show consideration and respect to their (Christian) wives since they are “joint heirs of the grace of life” (Balch 1981:114 n92). The author nevertheless accepted the contemporary cultural, patriarchal notion<sup>27</sup> that women were assumed to be weaker than men in a general sense, referring to intelligence, physical strength, moral fibre and so on; conversely, men lived “according to knowledge” or wisely, considerably. Women was considered to be “of a lower order of humanity than men” according to popular Greco-Roman sentiment (Corley 1994:353). Such conventional wisdom was inscribed in formulaic way in the household code as found also in 1 Peter and which required – among others – submission from wives to their husbands, as was typical in Christian<sup>28</sup> and Jewish marriages of the time (Balch 1981:23-31; 33-59). As part of the

<sup>24</sup> Reappearing in a later and most radical format in the deutero-Pauline tradition, 1 Tm 2:15 σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας ([a woman] will be saved through childbearing). On “barrenness” in Gal 4, cf Jobes (1993:306ff).

<sup>25</sup> Cf also the discussion in Punt (2004).

<sup>26</sup> The imbalance in instructions issued to men and women should not primarily be related to the social make-up of the community (e.g. Hanks 2000:212, “immigrants, poor slaves, and women constituted the basic nucleus”) but rather to the socio-cultural conventions regarding honour and shame (cf Elliott 1995). Richard sees 1 Pt's description (2:11) of the community members as *πάροικοι* “or political aliens” as entailing “corresponding honor to officials and ... their share of political and social duties” and as *παρεπίδημοι* or “religious exiles” as owing “their non-believing neighbors the honor owed God's creatures of servants” (Richard 2004:417,420). Elliott's comment that the reference to Abraham and Sarah might have been included as example of the *oikos* amidst a *paroikia* situation (1990:250 n92) disregards the point that the reference is primarily about Sarah and not Abraham!

<sup>27</sup> An important point of departure within Greco-Roman ethics was the postulated inferiority of women, which was considered an important consideration in regulating relationships between men and women, and as of course between husbands and wives. It is already with Aristotle that it is considered important to rule over wives and children in the household (*Politics*, 1.5.1), because men are their superiors (*Laws*, 11.917a); these relationships should be arranged already in the household (*Politics*, 1.2.1, 1253b). While *ὑποτάσσει* is primarily about the “maintenance of the divinely willed order” and not about inferiority and superiority (Slaughter 1996b:70) it is this very order which was believed to presuppose a gendered superiority and inferiority. For the household being a microcosm of the city-state, cf Meeks (1986:19-39). Such ideas also influenced the Jewish society, with Josephus claiming the importance of a wife's submission as situated not in her humiliation but so that she can be “directed” since God gave authority to men (*Against Apion*, 2.200-201).

<sup>28</sup> It is not legitimate to claim that in the Christian church of 1 Pt “women had their equality and human dignity restored and were treated as persons in their own right” (Van Rensburg 2004:255) – such claims should be carefully qualified since while women in the early Christian church did seem to have had relatively more freedom, the patriarchal net tightens around them around the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and they were probably never treated as “persons in their own right” but had their identity consistently determined by either a father or a husband. And the idea that “partnership” increasingly replaces patriarchy (Richardson 1987:74) should be qualified in the same way; contrary to Richardson's suggestion, it is unlikely that the call towards mutual humility

apologetic use<sup>29</sup> of the household code in 1Peter (Balch 1981), Sarah is presented along chauvinistic lines as the ideal or perfect Hellenistic wife<sup>30</sup> (Sly 1991:129).

The appeal to husbands to treat their wives with consideration follows upon the section of the household code where wives (ἰαὶ Ἐ gunai/kej) were exhorted to submit to their husbands (toi/j ivdi,oij avndra,sin, 1 Pt 3:1-6).<sup>31</sup> The exhortation to be submissive is propped up with a missionary motif (i[na )) kerdhqh,sontai, “in order that [they] be won over”, 1 Pt 3:1), where the – silent – behaviour of the wives will lead to their unbelieving husbands’ conversion (cf Slaughter 1996b:199-211). Wives are exhorted to concentrate on the inward aspects of their lives rather than outward appearances, and in support of the call to submissiveness the obedience of Sarah to Abraham is cited, ku,rion avvto.n kalou/sa (“calling him Lord”, 1 Pt 3:6a).<sup>32</sup>

The reference in 1 Pet 3:6a is probably<sup>33</sup> to Gen 18:12, which is more regularly remembered for Sarah’s laughing disbelief that she can still conceive at an old age, than for her all but fleeting reference to Abraham, as “my Lord is (or have become) old” (!qez” ynldoaw:, and o` de. ku,rio,j mou presbu,teroj in the LXX). In Gen 18 the emphasis seems to be on Abraham’s age, rather than Sarah’s reference to him as “my Lord”, a conventional term of submission, respect and honour at the time, as is clear throughout the Old Testament. Conversely, is it clearly important for the author of 1 Peter to stress both Abraham’s lordship over Sarah, and her acknowledgement thereof. “The author’s hermeneutics of Scripture seems to be predominantly determined by social, political, and ideological concerns and objectives, which *mutatis mutandis*, mediated the actualization of

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in 1 Pt 5:5 should be read to include any others but the elders of the community! Slaughter’s (1996b:esp 68-69) notion of mutual submission, and Spencer’s (2000:110) claim that “submission is respectful cooperation with others”, are suspect for similar reasons. A certain degree of subversion of the social order seems to be on the cards, but socio-political equality in gender and status does not characterise 1 Pt.

<sup>29</sup> Carter takes the accommodationist reading of 1 Pt to its logical extreme and argues that 1 Pt actually advocated participation in the emperor cult (Carter 2004:14-33). Some scholars argue for the opposite, that the household code is used in 1 Pt to warn against accommodation within or conformity to the society surrounding the community of faith and invokes resistance against the mores of the day (cf Achtemeier 1996:210-216; Elliott 1995; Hanks 2000:212-213).

<sup>30</sup> Why this rather obvious portrayal of Sarah would “necessitate an exceptionally low view of Scripture” (Slaughter 1996a:360) is not evident.

<sup>31</sup> Sarah’s ὑπακούω is treated here as an example of ὑποτασσόμενοι (cf Achtemeier 1996:215 n138).

<sup>32</sup> “One could read her statement [in Gen 18:12] as questioning Abraham’s virility, and yet the New Testament sanitizes the reference and turns it into a sign of submission by Sarah” (Schneider 2004:132). In 1 Pt 3:15, however, the appeal is to revere Jesus Christ as Lord, creating some tension the earlier text where Sarah used the same title for her husband and wives addressed by 1 Pt are encouraged to do obey their husbands with similar deference (cf Brown 2004:397; Michaels 1988:187-189).

<sup>33</sup> The only text in Genesis where Sarah refers to Abraham as “lord” (Misset van de Weg 1998:115) – it is a question whether Sarah’s use of “lord” is tantamount to obedience and Balch (1981:103-105) has argued that it, when read together with 18:12b, was rather insulting towards Abraham. Others have argued that Gen 12 and 20 may be the more appropriate intertexts, although Sarah did not address Abraham in these texts with the title, “Lord”; of course, even in Gen 18:12 Sarah only refers to and did not address Abraham as “Lord”; 18:12 also does not present a situation where Sarah experienced unfair treatment (cf Slaughter 1996a:360). Gen 12 and 20 are probable intertexts because they share similar motifs of being faithful in a foreign country amidst unfair treatment of Sarah/wives and with accompanying motifs of prayer and beauty – cf Kiley (1987:689-692), and for Gen 12 in particular cf Spencer (2000:112-116). Claiming that a general pattern rather than one incident is in view here because a present participle is used (Spencer 2000:113), is not convincing. While Achtemeier is critical of “other Jewish texts” rather than Gen 18:12 serving as source for the Lord-title (1996:215 n141), Troy Martin proposed *TestAbr* as the most probable intertext for 1 Pt 3:6 (1999:139-146): Sarah frequently calls Abraham “Lord”; also portrays Sarah as mother of the elect; and, this document connects good deeds and fearlessness.

the Abraham-Sarah cycle and resulted in his image of Sarah” (Misset van de Weg 1998:125). In short, women’s submissiveness needed to be grounded in sacred tradition.

The Sarah-image is invoked to validate and add support to the appeal to wives to act with the necessary submissiveness towards their husbands, and the proper relationship is found illustrated in the title used by Sarah:<sup>34</sup> Abraham is her lord or master. The issue is not about when or how women became believers, but how Christian wives are to act<sup>35</sup> in potentially hostile situations of marriage to unbelieving husbands (cf Achtemeier 1996:216). Matters are even more ambiguous. As argued above, the figure of Sarah in the Old Testament is hardly one of being constantly submissive,<sup>36</sup> although her initial childlessness, or failed sexuality according to the sentiment of the time, did complicate matters. In the end, Sarah is more of a good example of a woman whose husband denied their marriage, calling her his sister for self-protection (Gen.12 and 20),<sup>37</sup> and in a certain sense an inappropriate example of being treated considerably and with respect as called for in 1 Pt 3:7. Furthermore, with slaves being sexually available to their masters and wives having to submit to the sexual inclination of their husbands in the first-century Mediterranean world, 1 Pet 3 seems to suggest that slaves and wives should be willing to submit to sexual abuse<sup>38</sup> (Corley 1994:352-353) – as Sarah did! “It is not implausible to see unjust treatment, probably at the hands of a husband, as a dynamic of the exhortation to wives as well” (Kiley 1987:691). To put it bluntly, Sarah’s constructive role as presented in Genesis seems to come to naught in 1 Peter, and degenerates into little less than providing legitimacy for the abuse of wives in the interest of avoiding accusations against the broader community of faith, of being counter-conventional!

#### 4. Comparing Sarah in Galatians and 1 Peter

Attention to the two documents and the particular ways in which the figure of Sarah was appropriated in each, reveals interesting similarities and differences and mutes the claim that the New Testament makes “categorical” statements (Schneider 2004:132) about Sarah, certainly not in a consistent way. What the New Testament documents consistently do is to present Sarah as a positive example to be emulated, and she even retains her Hebrew Bible role as mother of the nation (cf Is 54:1-3; Josephus *Jewish War* 5.379).<sup>39</sup> As a matter of fact, “[t]he classic Christian expression of Sarah as mother of Christian believers comes from Paul” (Forbes 2005:107),<sup>40</sup> and 1 Peter tacitly accepted this portrayal of Sarah. Ironically such positive portrayal is generally detrimental to the affirmative role of Sarah in

<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Sarah is the mother of women proselytes, appropriate to the context here of winning converts as the main purpose of women submission (Balch 1981:105).

<sup>35</sup> Achtemeier insists that neither is Sarah made the type for Christian wives, nor do the latter become the fulfilment of the former (1996:216 n145).

<sup>36</sup> “First Peter depicts Sarah as a pious, submissive wife (3:5-6), but in Genesis she is strong, not always submissive, and is the first person in the scriptures accused of ‘oppression’” (Hanks 2000:196).

<sup>37</sup> Cf Hepner on Sarah as Abraham’s half-sister (2003:143-155).

<sup>38</sup> The palpable tension in text has convinced some scholars that 1 Pt is an attempt to balance “being radically different from the surrounding culture because of their Christian identity” while “affirming the best values of that culture for the sake of acceptance and witness” (Dowd 1998:370).

<sup>39</sup> “In later rabbinic literature Sarah is viewed as the (nursing) mother of all Gentile proselytes” (Forbes 2005:107). However, the more common designation is Abraham as father of the nation, and covenant status expressed as being children of Abraham is found e.g. in Ps 105:6 and Lk 13:16, complete with covenantal security as expressed in many later Jewish writings (b. *Erub.* 19a; b. *Šabb.* 33b; *Gen. Rab.* 48.8; *Exod. Rab.* 19:4) and Christian documents (Mt 1:73; 3:8-9; *Justin Dial.* 140) – cf Forbes (2005:107).

<sup>40</sup> For the strong traditions about the Zion or Jerusalem being “the mother of the children” of faith, cf Gl 4:26; Ps 87; Isa 49:20ff; Isa 54:1-13.



Genesis, while being co-opted in subverting at least the socio-historical position of first-century Jews and contemporary socio-cultural norms – to some extent!

#### 4.1 Use of Scripture and Rationale

Both Paul and the author of 1 Peter used Scripture according to conventional first-century hermeneutical practices which in short entailed that Scripture is holy and therefore should be interpreted; is the living word of God, and therefore remains actual for the lives of other generations as well; and that Scripture can be interpreted by inspired, spirit-filled interpreters – roles which the authors of Galatians and 1 Peter certainly claim for themselves. In both our texts the presence of the Hebrew Bible, even if somewhat rewritten is palpable, contributing to the experienced reality of the authors of Galatians and 1 Peter, and focussed in rhetorically determined, selected textual references to Sarah.

Paul's use of Scripture in Gal 4 demonstrates his intentional, calculated use of allegory, obviously conscious of its interpretive as well as theological prospects.<sup>41</sup> He and his contemporaries oscillated without restriction between different interpretive approaches, and Paul applied the well-established procedures of allegorical interpretation consistently, with symbolic identification used as a hermeneutical key to unlock the rest of the text (Wan 1995:164). Typically, understanding allegory as code entails an unconventional reading even if it implies a conventional understanding and mediating approach; on the other hand, taking allegory as counter-conventional reading (Dawson 1991; cf. Fowl 1994), means that its broader significance can be appreciated.<sup>42</sup> Paul is confident that his tailor-made, allegorical interpretation can persuade his audience (Stanley 2004:130-135), that the narrative on the wives of Abraham in Genesis requires a counter-conventional reading, to say the least,<sup>43</sup> which deconstructs *and* reconstructs Israel's history (cf Janzen 1991:17).<sup>44</sup>

Although no claims to allegorical readings are found in 1 Peter, roughly three different ways of referring to Scripture (LXX) can be identified in this document: Direct quotes,<sup>45</sup> including words from Scripture without an introductory formula,<sup>46</sup> and, as in 1 Pt 3:6, referring to biblical history, both generally and specifically.<sup>47</sup> Scripture is consistently interpreted from a Christian or even Christological point of view, and “[c]learly the Jewish scriptures are a major source for the author of 1 Peter, and an authority to which he appeals at decisive points” (Michaels 1988:xl). In 1 Peter 3:6 the author engages in a Midrash interpretation of one word in the text (ku,rioj, in Gen

<sup>41</sup> Although Paul refers in Galatians 4:24 to his rereading of the story of Abraham's two wives and sons as allegory, his use of Scripture were in line with the prevailing hermeneutical approaches of the day. It is unlikely to argue that Scripture functions simply as justification for an argument and that Paul only cited Scripture when disagreeing with opponents (Von Hamack).

<sup>42</sup> The traditional understanding of allegory makes the reading strategies of Philo, Valentinus, and Clement appear simplistic and naïve, and does not account for contemporary literary critical interest in allegory (Fowl 1994: 81; cf. Dawson 1991).

<sup>43</sup> Paul's interpretation cannot be dismissed as evidence of a Hellenistic attitude and approach to the Scriptures of Israel (*pace* Soards 1999: 96).

<sup>44</sup> Paul's sublime appeal is through his hermeneutical procedure in which the example of Abraham is treated as typical and normative, concentrating on scriptural texts which emphasise that Israel's special place with God is relativised (Dunn 1990, 203).

<sup>45</sup> E.g. 1:16 (Lev 19:2, introduced by διότι γέγραπται ὅτι, “for it is written that”); 1:24-25 (Isa 40:6-8, introduced by διότι, (“for”)), 2:6 (Isa 28:16, introduced by διότι περιέχει ἐν γραφῇ “for it says in writing”) and 3:10-12 (Ps 33[34]:13-17, introduced by γάρ “for”).

<sup>46</sup> E.g. 2:3 (cf Ps 33[34]:9), 2:7-8 (cf Ps 117[118]:22, Isa 8:14), 2:22-25 (cf Isa 53:4-12), 3:14-15 (cf Isa 8:12-13), 4:18 (cf Prov 11:31), and 5:5b (cf Prov 3:34).

<sup>47</sup> In general as in 1:10-12; 4:6 or to specific events which are presumed as background, such as in 1:22 (cf Jer 6:15), 2:9 (cf Exod 19:6; Isa 43:20-21), 2:10 (cf Hos 1:9-2:1; 2:13), 3:6 (Sarah and Abraham; cf Gen 18:12), 3:20 (the Noah story), 3:22 (cf Ps 8:7; 110:1), 4:8 (cf Prov 10:12), 4:14 (cf Isa 11:2), 5:8 (cf Ps 21[22]:14).

18:12 LXX), unlike his more general appeal in 1 Pt 3:5 and his broad focus on the quoted text (1 Pt 2:21-25) (Michaels 1988:xl-xli).

1 Peter was ostensibly addressed to Jews (1:1; 2:1-10, building upon Ex 19:6 and Isa 43:21) but the references to their lives prior to conversion (1:14,18,21; 4:3-5) has led to wide agreement that the recipients were in fact Gentile Christians.<sup>48</sup> The recipients of 1 Peter are best understood as socially marginalised rather than being sectarian, harbouring longings for the otherworldly and focussing on heaven as their ultimate and true home. “The addressees are people on the edges of society, harassed by their neighbours and former associates, without political rights and subject to sporadic abuse, and tempted to abandon their faith” (Boring 2004:365-366). The presence of Sarah in a foreign land or hostile environment may have presented the author of 1 Peter with an exemplary analogy for the required behaviour of Christian wives in the community he addressed – initiating for women over many centuries “a tale of terror” (Kiley 1987:690-692; cf Dowd 1998:463). For the author of 1 Peter, the reference to a designation used rather offhandedly by Sarah for Abraham became the grounding reason for insisting upon good behaviour from wives, while not challenging their husbands – and as far as religion is concerned, not challenging them verbally – and thereby conforming to the late first-century image of the ideal wife.

## 4.2 Interpretive Interests

Paul is not hesitant to name the two wives – rather than the two sons – of Abraham as the allegorised versions of life under the law and life according to the Spirit, a fleshly versus a spiritual existence, a life of bondage or slavery as opposed to a life of freedom. Paul’s allegorical reinterpretation of the Genesis material focuses attention on the “interpretive interests” of his reading, and the interpretive power which is evoked in the process (Fowl 1994:77-95). The socio-political setting of Paul’s interpretations is important for understanding how Paul put the Hagar/Sarah narrative to use, allegorically.<sup>49</sup> The end result is, though, that Paul transposes<sup>50</sup> traditional interpretation, although in later Pauline interpretation his original internal Jewish polemics became part of Christian Empire, and its anti-Judaism.<sup>51</sup> Paul’s hermeneutical efforts jeopardised Jewish identity when he reduced the ethnic as well as spiritual link Jews treasured with Sarah, wife of Abraham, to spiritual lineage only (cf Osiek 1998:426; cf Boyarin 1994). Not only was Sarah subverted, the link between her and the (largest part of the) Jewish nation severed, but Sarah, at least momentarily, subverted Abraham in becoming the primary reference point for the faithful!

While Sarah is never presented in the Genesis narratives as obeying (u`pakoue/in) Abraham, he on the other hand is presented on three occasions as obeying Sarah: Gen 16:2; 16:6; 21:12. “One may speculate that it is the author’s culturally conditioned concern not to remind the addressees of a weakness of the ‘father of faith’ that makes 1 Peter refrain from more explicitly referring to Abraham as one of the sources of Sara’s problem” (Kiley 1987:691; cf Schneider 2004:133 n1; Sly 1991:127). Such details would have been

<sup>48</sup> In this context, it is interesting that the central scriptural image invoked in 1 Peter is the exile and not the exodus (Michaels 1988).

<sup>49</sup> Space does not allow for discussing interesting further developments resulting from the influence of particular social locations in the history of Pauline interpretation – such as slavery during colonial times – on the understanding of Sarah and her actions (cf Schneider 2004:133).

<sup>50</sup> The Scriptures of Israel are testimony of Israel becoming like Hagar, “enslaved in a foreign nation, cries out in pain, and escapes to the wilderness” (O’Connor 1997:31).

<sup>51</sup> “Successful formation of a religious discourse was one of early Christianity’s greatest strengths. This is precisely what both Paul and Augustus recognized” (Cameron 1991:42).

problematic for an argument offered in support of sustaining the conventional husband-wife relationship of the patriarchal marriage in the first century.<sup>52</sup>

Arguing from adaptations made by Philo and Josephus to the Sarah-narratives of Genesis as well as allegorical interpretations<sup>53</sup> of these narratives, it has been suggested that the author of 1 Peter would have experienced the same pressures that the Sarah narratives put on patriarchal culture and its prescribed roles for wives and husbands. So while in 1 Peter “wives are paradigmatic for the whole of the Christian community” (Brown 2004:396; cf Elliott 2000:559, 566 ff),<sup>54</sup> their silence as commanded in 1 Pt 3:6 is however *not* exemplary since it will then override the exhortation to provide a ready, verbal defence of their faith.<sup>55</sup> In 1 Peter, therefore, the submission of wives is directly linked to “non-verbal witness” (Brown 2004:398; *contra* Michaels 1988:158 who contentiously argues that wives’ verbal witness is possible but not obligatory). The author of 1 Peter therefore constructed a polemical argument going beyond the details of the Genesis narrative and effectively moulding Sarah into an ideal Hellenistic wife<sup>56</sup> (Sly 1991:129).

An important aspect in citing Sarah in 1 Peter is the author’s concern to stress that Christian wives should not challenge the authority of their husbands but submit to them as was expected in the first century. And while the letter insists upon the community promoting *both* Christian identity *and* cultural affirmation, the author did not uncritically adopt the socio-cultural system as seen in the encouragement to slaves and women to hold onto their faith (Dowd 1998:463). But 1 Peter also works some subtle subversion with regard to Sarah. Firstly, while Sarah is not portrayed in the Genesis narratives as ever questioning Abraham, not even when she stands to lose her only child (Gen 22:1-19), there is no indication that she worshipped the same God as Abraham. In 1 Peter the context is different, with Christian wives called upon to submit to non-believing husbands in such a way as “to win them over” which probably entailed a brittle, subversive element within the traditional household code – along with 1 Pt 3:7’s non-traditional appeal to husbands also (e.g. Brown 2004:400). Secondly, Sarah is not only a model of obedience for late first-century Christian wives but also an example of fearlessness, a portrayal not quite aligned with Gen 18:15 where Sarah’s fear is highlighted (Martin 1999:139). Thirdly and ironically, whereas Sarah was cited in 1 Pt 3:6 to sanction the contemporary submission of wives, it is her compliance in this regard which

<sup>52</sup> Philo and Josephus as contemporaries of the author of 1 Peter made it clear that it incurred shame when husbands did as they were told by their wives, violating the common principles of hierarchy and patriarchy. Employing allegory, denial of Sarah’s womanhood and altering details in the Genesis narratives are employed by Philo in order to sustain the socio-cultural and socio-political conventions of the day (cf Sly 1991:127-129). Whereas Josephus’ interpretation diminishes Sarah’s constructive role, and while Philo’s interpretation played itself out within patriarchal structures and notions complete with gender and sexual stereotypes, even to the extent of presenting Sarah with masculine traits, Philo did not downplay the significance of Sarah and her specific virtues (Niehoff 2004:413-444).

<sup>53</sup> E.g. Philo allegorised Abraham as mind, and obeying virtue or wisdom as the allegorical meaning of Sarah (cf Sly 1991:127).

<sup>54</sup> The repetition of characteristics highlighted in the ideal woman (1 Pt 3:1-6) in the general admonitions of 1 Pt 3:14-15 (cf Richardson 1987:75) suggests the woman as model.

<sup>55</sup> Cf in Brown the comparison between the language used in 1 Pt 3:1-6 and 3:14-16, showing how the language used to describe wives is also used to describe the community’s faithfulness amidst suffering, and so establishes “a point of ethical tension” between the texts (Brown 2004:396-397). It is rather slaves (1 Pt 2:18-25) who are to become examples for the whole community (e.g. Richardson 1987:72-73).

<sup>56</sup> The strong condemnation in 1 Pt 3 of outdoor adornment is remarkable in light of the tradition which held that Sarah was, apart from being exceedingly modest, also exceptionally beautiful: was the prohibition on external beautifying to encourage women to aspire towards the natural beauty of Sarah, or simply to establish a contrast between modesty and adorned beauty?

is enlisted to issue the call upon husbands to bestow honour (timh,) <sup>57</sup> on their wives (1 Pt 3:7).<sup>58</sup> And Sarah thus becomes once more, albeit in different time, context and capacity, a model of subversive submission (cf Hanks 2000:213).

### 4.3 Ideological Settings of the Documents

Sarah's role throughout the New Testament and also in Galatians and 1 Peter is, understandably so especially in the first-century patriarchal world, described in terms of her relationship to Abraham. But in both Galatians 4 and 1 Peter 3 Sarah manages to have a life of her own for a brief moment, framed by and within the ideological concerns of each letter. The social location of the Galatian recipients and even of Paul as author needing to reassert his authority, did not permit a conciliatory stance, least of all to promote an accommodating stance within the social context within which the recipients of the letter found themselves. To the contrary, amidst the slander and vilifying of his opponents (e.g. Gal 3:1; 5:15) in what appear as harsh or even rude terms at times (e.g. cf Gal 5:12), the ideological setting of Galatians was characterised by Paul's rhetorical pitch. In short, it was not about a negotiated settlement but about an argument that had to be won. The battle lines were drawn around the interpretation of the narratives of origin, the genealogical wherewithal of the faithful of God.

It is Sarah's insistence that Hagar and Ishmael had to leave Abraham's household (Gen 21:10) that forms the ultimate appeal in Gal 4:21-5:1, and whether this command of exclusion is seen to be directed at the Judaising or circumcising missionaries, or the Galatians seeking circumcision contrary to Paul's instructions (cf Eastman 2006:309-336), the ideological setting is clear. In Gal 4:30 Paul completed the logic of his argument regarding the two wives of Abraham, and in particular his consistent emphasis on being aligned with Sarah as the free woman and her legacy. It is Sarah's words that reverberate through the Galatian church, to justify the exclusion of those who differed from Paul and his perception of the truth of the gospel.

The appeals in 1 Peter were responding to a twofold situation in that the author both addressed group cohesion as intra-community matter, and felt obliged to respond to external forces in order to allay the fears that the Christian community was a corruptible influence. In what was clearly a conflict-ridden context, Sarah represented the fear of unjust treatment as articulated in 1 Pt 3:6, of which the latter part may have been informed by Prov 3:25. Sarah is redrafted from being the mother of faith or model of obedience into becoming an example of how to act in marriage, "a model [for] those wives who obey their spouses *in an unjust and frightening situation in a foreign land/hostile environment*" (Kiley 1987:692, original italics; cf Achtemeier 1996:216).

The appeal to the contemporary wives to become "daughters of Sarah" was tantamount to calling upon them to emulate Sarah.<sup>59</sup> The participle in the concluding part of 1 Pet 3:6

<sup>57</sup> In elaboration upon 1 Pt 2:17 πάντας τιμήσατε (cf Richard 2004:417-420) but contrary to the honour and shame culture of the 1<sup>st</sup> century-Mediterranean stratified society, where honour should properly be bestowed by the inferior upon the superior (cf Elliott 1995:166-167). Richard's (2004:419) notion that "all are owed honor according to their relationships in the social order" tends to transform honour into a rather 21<sup>st</sup> century concept. Brown (2004:401) refers to Philo who cited a creation order argument in favour of a woman's lower honour compared to men (Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, 1.27).

<sup>58</sup> The instruction directed to men or husbands (ἰ ἄνδρες) in 3:7 is also introduced (as in 3:1) by "likewise" (ὁμοίως) and therefore connects at least indirectly with Sarah (the reference to her being part of the previous section, 3:1-6). Whether the compliance by men with such a counter-cultural instruction would necessarily have lessened the potential for the Christian community of being accused of subversion (so Brown 2004:401), is debatable.

<sup>59</sup> Slaughter (1996a:361) refers to the similar use of "sons of ..." as e.g. in Mt 5:44-45 ("...in order that you be sons of your Father...") to express likeness in character.

(Sa,rra) ... h`j evgenh,qhte te,kna avgaqoipoiou/sai kai. mh. fobou,menai mhdemi,an pto,hsin has in the past often been translated – if not also interpreted – as conditional (cf Slaughter 1996a:361), but should more properly be read as consequential or resultative and further probably having imperative force: “A command to action in light of new covenant status as Sarah’s children” (cf Forbes 2005:105-109). Whereas the apologetic role of the household code (Balch 1981) already suggests some socio-cultural conformity,<sup>60</sup> Sly (1991:126) contended that “some details in the Genesis account of Sarah and Abraham’s marriage were embarrassing to men in the Hellenistic age and that consequently the writer of 1 Peter may have been more deliberate in reinterpreting the story”.

In the end, it is not too surprising that Sarah appears in both New Testament letters which are often cited for their, albeit a contained and implicit, challenge to the socio-cultural structures of the time. Reference is often made to Gal 3:28 and 1 Pt 3:7 (Richardson 1987:79 n14, quoting also Stendahl) as instances of a significant contestation of the patriarchal system, or even a breakthrough in how gender relationships were conceived in the first century church. Sarah’s portrayal in the Genesis narratives and to some extent also in these texts correlate with the different but nevertheless grounding roles she is accorded in Galatians and 1 Peter.

## 5. Conclusion

In the New Testament, Sarah’s role as mother of the Jewish race (Gen 51:2, cf Achtemeier 1996:216 n143) is subverted, and she is reappropriated as the model of faith in the Christian tradition – the characteristics she was traditionally renowned for, beauty and wisdom, still intact albeit in subtle ways! Sarah finds herself in positions she did not occupy in the Genesis narratives, especially since New Testament interpretations in an ironic way became the lenses through which Sarah’s presence and behaviour in Genesis were and are read and evaluated (Schneider 2004:131-133). In Gal 4 and 1 Pt 3 Sarah is presented as an important figure regardless of the prominence bestowed on Abraham; and although she is presented and her life interpreted in different ways, she is mostly deemed exemplary by the New Testament documents – even if for different reasons as required by these authors’ rhetorical goals and strategies.

My contention<sup>61</sup> is that closer investigation shows that New Testament authors could appropriate Scripture in ways that at times subtly and at times less subtly subverted traditional positions, whether at socio-political (Galatians) or socio-cultural (1 Peter) level. In the two texts examined it can hardly be claimed that Scripture was simply appropriated to provide sanction for traditionalist positions,<sup>62</sup> while the representations of Sarah entailed both her subversion and enlisting her as mode and model of subversion, even if in subtle ways!

<sup>60</sup> The rest of the letter also suggests that the believing community it addressed, experienced some social ostracism and abuse, probably because of the believers’ rejection of pagan temple activities (4:3-4) which would have been viewed as antisocial behaviour and not only withdrawing from religious activities. This provides the context for 1 Peter’s call to comply with the social customs of the day, as also spelt out in the household code, but with the provision that their allegiance to Christ should not be compromised (2:12-13) (cf Brown 2004:401).

<sup>61</sup> The focus here was not on the different ways in which Scripture was quoted by the first-century New Testament authors, or the reasons for the variety: showing affinity for and continuation with a certain tradition(s); bolstering (weak) arguments; living in Scripture (LXX) to such an extent that of necessity its texts, themes and figures becomes part of the contemporary author’s repertoire, to name a few.

<sup>62</sup> In fact, comparing Galatians and 1 Peter is instructive, showing how Galatians’ counter-position has already become the norm in 1 Peter. “First Peter speaks serenely to the Gentiles as heirs of all the privileges of Israel without any suggestion of having taken such privileges from the Jews” (Hanks 2000:214).

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