

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

READING GALATIANS 4:21-31 AS A COVENANTAL DISCOURSE  
WITH RICOEUR'S EYES: IMPLICATION FOR THE GHANAIAN  
CONTEXT

ALICE MATILDA NSIAH

JULY 2017

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University of Cape Coast

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CONTEXT

BY

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Thesis submitted to the Department of RELIGION AND HUMAN VALUES  
of the Faculty of Arts in the College of Humanities and Legal Studies,  
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award of Doctor of Philosophy degree in New Testament.

JULY 2017

## DECLARATION

### Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this is the result of my own original work apart from scholarly works cited or quoted and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature:..... Date:.....

Name: Alice Matilda Nsiah

### Supervisor's Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

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## ABSTRACT

The study examined Galatians 4:21-31 as a covenantal discourse. The research used the Hermeneutical theory of Ricoeur, which is a double dialectic movement from understanding to explanation to comprehension and then appropriation. The study also adapted Ricoeur's theory to African biblical interpretation by creating an encounter between Ricoeur and West (2001) at the pre-understanding stage. The study considered covenantal discourse as that which appraised existing covenant event, in order to re-enact it for new members of the covenant community. The work also explored biblical covenants and discovered they were influenced by ancient covenant forms in a modified way. Similarly, covenant forms in Ghana shared some similarities with Ancient Near Eastern as well as biblical covenants where covenant oath is indissoluble. The study then advice Ghanaians to refrain from entering into covenant relationships for which they are not aware of its implications.

The work recommended more dialogue between Christianity and cultural practices like traditional festivals.

**Key words**

Appropriation

Comprehension

Covenantal

Discourse

Explanation

Understanding

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## DEDICATION

To my siblings, keep the faith.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the Study**

Paul's letter to the Galatians is considered by scholars like Kennedy (1984), Smit (1989), and Bailey and Broek (1992) as a biblical discourse because it is a dialogue between Paul and the churches in Galatia. The discourse recounted past events among which are the life of Abraham and his family as well as how God entered into a covenant relationship with them, especially as contained in Genesis 15--21. The meaning generated in the covenant events emphasized the importance of faith in God and obedience to the instructions of God, as some of the attitudes that made the life of Abraham pleasing to God. These two features – faith and obedience to the law – subsequently became requirements for all the members of the covenant community to maintain one's place in the divine/human relationship. However, when Paul was recounting the story of Abraham in the context of the churches in Galatia especially in chapter 4:21-31, he selectively stressed the importance of faith as a requirement to the covenant relationship and appeared to indicate that obedience to the law was no more necessary. He even went further to identify the gentile church in Galatia with Sarah and Isaac on the basis of their faith (4:28, 31).

This interpretative work of Paul in Galatians 4:21-31 makes reading the text difficult and uneasy (Bruce, 1982; Matera, 2007), which has culminated in the accusation that Paul was an anti-Jewish and a law-free Christian preacher (Jobs, 1993). I argue that the uneasiness in the text may be resolved if the passage is read as a covenantal discourse meant to renew the

commitment of the Galatian converts to the covenant relationship under different historical and theological contexts. I recommend that the discourse be read from the perspective of Paul Ricoeur who regards every text as a discourse, every discourse as an event, and every event as recounting a real life experience that may be contextualized in the present situation of readers. I am of the view that a closer examination of the discourse, of the event recounted in the discourse and actual life experiences described in the event will help to clarify the difficulties embedded in understanding the text as a contextualized form of the original covenant events. It will also help readers to acknowledge the various covenant renewal moments in their own contexts.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The motivation for this work comes from an earlier study of Galatians 4:21-31 that used an inter-texture as a study tool. This exposed me to the massive usage of Old Testament ideas by Paul in his letters. I developed a particular interest in the way Paul creatively used Old Testament texts and concepts in Gal.4:21-31.

However, the difficulty of the problem was with the kinds of meanings that Paul generated from the Old Testament and utilized in Galatians which created some inconsistencies between Genesis and Galatians. In referring to the Old Testament text, Paul seemed to have changed the meaning of the text in Genesis 15--21. This is because while the story in Genesis appeared to portray Abraham as one who personified his life with the issues of faith and works of the law, Paul seemed to emphasize the issue of faith and appeared to downplay the importance of the law in the Galatian text (Jobes 1993, Hays 2000; Bruce 2002). Paul even described the Jewish nation as descended from a

slave girl and the Jewish law as enslavement. Paul's reading had created historical, hermeneutical, and theological difficulties for readers. Jobes (1993) for example, suggests that Galatians 4:21-31 contains some notorious difficulties in understanding the way Paul weaved out an Old Testament story to create this passage. vonEhrhrenkrook (1998) considers the passage under study as a fertile ground for a hermeneutical battle, since Paul seems to have contradicted the traditional Jewish belief that identified the Jews as descendants of Isaac. Keener (1993) is convinced that the passage is perhaps one of the most difficult texts in the New Testament since it was used to accuse Paul of distorting historical information in the Old Testament.

I was challenged by these difficulties that have been pointed out by various authors, and decided to perceive the text as a covenantal discourse, using the hermeneutical approach of Ricoeur. This approach gave me the opportunity to probe into the text and the problems associated with it and see how they impinge on the usage of covenant and covenant renewals, which is found in both Testaments, and the implications for our world today.

### **Research Objectives**

The study seeks to read Galatians 4:21-31 as a covenantal discourse that seeks to rework the events of existing biblical covenant for the context of the present audience. The study hopes that this approach will ease some of the problematic issues surrounding the text. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the relationship between Covenantal Discourse and Galatians 4:21-31.
2. To find out the effects of reading the text with Ricoeur's eyes.

3. To examine the events of biblical covenants and their implications on the text.
4. To identify the insights that may be gained from the comprehension and appropriation of Galatians 4:21-31 in the Ghanaian context.

The following questions will guide the research:

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between Covenantal Discourse and Galatians 4:21-31?
2. What are the effects of reading Galatians 4:21-31 with Ricoeur's eyes?
3. What implications do we derive from the survey of the events of Biblical covenants on the text?
4. What insights do we gain from the comprehension and appropriation of the text in the Ghanaian context?

### **Purpose of the Study**

I hope to contribute to knowledge by approaching Galatians 4:21-31 as a covenantal discourse which is believed to help ease the tension in the text between law and faith. The study also throws light on the relationship between Paul's re-reading in Galatians 4:21-31 and Ricoeur's interpretation theory that always weaves existing materials to create something new. Moreover, Ricoeur's Hermeneutic theory serves as intermediary between ordinary and scholarly readings, since the explanation /validation stage, clarify issues raised at the pre-understanding stage.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study should also be beneficial to African biblical readers in search of an encounter between ordinary and scholarly readings of the bible.



The primary beneficiaries of the research are Ghanaians: both Christians and non-Christians, literates and illiterates, the youth, and the adult population, as the work highlights the irrevocability of covenant oath and the implication for participating in any form of covenant, especially the annual celebration of festivals by Christians and non-Christians. The researcher found Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics very illuminating as it has helped her to make a distinction between understanding, explanation, and comprehension. She was also able to make a difference between sense and reference in the generation of meaning. More importantly, she discovered that the goal of interpretation is not just to understand or explain or even to comprehend the text but to understand oneself and the way one lives in the world.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The framework that underpins this study is the distantiation theory of Paul Ricoeur. Distantiation may roughly be described as an objective approach to text, where the text is looked at from a distance as an object and allowed to speak for itself. Ricoeur says that when a discourse becomes fixed in writing, three types of distantiation occur. The work is dissociated from the author, and from the original reader as well as the context, which generated the text (1976). The work may be in the hands of readers who may be in different socio-cultural, historical, and geographical contexts, and may not even know the original author. Generation of meaning, therefore, is not limited to the psychological intention of the author but to the verbal propositions of the text. The written work acquires what Ricoeur calls 'semantic autonomy' with the capacity to generate multiples of meaning, some of which may not have been anticipated by the author (Ricoeur, 1976). Ricoeur explains that in the

absence of the author, the meaning of a text is initially guessed and the guess may be validated through explanation, which may lead to comprehension and then appropriation. Distantiation, therefore, allows a reader to read in front of a text, without reconstructing the background information so that meaning is the result of the encounter between the present reader and his/her context and the text. He adds:

Inscription becomes synonymous with the semantic autonomy of the text, which results from the disconnection of the mental intention of the author from the verbal meaning of the text, of what the author meant and what the text means. The text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it (Ricoeur, 1976, pp. 29-30).

### **Delimitation of the Study**

Although, there are other Pauline texts that talk about covenant, I delimited myself to Gal. 4:21-31. This is because sample interviews conducted among a section of Ghanaian Bible readers give the impression that Gal 4:21-31 is an unfamiliar and an uninteresting passage among Ghanaians. Many of the respondents have read the text but have not paid particular attention to it, and this attitude helped me to identify the text as a "strange" text. This offers readers the opportunity to use the text as if it is a first-time reading material that suits the methodology and meets its first criteria. There are other covenantal discourses in the New Testament outside the Pauline Corpus. Here again, I delimited myself to Galatians 4:21-31, which addresses a situational crisis with which Ghanaian Christians may easily identify themselves. Ricoeur's method is preferred to ensure that my work is original and serves as an interface between ordinary and scholarly biblical readers in Africa.

## **Methodology**

The study employs the interpretation theory of Paul Ricoeur as an exegetical tool. Ricoeur notes that even though the Bible is the inspired word of God, it must be subjected to what he calls the general or philosophical principles of interpretation that are applicable to all texts (Ricoeur, 1980). If the Bible is subjected to rigorous critical study like any other literature and it becomes meaningful to the reader, its particular character as the revealed word of God will be better perceived. Hence, biblical hermeneutics must conform to the rules of general text hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1980).

## **Ricoeur's Interpretation Theory**

Ricoeur describes his method as a double dialectic movement –“first as a move from understanding to explanation and then, as a move from explanation to comprehension” (1976, p. 76). This means that explanation has double movements between understanding and comprehension. Ricoeur argues that the first understanding is generated from the pre-critical engagement with the text. He maintains that explanation offers a critical examination of the discourse, which may lead to validating the pre-understanding. He observes further that explanation and validation generate further understanding or comprehension and appropriation (Ricoeur, 1976). The process is explained below as follows:

### **Naïve/Pre-Understanding**

Ricoeur claims that the first time a text is read, a reader guesses the meaning of the text. Many guesses, according to him, compete for the attention of the reader. This, he calls the pre-understanding (Ricoeur, 1976). He explains that pre-understanding is the first stage of understanding. It is enriched by the

knowledge the reader has of the topic before reading the text. This initial guessing is also called naïve understanding or the prejudice of the reader, which is very important to the whole process of understanding (Ricoeur, 1976). Ricoeur argues that there are different degrees of one's capacity to understand a text at the initial stage of reading. He explains further that such a capacity depends on one's academic and professional backgrounds, the personal experiences of the individual reader, and the information that may have been received from others (1976). He reasons that:

the necessity of guessing the meaning of a text may be related to the kind of semantic autonomy ...with writing, the verbal meaning of the text no longer coincides with the mental meaning or the intention of the text. The intention is both fulfilled and abolished by the text which is no longer the voice of someone present... we have to guess the meaning of the text because the author's intention is beyond our reach (Ricoeur: 1976, p. 75).

Ricoeur makes it clear that at this stage the text is to be read as a whole and every guess is to be noted down. He observes that subsequent reading of the same text may lead to new insights that might probably be different from the first one; the new insight, according to him, might lead to a more sophisticated mode of understanding. The more the reader grasps the message of what is read, the better the reader is influenced by the situation for which the text is calling. Understanding empowers a reader's horizon to be adjusted with that of the text, and the text might succeed in disclosing the deep meaning of its vision to the reader. Once understanding is achieved, the process may be repeated at a higher level. After reaching comprehension, the

previous knowledge becomes pre-understanding (Ricoeur, 1976). This is the stage where I will first engage the text and try to understand it from my own cultural, traditional, historical, and professional backgrounds.

It is also important to note that in this study, Ricoeur is brought to dialogue with African biblical interpreters like Gerald West to see how their methodological theories would benefit each other. Hence, the naïve reading is purposefully adapted to include focused group discussion using the contextual bible study tool of Gerald West.

### **Explanation/Validation stage**

The second stage is the Explanation or Validation stage. Ricoeur calls this a ‘scientific approach’ to the text where explanation is the process in which “we ex-plicate or unfold the range of propositions and meanings” (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 72). He states that explanation is the act of breaking down a hypothesis in order to make it easier and lighter for another person to grasp or understand. He says that explanation is first directed towards analysis of the structure of the text before it is directed to the meaning of the propositions.

Ricoeur posits that for one to be able to understand a text, one does not just repeat what has been said or memorize its content but one must be able to tease out a new event and new meaning from the existing text. The meaning of the text is guessed because the author’s intention is beyond the reader’s reach, and the dialogue is now between the reader and the text in the physical absence of the author. In the process of deciphering meaning from the semantics of the text, readers make guesses; yet, there are methods for validating those guesses (Ricoeur, 1976). How is this done?

Ricoeur explains that in order to validate the guesses one makes in the text one reads, it is important to note the following:

1. Whether the work under study consists of a whole book, a page or a paragraph, it must thus be considered as one holistic project and not just sentences in sequential order. Ricoeur reasons that since words are polysemic, they yield different meanings in different contexts; therefore, the meaning of each word must be related to its context. Similarly, sentences are ambiguous and, therefore, make sense within their context. Hence the meaning of a text goes beyond the polysemy of words and the ambiguity of individual sentences. To do this, the text must be divided into segments and analyzed. There must be a relationship between the parts and the whole. The meaning of each segment must pre-suppose the meaning of the whole text and the meaning of the whole must pre-suppose the meaning of the parts. In the process, one guesses where to lay emphasis (Ricoeur, 1976).
2. Ricoeur insists that every text is produced as a singular entity and follows particular generic rules. It is necessary to identify the scope of the generic concepts of the text: the literary genre, the types of code, the structure of the text, etc. Ricoeur calls these localization and individualization of the characteristics of the text, which are also done by guessing (Ricoeur, 1976). He discusses that once one is able to identify the text as a singular whole, it can be looked at as an object from various angles. In this way, the text is open to plurality of constructions and consequently generates different meanings (Ricoeur, 1976).

3. Any literary unit, especially metaphors and symbolic texts, has different potential horizons of meanings that may be actualized in different ways. Ricoeur proposes that metaphor and symbolic expressions are able to extend the meaning of the object they represent by exploring a relationship between the primary and secondary meanings. The secondary meaning opens the text up to several readings and the text is able to generate multiple meanings (Ricoeur, 1976, 1977).

As suggested previously, the genre of the text under study is a rhetorical discourse; therefore, this study adapts and uses the rhetorical outline of Betz (1979). This is because Betz was the first to subject Galatians to detailed rhetorical studies in contemporary times, and his outline is used or adapted by many scholars. The pericope is divided into segments and each segment is interpreted in relation to the whole literary unit and vice versa.

### **Comprehension and Appropriation**

The last phase of the interpretation theory of Ricoeur is comprehension and appropriation. Ricoeur (1976) insists that the goal of every interpretation is not that one can explain a text, but that the explanation may lead to comprehension and appropriation. It is important at this point to note that the more one explains a text, the better one comprehends that text. Ricoeur (1976, 1977) discusses that comprehension is the process by which a reader is able to make his/her own something that was previously alien (Ricoeur, 1976, 1977). What is to be made one's own is the reality that exists in a discourse. Ricoeur suggests that every discourse talks about a reality, an object, an event or a world that is created by the text that invites the reader to enter and inhabit it.

Comprehension, then, is the reader's capacity to bridge the gap or the distance between the world of the text and that of the reader. Ricoeur explains this when he discusses the meaning of a discourse as sense and reference: the sense is the abstract or the theoretical meaning of the propositions, and the reference is the practical meaning, the reality or the external object that is described in a discourse.

Appropriation is reached when different levels of understanding are achieved, and the reader is able to conveniently assimilate the world of the text. Once the knowledge in a text becomes part of the reader, it will broaden his or her horizon, enlarge his or her perspective and change the way the reader lives in the world. The reader begins to view things differently or, perhaps, from a better perspective. Interpretation of text then, may lead to the interpretation of oneself and the reality that surrounds one's life. However, this does not happen at once; it is a circular process as explained below.

### **The Hermeneutic circle**

The graphic presentation in figure 1 shows the process of meaning generation. It begins with initial understanding and explanation, which leads to further understanding or comprehension and then appropriation. Again, appropriation does not end further acquisition of knowledge, since anytime that new knowledge is acquired, the old one becomes previous knowledge and the cycle begins again.



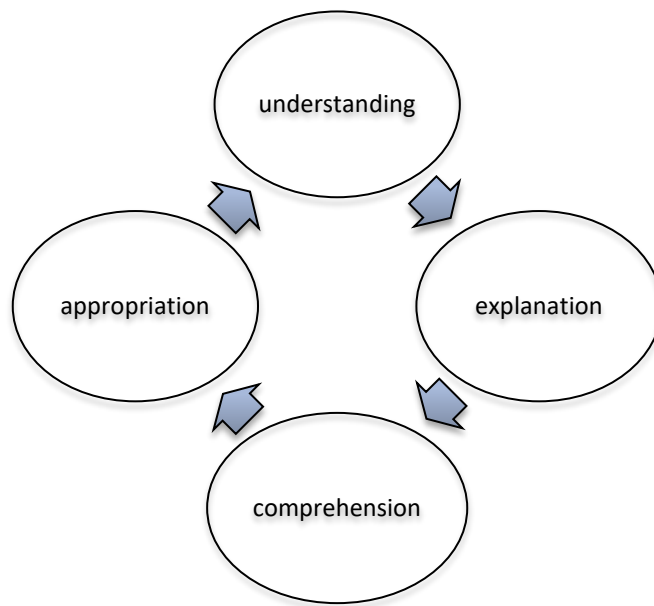


Figure 1 The Hermeneutic circle

Source: Nsiah, 2017

### **The Importance of the Use of Ricoeur's Method**

Ricoeur's method is chosen for the following reasons:

1. It is one of the tools that allow a reader to grow through the process of interpretation. This is made possible by offering the reader the opportunity to have a naïve understanding of a discourse (Ricoeur, 1976) and gradually enter into more critical readings of it.
2. In most of Ricoeur's writings, he uses existing ideas and materials of ancient writers like Aristotle as well as his own contemporaries such as Gadamer, Heidegger, and others. Yet, he weaves the materials to develop something new and original that go beyond perhaps what the authors anticipated. This is similar to what Paul has done in Galatians. He interpreted existing material in a completely different way for different contexts and purposes, which makes it interesting to read Paul from the point of view of Ricoeur.

3. Again, as Ricoeur considers every text to be a discourse, it will be more appropriate to use his method for this particular study that is investigating the text as a discourse.
4. Furthermore, Ricoeur insists that interpretation of text always prompts an action, since at the appropriation level, one's action is altered. With this in mind, the reader is sensitive as to how the text will influence his or her own concept of covenant and covenant renewals, and how this will be appropriated in his or her context.
5. Another good reason to read Paul from the point of view of Ricoeur is his use of metaphors and symbols in discourse. Ricoeur suggests that metaphors are more sophisticated modes of writing and, usually, living metaphors create new meanings in front of the text. This is because through metaphors, the author is able to generate new levels of meanings even from existing texts. Since Paul had weaved the narrative events in the life of Abraham and his family metaphorically, it will be interesting to read Paul with Ricoeur' eye.
6. Ricoeur also points out the importance of identifying ideological distortions in a text through rigorous criticism to ascertain how they influence the generation of meaning. He argues that readers need to be suspicious even of their own approach to a text, since they may bring their prejudices to influence the text.
7. Finally, one reads a text to be transformed by the particular experience that the discourse seeks to recount, so that the voice of the text is truly heard. It is important to note that the method is divided and explained

in stages for easy explanation and clarification; the method is a process and the movement in the process goes back and forth as in a dialogue.

### **The Weakness of Ricoeur's Method**

The weakness of this method is that Ricoeur avoids extreme positions. Although he argues for text autonomy, he does not accept that the issue of author's intention has completely lost significance. Again, he insists that there is always room to debate for or against a particular interpretation and maintains that interpretation should not just be probable but more credible than others (Ricoeur, 1976; Adorairaj, 2000). This means that Ricoeur leaves room for more probability and argues that one's interpretation may be contested, which is itself a weakness since there is no certainty in any interpretation. Again, Ricoeur's work is so diverse and cuts across different disciplines. As he also writes for the philosophically trained, it is very difficult for the unphilosophical mind since his hermeneutics must be extracted from the difficult philosophical writings (Mudge, 1980). Finally, it should be borne in mind that Ricoeur does not set out to do exegesis of biblical texts; his hermeneutics aims at understanding the human person and his or her existence, although his theory has been applied to different fields of texts including biblical ones. Last but not least is that all biblical scholars who hold historical approach to biblical studies as one of the most authentic methods will criticize Ricoeur for standing up against authorial intention. Yet, I agree with Ricoeur that the authorial intention is good but it is not the only way to generate meaning from a text.

## **Literature Review**

This section reviews related literature of the study area. The aim is to furnish me about current issues in the research area. The review areas are: General concept of covenantal discourse, Identification of Galatians as a discourse, Scholarly reviews on Gal. 4:21-31, Paul's views on the Law, review on Allegory, and African Scholarly Readers of the Bible.

## **Covenantal Discourse**

The term covenantal discourse is used to describe various dimensions of biblical covenants. It is specially used to discuss discourses related to covenant renewals (Metso, 2008). It has also been used to identify what is described as a covenantal structure of the Bible, where the different covenants such as Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and the New covenants are treated as ways of God's revelation in order to establish his relationship with his people (Smith, 2006). Anizor (2014) identifies a number of scholars who had studied some aspects of the gospel of John as a covenant discourse. In most of these studies, the scholars used a structural linguistic approach to analyze the text in relation to the covenant elements in the Old Testament or some aspects of it. This is very important for my work as Ricoeur recommends structural linguistic approach to the study of the text. Anizor confirms scripture as a covenantal discourse and images in scripture are used as covenantal metaphors. Scriptural reading, therefore, is seen as a fulfillment of covenantal obligation. The study reveals the relations between the concept of discourse and biblical covenant, which is very insightful for this work as I read a biblical text as a covenantal discourse.

Draper (2006) discusses the Q material in Luke as a covenantal discourse in oral form. He argues that the Q material in the New Testament is generally assumed to have been a written material consisting of different sayings of Jesus that have been assembled together. He maintains that on the contrary, Q might have existed in an oral form since it originated from an oral culture in which majority was illiterate. He does not define a covenantal discourse but he likens it to a 'sermon'; he stresses the importance of the discourse register as consisting of field, tenor and mode. The field deals with what the discourse is about and where it is taking place. The tenor treats the speaker and audience while the mode discusses the method of delivery. Draper (2006) contends that whoever discusses discourse without the register misses a great deal of information because it is the key to understanding oral performance that is described in a text. It appears that what Draper calls discourse register is the same as what Ricoeur refers to as the structure of the discourse. Draper observes that the most important element in the discourse register is to demarcate the narrative framework as found in Luke 6:12-7:17. Draper follows Ricoeur in analyzing the text by dividing it into segments and analyzing the parts in relations to the whole and vice versa.

Draper's work highlights the importance of covenantal discourse, its relationship to existing covenant events and the new dimension that covenantal discourse brings to existing covenant event, which is very important for the research. Draper also brings into fore the fact that covenant in the synoptic gospels is not limited to the last supper events, but there are other untapped covenant realities in the bible. This may also be true about the covenant realities in Pauline letters such as the covenantal issues in Galatians.

I find Draper confirming me and putting confidence in my decision to study the text as a covenant discourse.

Now the next section reviews scholarly work that identifies Galatians as a discourse as well as the nature and function of that discourse.

### **Identification of Galatians as a Discourse**

Galatians is accepted as an authentic letter by several scholars such as Rosenmeyer (2003), Muir (2009), Nanos, (2010) and Just, (2010). It is accepted that Galatians was being written in response to the specific needs of a group of Christian believers in a particular situation as instructions for common life (Kennedy, 1984; Bailey and Broek, 1992). The letter has been found to conform in a modified form, to the three parts structure of ancient letters, which are: the Introduction, the Body, and the Closing. While the opening and closing are clearly marked out, sometimes it is difficult to analyze the various components of the body and their functions. This has forced scholars to use complementary methods to study the inner literary relationships of the body of a letter. An example of the structure of Christian letters showing the items that go into introduction, the body and the conclusion is presented in Table 1 (White, 1988; Rosenmyer, 2003; Muir, 2009; Nanos, 2010 and Just, 2010). This will help readers to identify the possible structure of the letter even before a detailed study is carried out.

Table 1 below shows the epistolary structure of Christian Letters that is divided into three parts: Introduction, Body and Closing.

**Table 1: Structure of Christian letters**

INTRODUCTION	THE BODY	THE CLOSING
Sender	Initial exhortation	Practical matters
Recipient	Thesis statement	Individual greetings
Greetings	Arguments	Personal Postscript
Thanksgiving	Ethical teachings	Doxology

(source: adapted from White, 1988; Rosenmyer, 2003; Muir, 2009; Nanos, 2010; and Just, 2010)

Though the structure may look visible and identifiable, it does not offer enough information about the inner literary style of the body of a letter (Betz, 1979). Table 1 above shows that the body of a letter follows closely the structure of a speech. This has led some scholars to suggest that epistolary and rhetorical writings were closely related, and perhaps rhetorical criticism may be used as a complimentary method of studying the body of an epistolary text. Several scholars such as Kennedy, (1984), Bailey and Broek (1992), Sampley and Lampe, (2010) have observed that Graeco-Roman letters resembled a speech art. Witherington III (2009) opines that the letters are one-half of a conversation, a substitute for the absence of the sender and so the letter is a discourse. He observes that there had always been a close connection between oration and the epistles. He notes that in antiquity speeches might have been written as open letters and so letters and speeches were closely related.

Kennedy (1984) appears to confirm the point of Witherington and gives a further hint that in later antiquity there were lots of rhetorical influences on handbooks of letter writing so that instruction in letter writing became part of rhetoric. He explains that many of the Pauline letters were

read and explained to the community, and therefore, possessed some characteristics of a speech. Bailey and Broek (1992) agree that Paul wrote to a faith community on specific situations where people expected his letters to be read aloud and so may be considered as a speech. Sampley and Lampe (2010) add that though the structure of Pauline letters may correspond to a conventional pattern of a letter, it also exhibits many characteristics of as a speech. They, therefore, confirm that Paul employed rhetorical features to convey his message to his audience. His letters are letters and speeches at the same time, and they conform in part or whole to the traditional genre of speeches such as deliberative, judicial or epideictic.

Watson (1986) explains that many scholars have debated strongly on the extent to which Graeco-Roman rhetorical theories influenced epistolary genres in the late antiquity. He provides important information that although in theory, rhetorical handbooks never discussed epistolary writings and vice versa, in practice the two theories developed side-by-side and overlapped, resulting in functional parallel materials. Hence the two theories may serve as complimentary methods to study the letters.

Martyn (1997) contends that the epistolary character of the letter is not confined only to the external structure of the three-part division as some scholars suggest. He even rejects the idea of identifying the letter with a particular rhetorical species and argues that the letter is a sermon preached during worship in the presence of God as God's word to his people and should not be put into a box of a particular rhetorical genre.

All these notwithstanding, recent biblical scholars have therefore identified several rhetorical features in the letters. The letter to the Galatians is



the first of the letters to be singled out for detailed rhetorical analysis. Hans Dieter Betz (1979) is credited with being the first to subject Galatians to rhetorical examination in modern times. He recommends Galatians to be analyzed by the principles of Graeco-Roman rhetoric and epistolography. He suggests that Galatians is an apologetic speech. He traces the presence of apologetic speech from the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., which was used by Plato and other subsequent writers. He thinks that epistolary framework and rhetorical features are so interrelated that both elements could easily form one composition. The rhetorical techniques and arrangements are analyzed in terms of their function in Pauline letters.

Now, if Galatians is accepted as a discourse and as a rhetorical discourse, it is important to discuss the genre of the discourse that may help the reader to examine the inner literary relationship of the body of the discourse. The subsection that follows discusses the particular rhetorical species of the discourse of Galatians.

### **The Rhetorical Genre of Galatians**

There are different schools of thought with regard to the type of rhetorical species to which Galatians belongs. One school of thought championed by Betz (1979) and corroborated by Dunn (1995) and Bruce (1982), among others, suggests that Galatians is an apologetic letter genre that is best classified as a Forensic or Judicial rhetoric. In this letter, there is a presupposition of a fictitious situation of a courtroom. Paul is to be regarded as the accused, who is defending himself against his accusers, the opponents. The Galatians are to be seen as the judges and Paul is not only trying to persuade

them to follow a certain course of action, but give them conditional blessings and curses that will be effective in their decision (Betz, 1979).

The other school of thought, championed by scholars such as Kennedy (1984), Hall (1987), Cosgrove (1988), Smith (1997), and Matera (2007), acknowledges with particular interest the significance and contribution of Betz (1979) but disagrees with him on what they consider to be the rigid application of forensic rhetorical elements to the letter. This school of thought rather classifies Galatians as deliberative rhetoric. Kennedy's (1984) argument is that Betz is unable to explain why forensic rhetoric should contain exhortation in chapters 5 and 6, and that Betz (1979) over-emphasizes the presence of narratives in the first half of the letter as evidence of a judicial letter. Kennedy (1984) quotes Quintilian as saying that exhortations and discussions are two forms of deliberative rhetoric. Kennedy argues further that in the letter to the Galatians, Paul is not defending himself but he is preaching the gospel and urging his audience not to turn away from his gospel in their own interest, which is typical of deliberative rhetorical argument. Hall (1987), Cosgrove (1988), Joop (1989) and Russell (1993) appear to substantiate Kennedy (1984) and classify the letter as deliberative rhetorical genre, although they provide quite a different outline from each other. They compare Galatians to an ancient deliberative text written by Demosthenes and conclude that the two texts have relatively long *narratio* and *dispositio* which are characteristics of a deliberative genre and confirm Galatians as a deliberative discourse. Matera acknowledges the fact that Paul defends the divine origin of his gospel and yet contends that the letter is generally of deliberative genre. This is because Paul

was trying to persuade his audience not to accept the agitator's gospel of circumcision and thus substantiate what Kennedy said earlier.

There is also a third school of thought that regards Galatians as having a mixture of rhetorical genres: Aune (1984) argues that the narrative section in Galatians 1 and 2 exhibits forensic rhetorical genres as maintained by Betz, but there is a change of style from the beginning of chapter three. This latter section of the letter exhibits a deliberative model of rhetoric when the diatribe style is introduced into the letter. Hansen (1989) follows Aune's argument that Galatians has a mixture of rhetorical genres. He agrees that some sections of the letter possess characteristics of forensic rhetoric but he disagrees with Aune as to which section. He proposes that chapters 1:6-4:11 contain Judicial rhetorical characteristics in the sense that there appears to be a defense against accusations with regard to the gospel that is to be followed. However, Hansen acknowledges a shift from chapter 4:12ff as having the characteristics of deliberative rhetoric rather than forensic.

There is still a fourth group of scholars who think that the letter exhibits epideictic features because Paul put himself as a model to be imitated.

Anderson and Moore (2008), however, warn that the letter does not fall within the confines of any of the genres, and that care should be taken to divide the letter into traditional parts of speech. For this reason, they apply what they called synchronic rhetorical analysis, which focuses on the argumentative structure of the text and not its relationship to ancient writings. Stanley and Lampe (2010) suggest that Paul's letters are of a different genre from the three classical species; this is because Paul did not stick to the

confines of one genre, but he used all of them to praise, guide and correct his churches. Kennedy proposes a new genre for Paul known as the rhetoric of religion. Martyn (1997) points out that the letter reflects Paul's training in rhetoric but warns that the letter should not be put into any strict rhetorical jacket, since it does not conform to any particular rhetorical species. To him, the letter is an argumentative sermon, preached in the context of worship and not just a political or courtroom speech.

It is important to note that not every biblical scholar agrees that Galatians may be studied using rhetorical criticism as a tool. Kern (2004) is of the opinion that the letter does not conform to the instructions in rhetorical handbooks and this may explain why the rhetorical analysis of Galatians could not produce agreement in the outline suggested by scholars. Dunn (1998) appears to confirm this opinion when he says that Paul might have worked within the conventions of the time, his main drive being his passion and theological logic of the good news and not just rhetorical considerations.

It seems that categories of the genre chosen depend to a large extent on the point of departure. Yet, Sampley and Lampe (2010) suggest that one should not rush to assign a genre to any of the letters unless one knows the rhetorical and historical situations that necessitated the discourse. They continue that it is always difficult to reconstruct these situations with precision, since most of the time they are reconstructed from the text itself. This is where Ricoeur also says that all reconstructions are based on probabilities and not certainties. Sampley and Lampe observe that some scholars do classify every paraenetical material as deliberative genre and every apologetic material as judicial species. However, Sampley and Lampe (2010)

contend that any letter that is being written in response to a particular life situation may require more complex rhetorical strategies to be effective and simple classification may fail to work. They add that some letters have numerous rhetorical functions. Moreover, Paul was a creative rhetor who may have adapted different rhetorical genres for different purposes even in the same letter. In effect, Sampley and Lampe confirms Ricoeur's probability theory.

Tull (1999) made an interesting discussion on the efficacy of new rhetoric in studying theories of discourse. This is because the new rhetoric allows readers to investigate the internal relations of a text, its affective persuasion and how it can be used as a tool for social control. Although she agrees with Ricoeur and Draper that words are not understood in isolation but within the context of their discourse. Tull departed from Ricoeur when she insisted that any interpreter who does not take the rhetorical context of an author and a reader into consideration does a work that is incomplete and irrelevant. She made interesting contribution to discourse analysis when she talks about dialoguing with three important elements in text analysis. In the first place it is important to dialogue in the environment of a text, since every text came into being from existing materials and ideas it has relations with its environment. Secondly, it is important to be conscious of the internal dialogue within a text so that characters, voices and attitudes are engaged and managed. Lastly a text engaged different audience at different settings with varying questions and answers and these must be managed as well. Tull's method will make an interesting intertexture reading of Galatians but going to the

environment of the text, would send the reader back to the historical background of the text which will defeat the theory of Ricoeur.

From the foregoing, I do not confine Galatians to any one particular genre, but will focus on the argumentative structure of the particular passage under study. Moreover, the identification of Galatians as a written letter and a rhetorical discourse helps to meet some criteria of Ricoeur that identify a text as a written rather than oral discourse and a literary work that follows a particular generic rules that must be studied as part of studying the internal relations of the text. Hence, I accept Galatians as a rhetorical discourse but will not confine it to any particular rhetorical genre.

#### **Biblical scholarship on Galatians 4:21-31**

Galatians 4:21-31 has received a wide range of scholarly attention over the years. Even though scholars have used different methodologies to study the text, the traditional ones have been largely the historical and epistolary criticisms. Since then, different books of the Bible have been subjected to various methods of reading and this does not exclude Paul's letter to the Galatians. I have made an attempt to give a chronological review with the exception of the work of Augustine. The review also took into consideration major themes in the text to ensure total comprehension as much as possible.

Luther's lecture series on Galatians (1963) suggest that the passage under study was an afterthought and was not part of the original arguments of Paul. He suggests that Paul had concluded his argument in the preceding passage, when it occurred to him that one of the forceful and graphic ways to deliver a message was through allegories and parables. Hence Paul added the passage under study as his last argument.

Luther further explains that Paul identified Sarah with the new Jerusalem where the law was not effective and children were not enslaved, but rather God's promise was made available to God's children who were all free. Luther states that it is the people of faith who are born of the free woman, Sarah. Hence, the law of Moses does not bind all Christians and Christians should not put themselves under it. Luther blames the Pope and other Church leaders for regulating the life of Christians and enslaving them in some way. And therefore, for Luther, Christians are free children of God and are saved by grace and not by obedience to any law.

Even though this was an oral lecture that was transcribed with time, I perceive some elements of history to suggest the possibility of historical critical approach to the text, which has been applied to the context of the author. This also means that Luther tried to understand the authorial intention and this sets him against Ricoeur's text centered approach.

Augustine's commentary on Galatians (2003), was a pastoral letter meant for Christian unity. In this commentary, Augustine argues that one of the covenants that Paul discussed was the whole of the Old Testament and the Old Testament people. The promises they received from the covenant were earthly, which enslaved them so much that they did not expect anything from God again and were not invited to the heavenly inheritance.

He notes further that those without hope who lived in the carnal flesh and were the sources of heresies persecuted the children of the promise, but such persecution was in vain, since they would be cast out of the heavenly inheritance. Augustine contextualizes his reflection on the passage to meet the

needs and conditions of the time. He also views Galatians as a document of history and is sensitive to historical facts in the text.

Betz (1979) recognizes the three-part structure of Galatians as the prescript, the body and the postscript. At the same time, he acknowledges it as a rhetorical discourse of judicial genre. He observes that Paul designed his arguments to defend himself against his accusers before a jury. For Betz, the whole letter is composed of introduction, thesis, arguments to support the thesis, exhortation and conclusion.

Betz disagrees with others who think that the passage is out of place, an afterthought and a repetition of what has been said earlier. He suggests that the method Paul used in interpreting the stories of Abraham and his family is a combination of both allegory and typology. He explains that while typology takes historical information seriously because it is repeated, fulfilled or completed in the present context, allegory looks at deeper meanings besides the surface or apparent meanings of texts.

Betz is aware of the fact that scholars doubt the potency of allegorical argument because of its uncertainty, yet he cites Demetrius who argues that a strong rhetorical argument does not always depend on an author to give convincing information, but on one who has the capacity to make his audience part of discovering the answer to their questions. Betz notes that such is the function of the allegorical discourse in 4:21-31 to the whole letter to the Galatians. He explains that it is a rhetorical device, used as a last resort, when other arguments have probably failed.

Betz divides the work into a rhetorical outline, the parts in relation to the whole and vice versa. In the analysis of the text, he emphasizes the



historical background to the text, gives priority to the intention of the author and tries to ascertain what the author was trying to say. In the same way, an attempt was made to reconstruct the context of the first readers and how they understood the author. The intention of the author and the understanding of the first readers are the criteria used to generate meaning in the text. This is the area where Ricoeur differs from Betz when Ricoeur recommends that written text is distanced from the author and first readers, and that a text generates multiples of meaning irrespective of the intension of the author since the intention of the author does not exhaust the meaning of a text.

Bruce (1982) approaches Galatians from the point of view of epistolary criticism and so has slightly different structure from that of Betz. The difference is located within the body of the text, as both of them have the three-part structure typical of ancient letters. Yet, the passage under study forms part of the body of the argument to support the gospel of Paul. Using historical criticism, he places Paul's allegorical interpretation in historical perspective, noting that others had done similar interpretations of the text before Paul. He cites the example of Philo's interpretation of the story of Abraham and his family, which led to the discovery of some philosophical truths. However, he finds the allegorical interpretation of Paul different from the others in the sense that it is a phase in the history of interpretation in which the patriarchal narratives emphasized that life under the law is incompatible with that of the promise.

Bruce observes further that the expected results of the allegory of Paul was inverted when the Jews were rather identified with Hagar, Ishmael and the law, while the gentiles were identified with Isaac, Sarah and the promise to

Abraham. He notes that it is this kind of inversion that made the methodology of Paul unique and unparalleled elsewhere. With such a methodology, Paul was able to describe the two mothers as representing Sinai and Abrahamic covenants. He confirms that the opponents of Paul may have used the law to their advantage and Paul, through the allegory, used it to their disadvantage. He concludes that in this analogy the gentiles had in Christ Jesus received the promise of Abraham.

Bruce did not use rhetorical criticism. He uses the historical critical approach and like others focuses on authorial intentional meaning.

Hays (1989) studied the passage intertextually. He is of the view that Paul read the Old Testament in the Hagar/Sarah allegory as ecclesiocentric hermeneutic aimed at prefiguring the church in the believing community in Galatia. He explains that this is particularly visible when Paul associated Isaac with the Galatian church as the children of the promise against the anticipated identification of Isaac with Christ. He explains that instead, Christ was not even factored into the argument, which is an indication that Paul was more interested in the church as the recipient of the blessings in the covenant. Hays' ecclesiocentric hermeneutic is quite interesting and insightful. He confirms my opinion that the text can be read as a covenantal discourse, as the church represents a covenant community.

Longenecker (1990) agrees to a large extent with the idea of combining epistolography and rhetorical argumentative structure in studying Galatians. However, he does not agree that the passage under study is part of the proof section and rather places it in the exhortation section and thus puts this section (4:12-6:10) under deliberative speech and the previous section 1:6-

4:11) under forensic speech. He is of the view that Paul is not saying that rules and regulations are not necessary for a smooth running of the community but that the Jewish laws especially circumcision are not appendage to faith and so they should not be imposed on the gentiles. He explains nomism as a way of imposing certain rules and regulations on others. He argues that the answer to the question concerning the identity of the children of Abraham is Paul's way of relieving Christians of nomism so that they can enjoy their newly found freedom in Christ. He reasons that the allegorical interpretation is to set up a distinction between the flesh and the spirit, between faith and law in the life of every believer so that they do not entangle themselves in nomism. Once Longenecker identifies the Galatians as children of Abraham through faith, by implication he places them in the covenant community, yet they enter the community on faith and not by the law.

Keener (1993) argues that Paul's primary purpose here was to identify the Galatians as the true descendants of Abraham by the free woman and by a promise. He explains that in relation to the entire letter, the allegory was to call on the Galatians to decisively resist the teachings of his opponents. He observes that Paul saw the allegorical treatment of Sarah/Hagar as very important because perhaps it was part of the argument of his opponents. Keener maintains that Paul saw a true correspondence in the two sons of Abraham in the two sorts of people that formed the descendants of Abraham in his own days. These were those born according to the flesh and those born in the spirit. He reasons that the Galatians were finding fulfilment in what was promised to Isaac, confirming the idea that God acts in similar ways in different periods for the salvation of his people. Keener confirmed Bert (1979)

that Paul combined a typological interpretation with an allegorical treatment of the text so that he could relate the characters in the text to specific issues in Galatia in order to counter-attack the position of his opponents.

Keener is among those who argue that Paul developed his allegory from the argument of his opponents to establish two different groups of descendants from Abraham. Keener confirms that the passage concerns the identity of the Galatian converts but does not specifically associate them with a covenant. I am arguing that the identity of the Galatians in the descendants of Abraham, which forms the covenant community, is by implication, identifying the converts as covenant members.

Jobes (1993) argues that Paul began and ended his proof section with Abraham by comparing the faith of the Galatians to that of Abraham. She maintains that Paul presented the two children of Abraham as representing two contradictory states of being: slavery and freedom. She states again that one group represented the Judaizers and the other the Galatians. She further asserts that Paul's interpretation contradicted the traditional understanding of the historical material on Abraham and his family, yet it is the contradiction that makes the interpretations of Paul different from all others. Jobes is among the scholars who argue that the text is not referring to all Jews but only to those who troubled the Galatian Christians. This confirms that Paul is not an anti-Jewish, he was not attacking the Jewish religion, but the missionaries who were confusing the Galatians.

Martyn (1997) observes that Paul described the law in negative and positive terms. In one way, the law had the capacity to pronounce a curse, but it also had the voice of God's promise. He suggests that Paul's teaching here

was to correct the false teachings of the opponents. He notes that to do this Paul had to coin two important words and describe the two children as born according to the flesh and through the promise. He contends that in this way Paul was able to create a contrast between two brothers. He reasons that the fact that one covenant bears children into slavery is the most important element in this reading. It refers to those who were founding gentile churches and leading them to slavery. In effect Martyn is saying that the Galatians must choose which covenant to belong to, the one of freedom or the one that gives birth into slavery. This supports my resolve to study the text as a covenant discourse

Dunn (1998) adds a very interesting dimension to the discussion when he argues that, Paul was teaching that the coming of Christ inaugurated an eschatological division of time by two covenants. For him, Hagar and her son represent one epoch, while Sarah and her son represent another. He insists that when Israel refused to accept the fact that the law belonged to the past and it cannot match God's purpose for history in the present, then Israel becomes more Ishmael than Isaac. He asserts that the old covenant had been surpassed and replaced with something new and better. Dunn's work is very insightful as he highlights the two allegorical covenants in the text and why the law appears to be ineffective in the present context of the Galatians. He really brings out the second level of meaning in the allegory.

Von Ehrenkrook (1998) admits that the passage is surrounded by hermeneutical tension because of the upside-down manner in which Old Testament information is treated. He situates the passage in the context of Jewish hermeneutical framework. He highlights some Jewish hermeneutical

tools like allegory, typology and Midrash that Paul may have used in his treatment of the Old Testament material in this passage. He admits that these methods were adapted by Paul in an original way. According to Von Ehrenkrook, unlike Paul's predecessors and contemporary uses of allegory, he paid attention to historical information but interpreted them in unprecedented, different ways against the expectation of his time. Von Ehrenkrook explains that what was considered allegory might have been so fluid that it may have contained some element of typology, and this would have allowed Paul the freedom to approach the material the way he did. Following Betz, Von Ehrenkrook accepts the passage as the strongest argument of Paul's to conclude the proof section. He notes that Paul's interpretation is seen as derived from the prophecy of Isaiah that situates allegory into a wider perspective of salvation history. He claims that in this way Paul defeats the particularist perspective of his opponent and champions an all-inclusive salvation in Christ. Von Ehrenkrook's work throws light on why Paul inserts a prophetic poem into the patriarchal narratives; its aim is to capture the whole of the Old Testament experiences of the Jewish people.

Elliott (1999) is the only author I have read who suggests that Paul was not responding to any opposition, but that he was speaking to the Galatians themselves who understood the communication within their own context. He contends that what was discussed was known and experienced by the Galatians in their social situation. He explains that the Sinai Mountain, for example, was associated with a mountain that was identified as the mother of the gods. Elliott discusses that this mother mountain overlooked the towns and villages that she (the mountain goddess) was supposed to protect. He also says

that she was also supposed to be a law enforcer in the Anatolian culture and because of this she was easily associated with the Jewish Torah. Elliott asserts that this mother mountain was served by slaves who castrated themselves in their ecstatic moments. He argues that this was the background against which the Galatians were ready to undergo circumcision, and to which Paul was vehemently opposed. He claims that this background helps to clarify the clumsy reading of verse 25, which further fits the entire passage. It appears that this kind of interpretation did not gain popularity among scholars. This contribution is unique in the sense that it gives certain possible historical insight into the social situation of the Galatians that is not common. However, this confirms Ricoeur's assertion that there are not enough logistics to reconstruct the exact background to any text, which gives room for scholars to speculate and make assumptions which may or may not be factual.

Hays (2000) confirms that the letter qualifies to be viewed as a rhetorical discourse and agrees that the passage was the last of the argument designed to counter-attack the opposition's argument in the proof section. He argues that the thrust of the message was that his law-free gospel was anticipated in the Torah in the very stories of the opponents and exhorted the Galatians to be firm in the freedom they enjoyed in Christ. Hays reminds readers that Paul's attack was not on Judaism but on Jewish Christian missionaries interfering with his work in Galatia. He proposes that the passage uses law and scripture synonymously, and surprisingly uses in opposite terms flesh and promise instead of flesh and spirit. He notes that this is explained as the possibility of Paul keeping to the original Genesis story. Hay (2000) posits that Paul earlier established the premise of Abraham's inheritance given by

God through a promise and this promise included gentiles in the blessings of the promise. He remarks that this created the basis for Paul to say that Isaac's birth was a prefiguration of the gentile church in Galatia. I agree with Hays that Paul is not against all Jews but only the troublers of the gentile mission who were described as trouble-makers and agitators (Gal 1:7; 5:12). Moreover, if the Galatian churches were prefigured in the promise of God to Abraham, then they were members of the covenant in anticipation. Such a reading throws light and enriches my research.

Kern (2004) is strongly against the idea of using classical rhetoric to study Galatians. Whether the argument is strong or weak has nothing to do with rhetoric, and the fact that scholars do not agree on the function of the passage in the argumentative force of Paul even diminishes the relevance of the passage. To him, the question that should rather be asked is whether in the final analysis, Paul achieved the aim he set out for himself since the forcefulness of any rhetorical argument depends on the effects of the argument on the audience. This is an indication that Kern departed from classical rhetoric to new rhetoric that is more focused on the persuasive effects of the discourse on audience rather than just style.

Punt (2006) thinks that before any attempt is made to understand the passage under study, it is important to understand the hermeneutical situation of the first century. He theorizes that in that context scripture was approached as the inspired word of God, which was expressed in a language that contained multiples of meanings. Punt (2006) propounds the view that the sacred nature of the text also made it a dynamic living text, so that it needed to be contextualized in the current situation to make it a living organism. In this



way, its meaning cannot be exhausted in any contextual situation. He observes that early Judaism also looked at the scripture exegete as an inspired personality with the capacity to discern different panels of meanings in the text by revelation. He submits that this was the hermeneutical key of the first century used also by Paul, which is important for our understanding of the text, or else the text suffers what he calls hermeneutic deficit. He argues that allegory is an interpretive tool that is able to generate meaning in a way that is different, or may be against traditionally acceptable interpretation or that may be completely new. Paul's re-reading of the Genesis narratives went beyond the literal meaning of the text, but he also intentionally did a counter conventional reading to generate a meaning that was against expectation. Paul challenged the traditionally accepted interpretation of Genesis, going beyond the surface meaning. Punt submits that the strength of Paul's hermeneutics is in the deeper levels of meaning that he was able to generate provided that his audience accepted it as genuine scriptural interpretation.

He argues further that the traditionally acceptable way of incorporating new members into the covenant community is challenged. He proposes that the formation of people of God was no more dependent on genealogy but on the promise of God and shared in faith. Punt is the first scholar who has categorically stated that the passage under study talks about two ways of accepting people into the covenant community and that the traditional way of doing this was no longer effective. Punt's argument that it is not only scripture that was sacred but the interpreter was also considered inspired and so could generate multiples of meanings from the text is very innovative and reminiscent Ricoeur.

Matera (2007) cites Betz (1979) in his work and agrees with him on a number of issues in the structural outline. However, He divides the passage into three broad parts as follows: introduction (verse 21), allegory and interpretation (verses 22-27), application and appeal (verses 28-31). He thinks that the agitators had a strong argument that would have been difficult for Paul to respond to effectively, had he not used allegory. He says that Paul's message was not directed against Jews but against Christian troublers in Galatia. The way Matera divides the passage into segments is very helpful for my study.

Nanos (2002) challenges the dominant understanding of Paul as anti-Jewish and anti-Torah and argues that the word "gospel" is used ironically. He insists that those who came to teach the Galatians after Paul should rather be called influencers and were neither coming from Jerusalem nor were they Christians, but were members of the larger Jewish community who were in charge of proselytes in Galatia. According to him, what the influencers did was to make every effort to integrate the Galatians into the larger Jewish community as proselytes. Nanos (2002) claims that this was because the community had a legal standing that made it very attractive and may have had lots of advantages for its members in the province. He concludes that this apparent attractive offer was what Paul was trying to counter-attack. Paul's allegory was not about law-observing Christians and grace or law-free Christianity, because Paul himself was steeped in Judaism. Nanos' book is the first of the books I have discussed that deals with Jewish proselytism as part of the background to the text. This indicates that Nanos' position is that the tension in the text is not about two groups of Christians, as other scholars

suggest, but those who attempted to convert the Galatians to become Jewish proselytes or those called God-fearers. This corroborates Ricoeur's point that it is difficult to construct the background of every text since there are divergent views and the text generates multiple meanings.

### **Conclusion**

Paul's letter to the Galatians has indeed been studied from perspectives that are stimulating, dynamic, and innovative as has been demonstrated in this review. It is difficult to describe these approaches and perspectives in few words, as there is the danger and tendency to ignore some important elements. The letter has been studied with historical, epistolary, rhetorical, social scientific theories, narrative criticisms, and many other criticisms. Sometimes, one or two or more of these criticisms are combined to create multiple and interdisciplinary approaches to the text. A majority of scholars I have read have applied rhetorical criticism to the letter in diverse and multiple ways that are amazing, dialogical and contested. Scholars are openly divided for or against Betz for his contribution to the study of the letter. However, one characteristic of all the reviews that have been done is the fact that almost all scholars approach Galatians from the point of view of the intention of the author. They try to establish what the author wanted to say and how the first readers understood the message of the author. As a result, most of them attempt to reconstruct the background of the author and readers and the context that generated the text. There are various suggestions as to what could have been the possible background which are based on probabilities. This is where the theory I will employ becomes essential. I am arguing in line with Ricoeur that the intention of the author does not exhaust the meaning in a text,

that the text may be studied in its own right as an autonomous body that is distanced from the author and first readers, and that I am in a different socio-cultural and geographical location from the author, the first readers, and the context that generated the text. Again, most scholars admit that Galatians qualifies to be studied as a rhetorical discourse. Most scholars do not comment much on the issues of covenant in the text, and none looks at the text as a covenantal discourse. Again, since the issue of law is closely related to covenant and the word occurs several times in the passage, I am going to look at Paul's view of the law in Galatians in the next section.

### **Paul's View on the Law in Galatians**

Another key concept in the text is the function of the law. Paul's view of the law has received lots of scholarly attention. I do not intend to review all the diverse positions that scholars have taken but to review some scholarly views on the law and its functions in Galatians.

McKenzie (1966) maintains that the Hebrew word *Torah* has become the most general term for the Law in Judaism, but several Hebrew words connote various species of the law. He argues that *Torah* is derived from *yara* (to throw or cast lot) and so *Torah* was a "divine oracle revealed by lot". He says that in the course of time, it came to mean a 'divine response'. During the time that divine instruction was mostly communicated by the priest, *Torah* became a 'priestly instruction', which originally dealt with cultic and moral precept. He argues further that *Torah* gradually became the revelation of Yahweh through the priest and so the law became the revealed 'will of Yahweh'. McKenzie further states that the *Torah* later became known as the Pentateuch. According to him, in order to preserve the law and effectively

follow its obligation, legal opinions on the law developed, which became known as the oral law. He notes again that in the New Testament, the law may be referred to as the Torah or the Pentateuch and the oral law is called Tradition. He concludes that the law may now refer to the Decalogue, the entire Old Testament or a particular law in the Pentateuch. I find the Translating of the law as Torah and equating it to the Pentateuch and the legal observations of the covenant a bit limited.

Dunn (1998) agrees with McKenzie on the Torah but claims that the Torah is translated in Greek as νόμος, although Torah has a broader meaning than νόμος. He observes that the Septuagint rendering of the Hebrew Torah as νόμος makes the Hebrew concept of Torah distorted. Dunn argues that the Torah had a special relationship to the covenant at Sinai, from where the book of the covenant became the expression used for a collection of laws that became popularly known as the Ten Commandments, the statutes or the covenant obligations (Dunn, 1998). He notes that the divine instructions became the Torah/law during the second testament temple and the two words were used synonymously. Again I find a limited use of the word law here.

Wenham (1996) suggests that the Old Testament presents different terminologies for the word law because of its importance in the life of the people. Thus he agrees with McKenzie that there are other terminologies of the word law other than Torah. Some of the commonest terms are *Torah* (law, instruction, teaching); *hoq* (statute, decree); *mispāt* (judgment, legal decision); *dabar* (word); *miswah* (commandment). Wenham has rather given a broader meaning to the word law which is useful for the research. He argues that the first five books of the bible is called Torah by both Jews and early Christians,

although those books also contain narrative history of Israel. The ten commandment are actually considered as the epitome of law in the old Testament. By implication Wenham is saying that the meaning of the word is broader than the standard ten commandment. Sanders (1992) affirm Wenham when he says that law meant divine revelation either in part or as a whole. It may include commandment, admonition, advice, theological affirmation, worship and all the stories of redemption with all of its requirements on the people and the subsequent failure and forgiveness. Sanders made an interesting discussion when he disagrees with Dunn that the Hebrew word is broader than the Greek word *nomos*. Sanders rather claims that both Torah and *nomos* mean law and also grace. Greengus (1992) states that not all biblical laws are found in the Pentateuch since there are some legal matters in non legal books like the psalms and other books. Schreiner (1996) suggests that the New Testament used of the word *nomos* sometimes refer to the whole of the old testament.

Dunn (1998) insists that there is no general consensus to account for the presence or the absence of the definite article, since both νόμος and ὁ νόμος refer to the same law in the Pauline letters (Rom. 2:17, 23, 25, 12-14, 5:13-14, 7:7-12, 1 Cor. 9:20-21). However, Dunn (1998) outlines a number of ways in which Paul had used the word νόμος in Galatians as follows: as a direct contrast to the promises (3:17); that it could not annul an earlier and primary promise (3:15-18); it functioned as something that took care of transgressions (3:19); it provided a way of solving the attitude of disobedience; it drew awareness to an offence; it provided the opportunity to offer sacrifices to remedy sins; it was given through a mediator, which connotes the idea of

rejection of divine origin (3:19); the law had the tendency to imprison or impose itself on others; the law also protected and took custody of its followers.

Dunn also discusses the function of the law as *παιδαγωγός*. This function is explained as follows: a *παιδαγωγός* is perhaps a slave who is put in charge of his master's household in the absence of the master as a guard or the administrator; his work is not permanent but temporary and he takes charge of the heir while he is an infant until he matures. Sometimes the *παιδαγωγός* is described negatively as being harsh, greedy, opportunistic and impatient, but he is also a tutor who disciplines and teaches, and finally the *παιδαγωγός* is a disciplinarian whose actions have a long-term benefit.

Dunn (1998) proposes that the role of the *παιδαγωγός* was similar to Israel's relationship with the law; the time was past when their relationship with the law made them resemble infants and slaves, and gentiles were warned to be careful in entering such a relationship (4:8-11). Dunn suggests that *παιδαγωγός* also connotes the idea that Israel's relationship under the law was temporary, coming between the giving of the promise and its fulfilment (3:16-25). The law, as a custodian, took care of Israel as an infant until the time of maturity (4:1-5) and it was to end with the coming of faith (3:23-25), with the arrival of the coming of the seed (3:16, 4:4).

Dunn sees another dimension of Paul's view of the law in the fact that the coming of Christ was seen as the completion and the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham. He claims that the coming of Christ was seen in Galatians as what marked the appointed time when God was to fulfil the promise. Dunn observes that the implication of this was that Israel no longer

needed the special protection of the law; they were to go beyond slavery-like life, and be matured enough to possess their inheritance. Since the law was given to Israel, it was to protect Israel, but the promise of God had a universal dimension that would make it possible to include the gentile believers. Dunn argues that the promise was not just land and seed, but also included blessings, and the gentiles were made sharers of the promised blessings from the beginning. He sees this as a very fundamental feature in Paul's theology on the blessings to Abraham. He insists that Israel did not recognize that the time for the fulfilment of the third element of the blessing was at the coming of Christ. He concludes that the coming of Christ marked an eschatological division of time, a new phase of God's purpose where the law did not enjoy the position it had enjoyed previously. This is very important to understand the passage under study and the attempt to explain why there appears to be tension between the law and faith in the text.

Kulikovsky (1999) agrees with most of the points raised by Dunn above. He acknowledges the insistence of Paul that circumcision should not be imposed on non-Jews because it was not a guarantee for salvation (Gal 5:2-4). Kulikovsky sees in Paul the expression that anyone who relies solely on observance of the law for salvation is under a curse (3:10-13). He discusses again that the law enslaves whoever comes under it. He cites Hagar's allegory as an example of how the law enslaves. Kulikovsky notes that Paul saw the law as abolished, that is, the burden of trying to attain salvation by one's own capacity in obeying the law was abolished. Kulikovsky's contribution highlights why Paul insisted that the Galatians did not need to go back to the law, which is very illuminating for the passage under study.



Keener (1993) defines transgression as “violation of a standard” set by God. Keener adds that sin was in the world before the law, but the presence of the law served as a measuring rod that sharpened the boundaries and parameters within which sin occurred. This had made the reality of sin more visible and pronounced. Keener confirms that from the teachings of Paul, the law had a temporary framework. It was to take effect until the promised seed came. According to Keener, this perception of a permanent validity of the promise and the temporary nature of the law in Paul was really against the dominant concept of the law among the Jews. Paul further maintained that the experience of the Holy Spirit in faith was the fulfilment of the promise, so that if the Galatians had experienced the Spirit, they did not need to retrogress to the law. I see Keener’s point substantiating what has been established earlier by Dunn and Kulikovsky.

Smith (2014) argues that the term  $\acute{\omicron}$  νόμος meant all the attitudes and behaviour that God requires from his people. In other words, it means the totality of the law. He establishes a relationship between God’s law and natural law and insists that even gentiles have the law written on their hearts and therefore God requires all human beings to observe the law.

Smith (2014) distinguishes Paul’s views of the law as being in two parts: before and after his conversion. He suggests that Paul’s view of the law before his conversion was that God gave the law as the requirement of the covenant for the covenant people to keep. Those who kept the law were considered righteous. Occasionally, people sinned, but if they habitually asked for God’s forgiveness, they were justified and made righteous by God so that they could stand before him in confidence. Smith helps to clarify Paul’s

present attitude to the law and confirms that faith in Christ had made the old religious belief in the law irrelevant.

Sanders (1983) posits that the overriding understanding of the law in Galatians rests on two points namely that no person can earn righteousness through meritorious good work and the law is not a requirement to enter into the covenant community. These two points were in response to his missionary opponents who might have taught the converts to accept circumcision before they could become children of Abraham. Sanders insists that Paul's argument is neither in favour of faith nor against the works of the law but rather it was a specific requirement that gentiles should not be made to keep the Jewish law in order to become children of Abraham. He holds that Paul contends that the only requirement for one to enter the covenant was faith and he used the story of Abraham in Genesis 15:6 and 18:8 to justify his claim in Galatians 3:8.

Schreiner (1989) says that there is a debate as to whether Paul was consistent or inconsistent in his understanding of the law. The consistent school of thought propose that Paul's view of the law developed gradually with time in his ministry. His latter letters contain a more developed view than his earlier ones. The other school of thought expressed the opinion that Paul was teaching long before he wrote his letters, and therefore, his views were already developed. Furthermore, Paul responded to the various churches according to their needs and this did not depend on any theological development. Again, Paul spoke negatively of circumcision and excluded it from the law, yet he spoke positively of obeying God's commandments, talked about the love of neighbour and the abolition of the law, and therefore Paul was inconsistent with the law.

Schreiner discusses a third view that divides the law into two compartments and separates ethical imperatives from the general covenant stipulations. According to Schreiner, what Paul disagreed with were the legalistic interpretations of the law. Schreiner adds that the bone of contention was not that Paul was against the law but the aspect of the law that separated Jews from gentiles such as circumcision, the observance of food laws and festive days, which were the issues that needed to be abolished.

Schreiner's contribution here is emphasizing Paul's rejection of the aspect of the law that stretched Jewish particularism and set them apart from all nations as far as salvation was concerned.

Longenecker (1990) says that Church Fathers such as Tertullian, Irenaeus and others generally separated the law into two halves, namely the ceremonial laws of Leviticus and the moral requirements of the law. The former had come to an end in Christ, the latter was amplified and retained in Christ.

I have come to understand that the general concept of the law varies, as the word may be used to refer to the requirements of the covenant or all that God requires of his people. The law may refer to the Pentateuch, the Old Testament or Scripture in general. The treatment of the law in Galatians sets up a contrast between the promises to Abraham and the requirements of the covenant that came later. However, priority was given to the promises over and above the importance of the law. Again, the coming of Christ, seen as the promised seed to Abraham, marked the designated time for gentiles to share in the blessings of the covenant that was promised from the beginning. However, this participation in the covenant relationship was not marked by observance

of the Jewish law but on faith in Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit, which would empower participants to remain faithful to the covenant. I also observe that sometimes the word 'law' is not used alone but in the expression 'under the law'. This has caught my attention and will, therefore, be discussed in the next section.

### **Under the law**

The expression "under the law" occurs in Pauline literature and it is very important in Galatians where it occurs several times (3:23, 4:4-5, 21, 5:13). The phrase is also found in Romans and 1 Corinthians (Rm. 6:14-15, 1 Cor. 9:20). Marcus (2001) suggests that since the phrase did not seem to appear in other Jewish literature, scholars were of the opinion that it may have originated from Paul in response to the Galatian crisis. Marcus contends that the phrase occurred in the plural form in Josephus where gentile proselytes were encouraged to join Judaism. He observes that another school of thought attributes the phrase to Paul's Christian opponents, who used it to make an argument similar to what Josephus made on gentile Christians in their teachings in Galatia. He argues that if this assertion is true, then the phrase did not originate from Paul, but he used it in order to debate his opponents. Marcus (2001) suggests that the background to the phrase is to be found in a Jewish Midrash around the Sinai covenant in Exodus 19:17 when Moses led the people to camp at the foot of the Mountain where the law was given. He explains that this incident earned the expression "at the foot of the mountain" (ὕπὸ τὸ ὄρος). The Jewish people were later reminded on how they encountered the Lord "at the foot of the mountain", which is translated as 'under the mountain' (Deuteronomy 4:11). This was what has been rendered

‘beneath’ or ‘under the mountain’. He says further that this expression generated from the idea that ‘the mountain was lifted up by God’ which meant that it shook violently and it was terrifying. This background to the expression provided two ideas.

Positively, the elevation of the mountain provided the opportunity for the people to behold God from their vantage point beneath the mountain, while Moses and some selected people were allowed to see God on the mountain. Marcus argues that the mountain became the mirror through which the people were allowed to see God. Since the mountain was associated with Torah, the latter became the medium to see, know and experience the vision and will of God.

Marcus observes the negative side of the experience. This was that the image of an elevated mountain may be terrifying and threatening and thus if the people refused to accept the Torah, they could be crushed and destroyed by the mountain. In effect, the mountain was lifted up not to serve as a mirror to experience God, but to intimidate the people to accept the Torah. This, by implication, connotes the idea that the Torah was imposed on the people. Hence the idea may have developed that the Torah had both positive and negative implications for the people. It is possible that the teachers may have used this information to encourage and at the same time threaten the Galatians to accept the Torah. On the other hand, if God threatened the people to accept the Torah, those threats were for their own good; the law was to lead them to life. The interpreters of the text later employed a verb that became a technical verb for those who converted to Judaism, that is, proselyte derived from προσέρχασθαι, “to approach, come near”. A proselyte then is one who had

come near to the God of Israel and to the Torah that manifests his will. ὑπὸ νόμον, therefore, is a short form of a midrash that speaks of the joy of someone experiencing divine revelation and becoming a member of God's people and avoiding the risk of destruction involved in coming under the mountain. Paul may have emphasized the negative side of the midrash ignoring the positive side. Marcus' work provides some insight into the use of the term 'under the law' in relation to my work. This is very helpful as he relates the term specifically to the Mosaic covenant.

Longenecker (1999) argues that under the law means under the discipline, authority and tutelage of the law. Chamblin (1993) suggests that "under the law" means "under sin"; that is why Christ had to suffer the curse of the law for those under the law. It is the Spirit that grants freedom to believers from the letter of the law. Longenecker rather relates the term 'under the law' in general sense to all laws and not particularly to the Mosaic law.

### **Allegory**

The word "allegory" comes from the Greek word ἀλληγορέω. Henebury (2007) defines the word allegory as coming from two Greek words ἄλλος, "other", and ἡγορέω, "to speak publicly", from ἀγορά, "assembly". It therefore means "to speak in another way". According to him, it is a method that brings out hidden meanings from a literal text. He observes that the word is sometimes explained as "extended metaphor". According to Viviano (2008) the term is used to refer to a story with two levels of meaning: the literal meaning and the one that is hidden beneath the surface of the text. She says that both meanings are however valid and that a literal interpretation does not exhaust the divinely revealed purpose of a passage. Viviano (2008) argues that

allegorical treatment of text was first borrowed by early Hellenistic Jewish writers like Philo of Alexandria in an attempt to synthesize Hebrew and Greek thought. She adds that Philo, for example, saw the Old Testament as a book of symbols with hidden meanings beyond the historical literal sense, and he used this method to demonstrate that Jewish scripture contained some essence of Greek philosophy. Viviano (2008) adds that allegory became important in sacred writings so that new meanings could be injected into them that reflected contemporary times and yet reserved their canonical authority. Viviano goes on to say that this kind of interpretation was taken on by Christian Platonists of Alexandria, especially Clement and Origen. Origen in particular followed three main modes of interpretation; the literal, the moral and the spiritual meanings. Later, Augustine also saw a hidden significance in some New Testament passages like the story of the Good Samaritan. The spiritual meaning was read into the story in a way alien to the original intention of the story. Viviano's work serves as a good background to understand Pauline use of allegory. It prepares me for the hidden meaning that may be derived from a literal meaning of a text.

According to Hans Dieter Betz, Paul interpreted Galatians 4:21-31 allegorically and mixed his allegory with typology to enable him bring a deeper truth to the surface historical materials. He adds that Judaism had adopted such a method long before Paul, and there is the possibility that primitive Christianity also used the method.

Longenecker (1990) also agrees that Paul interpreted Galatians 4:21-31 allegorically. He notes that there is a parallel between Philo's allegorical method and that of Paul's, and adds that Paul also differed from Philo in many

respects. He points out that the method was widespread among Rabbis of Palestinian tradition. The terminology in the passage signified two things: either the stories of Abraham, his wives and children were originally given allegorically, thus doubting their historicity, or the stories were historical but it was Paul who interpreted them allegorically.

Martyn (1997) is of the opinion that the historical materials in Genesis were being interpreted allegorically by Paul to find a deeper meaning in addition to what the materials appear to say. Longenecker (1990) emphasizes that the hidden meaning was triggered by polemic debate, and that it was circumstantial and ‘ad hominem’. Allegorical interpretation, therefore, connotes two layers of meanings of which one may be the primary meaning and the other secondary. The secondary meaning may be derived from the first or may be alien to the first meaning.

Huizenga (2013) argues that the interpretation theory of allegory had been misunderstood over the years as a process that has the tendency to read things into text that are not present in the text. He rather perceives allegory as “the discipline, religious, spiritual interpretation of sacred, authoritative texts motivated by their inspired, inherent dynamism for the nurturing of the life of the community” (Huizenga, 2013, p. 78). He explains that the fourfold sense of scripture evolved in a situation where a text was common to Christianity, Judaism as well as paganism and where interpretation was based on several assumptions. Allegory was used as a tool to reconcile several texts into harmony. Allegory is able to make the meaning of a text perpetually relevant. This caused many New Testament writers to use Old Testament information and to read them allegorically to make the message relevant in different



historical and theological communities. An example is the allegorical interpretation of Galatians 4:21-31 where Paul made a radical spiritual interpretation of the stories of Abraham and his family. Huizenga's work gives a positive outlook on Paul's re-reading of Old Testament passage in Galatians. This helps to reduce the tension that appears to surround the text under study.

Davies (2004) is of the view that when scholars suggest that typology is a kind of allegorical process of interpretation, they indicate that events, symbols and even persons in the bible, especially in the Old Testament, were prophetic in nature and that what was said of them is believed to have been fulfilled in Christ. She, however, warns that what happened in Galatians 4:21-31 was not typology, since what is prophetic lacks the surprising character with which Paul stunned his readers. Paul rather allegorically manipulated different metaphors to create thesis and antithesis. Sometimes, the meaning he associated with the words was even opposed to or contradicted the apparent meaning of the word. Sometimes there were historical contradictions or misuse of scripture, which was all part of his argumentative strategy, since he spoke to different audiences. Davies suggests that Paul was speaking to both his Jewish opponents and his gentile converts and his message was like a double-edged sword, meant for each group to do their own interpretation. Davies' position disagrees with Betz (1979) and others who posit that Paul combines allegory and typology. Davies rather emphasizes on the creativity of Paul, who was able to weave his argument with a double-edged sword to be relevant for his converts as well as his opponents.

## **Review on Paul Ricoeur**

Before I proceed, I find it important to talk about who Paul Ricoeur is. Jean Paul Gustave Ricoeur was born on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 1913 in Valence, France. Both of his parents died in early stages of his life. Therefore, he was brought up by his paternal grandparents. He was a very intelligent student, and this helped him to earn a scholarship to study at University of Sorbonne in 1934. There, he met an eminent philosopher Gabriel Marcel, who became his teacher, mentor, and friend (Ritivoi, 2006; Pallauer and Dauenhauer, 2011; Atkins, 2016). Ricoeur became a prisoner of war in World War II in Germany, which also had a great influence on his writings. He worked in various universities like Strasbourg, the Sorbonne, University of Paris, Louvain and Chicago (Ritivoi, 2006; Pellauer and Deuenhauer, 2011). As a French phenomenologist, Ricoeur became an existentialist, an expert in hermeneutics, linguistics and psychoanalysis (Ritivoi, 2006). He developed his methodologies from these interdisciplinary areas and developed his theories of interpretation, which was applicable to all texts.

Ricoeur (1980) argued that there had always been a hermeneutical problem in Christianity. This is because Christianity had its source from a proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, which was originally in an oral form, and which had now been transmitted in the form of written texts. He observed that in order to get the Christian message from the written text and make it a living word, there was the need for interpretation (Ricoeur, 1980).

Ricoeur (1980) made an interesting and rich discussion on allegory which is very useful to me. He explained that the fundamental Hermeneutic of Christianity is understood as its fulfillment of the rituals of the old testament.

He saw the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments as an allegorical one because through allegory we are able to establish that the Jewish events are fulfilled in Christ. He described the Sarah/Hagar allegory as Christian allegory that is different from those of Philo and Cicero that saw a text as a lens to understand something else. Rather, Pauline allegory together with those of Tertullian and Origen is inseparable to the mystery of Christ. This is because this allegory allows Christians to read the Christ events from the point of view of ancient scripture. Consequently, Ricoeur condemned Marcion and Gnosticism that attempted to sever the good news of Christ from its hermeneutical relationship with the old testament.

Ricoeur (1980) also suggested that even though the Bible is the inspired Word of God, it must be subjected to the general or philosophical principles of interpretation and be treated as ordinary literature. Ricoeur is of the opinion that a critical approach to the biblical text will help to make its confessional character more credible, since “neither faith excludes criticism nor criticism excludes faith” (Ricoeur, 1980).

Ricoeur’s (1976) style of work was found in his ability to weave together different concepts from interdisciplinary areas of his contemporary philosophers and theologians to form a composite of his methodology. Ricoeur took pains to make sure that each borrowed concept retained its particular character, yet mingled well with others in a complex whole to create something new. He enjoyed describing concepts in pairs using opposite terms as the two sides of a coin such as he did in the dialectics of understanding and explanation, discourse as events and meaning and meaning as sense and reference. It is important to point out that Ricoeur did not set out to do

exegesis of biblical text but to understand the human person and his or her existence in life. However, Ricoeur was of the opinion that the human person is understood through interpretation.

### **African Biblical Readers**

Moyaert (2014) did not apply Ricoeur's theory to any particular text but rather she reviewed Ricoeur's general outlook on biblical hermeneutics, and argued that Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutics was so original and that it had been accepted by a range of biblical scholars and schools of thought. According to her, what was central to Ricoeur's approach was the argument that biblical hermeneutics was a regional one that should be made to conform to general philosophical principles of hermeneutics. To Moyaert, this allowed the Bible to be treated as any other literature and be subjected to criticism like any genre. This was important because faith is not against critical thinking and every religious conviction has its critical dimension. Moyaert observed that the Bible was taken as a written discourse that was removed from its original context, and it may be studied like any conversation. According to her, what made biblical hermeneutic unique in Ricoeur's work was the peculiar character of God in the central place of the bible as its reference. The presence of God in the Bible made it different from ordinary discourse to become a religious document.

Hecker (2014), on the other hand, critiqued Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutic and also applied it to a specific biblical theme. What is significant in his work was his disagreement with Ricoeur that written work was dissociated from its author. Even though he accepted the fact that distance between author and reader created problems in interpretation, he maintained

that author and reader still shared some common characteristics of interest. Therefore, instead of the principle of dissociation and recontextualization, he propounded the hermeneutics of metaphorization, where he used metaphor as a tool for interpretation. Hecker identified two domains in metaphor: the source domain and target domain. He posited that understanding the knowledge and structure of the source domain was mapped to understanding the knowledge and structure of the target domain. He explained further that when God was, for example, called the Good Shepherd, the understanding and knowledge of animal husbandry was mapped unto the domain of God and his relationship with man. The mapping was done on selective and partial basis so that what was not beneficial in the source domain was eliminated from the mapping. In the case of biblical hermeneutics, the source domain will be the biblical passages which would be studied and mapped into the target domain of the reader.

Thus, Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory is not only applicable to biblical texts but to other disciplines like education. In biblical hermeneutics, different dimensions of Ricoeur's theory have been used by various authors for different purposes. Yet, within the limited scope of my study, I have not come across any dimension of the theory being applied to Galatians, which will make my study quite original. As an African, I now review few African biblical readers to be informed on African hermeneutics to enrich the study.

West (2001) notes that many African biblical scholars have largely used western biblical tools for biblical interpretation because they had been trained in Western academic institutions. This was largely due to the initial lack of logistics and resources for theological and biblical studies in Africa.

He however, adds that South Africa was perhaps the only exception to this assertion. He claims that white South Africans generally used historical criticism in interpreting the bible, which is different from their black counterparts. The black South Africans, on the other hand, emphasize the social and contextual needs of the people and generally focus on the correspondence between their experiences and the Bible. He argues that African biblical scholars have noted the relationship between scholarly and ordinary readings that there were some elements of ordinary readings in their own process of academic readings. West (2001) suggests that interestingly scholarly readers make effective use of the rich resources of ordinary readers such as their struggle for liberation and survival, their quest for healing, their marginalization and poverty as the basis on which to build the theologies of the scholarly readings. Moreover, African arts, symbols and narrative stories are rich resources for scholarly readers.

West (2001) proposes four commitments in doing contextual criticism as a tool to study the bible. The first of these is the commitment to read the Bible critically. In reading the Bible critically, West proposes three modes of reading: Reading behind the text, reading the text itself and reading in front of the text. West explains further that the first mode uses the historical critical tool and a sociological model to reconstruct the historical period in which the text was produced and the society that produced it. The text is read in the light of these findings and then it is appropriated in the present context of the reader.

What West means by reading the text is more of using literary critical tools like narrative, rhetoric, sermon, etc., to get the meaning of the text and

then appropriate it to the present context. The last model that West discusses concentrates on discerning a predominant theme, symbol or metaphor as the key to getting the sense of the whole book. The weakness of this model is that it is difficult to reconstruct with precision the original history and society. Moreover, this method needs a lot of training for the research to be successful.

Draper (2001) agrees with Patte and Grenholm (2000) on the tri-polar model, which discusses distantiation, contextualization and appropriation. He argues that distantiation is allowing a text to speak for itself, where readers distance themselves from the text, and view the text as another entity of a different historical, social, cultural and economic context from the readers. He contends that this model uses a combination of the historical and literary tools to reconstruct the original context of the text, so that readers do not impose their own presuppositions, prejudices, and needs on the text, but the creative reconstruction helps to create distance between readers and the text (Draper, 2001).

The second phase of the process is contextualization. Draper (2001) argues that there is no absolute meaning in a text, and that meaning is generated through the encounter between the reader(s) and the context of the reading. This is because it is difficult to reconstruct with precision what the text meant for the original readers, and there is the need to move to what the text means in the present context. The text is then appropriated in the light of the context of readers, which is the third and final phase of the model (Draper, 2001).

Mijoga (2001) made a study of popular biblical readers in Malawi, using Africa Independent (Indigenous) Churches (AIC) pastors' sermons as a

case study. To him, real African readers are those who do not use commentaries in their sermons. He argues that popular African preachers usually begin and end their sermons with prayers. Mijoga proposes that African readers often use inductive methods to deliver their sermon. He adds that they may also use different interpretive tools such as prayers, songs, puzzles, analogies, drama and stories that either have a direct or indirect relationship with the text, or theme of the sermon. He reasons that because of these modes of interpretation, the Bible is sometimes used interactively to ensure audience participation and the reading is in front of the text.

### **Ghanaian Biblical Readers**

Obeng (1986) studied Romans 8:6 where Paul's statement on prayer appears to be out of context and contradicts other new Testament teaching on prayer. He placed the text in its larger unit, combined textual analysis and historical critical method to generate meaning based on authorial intention. He concluded that the text is not out of place in its context, the verse does not contradict other New Testament teachings and themes on prayer, and that the Holy Spirit intercedes for Christians who prays in difficult times. Obeng demonstrates how a Ghanaian scholarly reader uses western biblical tools in studying a biblical text and generating meaning for all biblical readers.

Anum (2014) studied 1Corinthians 6:9-11 using the theories contextualization distantiation and appropriation and relating it to the rights and rites of sexuality in Africa. He recounted the various rights and rites of sexualities in different African countries and concluded that legal issues are always outside the struggles for rights and rites of sexualities in Africa. This is because, when it comes to these rights, people act instantly, with whatever tool available for



redress rather than to wait for legal processes. Anum started his research by studying the African context, came to read the text and then appropriated the insight into the African context again. He demonstrates a Ghanaian scholarly reader using ordinary resources of Africa to generate meaning for the African context. This is very good for my research.

Ntreh (2016) studied the bible, cultural identity and mission and discovered that the bible is situated in a dual cultural setting, the culture of Ancient Near East and that of the Greco-Roman civilization. In the same vein, missionary activities in both the Old and New Testaments were mediated through the Jewish and Greco Roman cultures of the time. Unfortunately, missionaries to the Gold Coast, used dialectic rather than the dialogic model in their missionary activities. Hence, everything Ghanaian was condemned as evil. In order to become a good Christian, all cultural identities were to be abandoned, and in its place, western names and other practices considered to be good were encouraged. This did not help the long term Christianization of the Ghanaian. He concluded that a dialogic process of Christianization is very important so that things that are common to Ghanaians could be used to preach the word of God to them. Ntreh used historical critical method to situate the bible in its historical cultural context and applied the insight into the Ghanaian context.

I discovered that Ghanaian scholarly readers use different methodology to study the bible: historical critical tool is sometimes combined with textual, or contextual readings are tools used to study the bible.

These are some highlights as to how some African biblical scholars interact with the bible. They usually start from the context of the reader, according to the needs and purpose of the reading, and the reading community. I reviewed related literature on key areas of the study. Within the scope of my research, I discovered that there is a dearth of literature on covenantal discourse relating to specific biblical texts. Hence, I seek to contribute to scholarship in this area.

### **Operational Definition of Terms**

**Appropriation:** it is the process of generating new events from existing knowledge and assimilating it in the context of the reader

**Comprehension:** it is the process by which a reader makes his or her own a knowledge or an experience that was previously alien.

**Covenantal:** it is the adjective of covenant. A covenant is a relationship of obligation that is backed by oath that may be sealed with some ritual ceremony.

**Discourse:** is a communication between two persons or two groups of persons

**Distantiation:** it is an objective approach to text to ensure the elimination of too much subjectivity. This is a process whereby the text is regarded as another object that is allowed to speak for itself. In this way, the text is separated from its author, its original context and first readers.

**Explanation:** is the process of breaking down of propositions to make it easier for one to understand.

**Pre-critical understanding:** it is the initial knowledge of a reader on a subject of enquiry before any rigorous research is done on the topic.

Understanding: it is a reader's capacity to grasp as a whole the reality embedded in a discourse or a text.

Validation: it is the process by which a reader puts to text the content of his or her initial understanding. In other words, validation is the explanation of what is guessed at the pre-critical understanding.

### **Sources of Information**

Electronic books

Journals

Books

Articles

Interviews- experts, elders, students, teachers, catechists

### **Organization of the Study**

The work consists of six chapters. Chapter One discusses the introductory issues: the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, the literature review, the methodology, the hypothetical theory and the organization of the work. Chapter Two deals with the relationship between covenantal discourse and Galatians 4:21-31, while Chapter Three examines Galatians 4:21-31 using the Hermeneutical theory of Paul Ricoeur. Chapter Four examines the general perception of the events of Biblical Covenants. Chapter Five draws implications from the study, while Chapter Six outlines the findings, gives a summary, draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COVENANTAL**  
**DISCOURSE AND GALATIANS 4:21-31**

**Introduction**

The two terms “discourse” and “covenantal” are not commonly put together as interpretative tools to study Galatians. Covenantal discourse was used by Jonathan Draper to study the “Q Source” in the gospel of Luke as oral performance (Draper, 2006). Paul’s letter to the Galatians has rather been studied extensively as a persuasive discourse that communicated to the churches of Galatia in an attempt to respond to the needs of the congregations. The letter has also been known to contain some terminologies and elements of covenant that are worthy of examination. However, I argue, following Draper, that the combination of the concepts is more innovative in examining Galatians 4:21-31 than other perspectives. In this chapter, I examine the concept of discourse and how meaning is generated in a discourse from the point of view of Paul Ricoeur. An attempt is made to establish when a discourse becomes covenantal and the possible relationship between covenantal discourse and Galatians 4:21-31.

**The Concept and Structure of Discourse**

Ricoeur describes discourse as a communication between two people or groups of people about something. He observes that discourse serves as a link between a speaker/an author and audience/readers in dialogue (Ricoeur, 1976). He maintains that discourse uses language to communicate human experience and acquires its structure (Ricoeur, 1976; 1977). However, in discourse, words are not understood in isolation, but only in relation to the

context of the statements in which they occur so that the meaning of a sentence is distributed among the words that form the sentence, and the suggestion that the reader attaches to the meanings in relationship with other words in the sentence (Ricoeur, 1976; Draper, 2006). A discourse, therefore, is understood in context between the speaker and the audience who both know what is going on; otherwise, there is the tendency for misunderstanding (Draper, 2006).

The structure of a discourse, therefore, consists of the speaker, the audience and the message (Ricoeur, 1976; Kennedy, 1984; Schokel, 1998). Kennedy (1984) adds a fourth part, which is the context within which the discourse is generated and delivered. Although Draper (2006) has three parts in his discourse register, these embodies all the four elements mentioned above and adds a fifth element, which is the method of delivery. A discourse may exist in oral or written form (Ricoeur, 1976; Kennedy, 1984 and Draper, 2006). Ricoeur (1976) observes that in oral discourse, the speaker and the audience share the same dialogical context and so the audience may have the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarifications from the speaker in the dialogue to make generation of meaning easier. Ricoeur argues however that once a discourse is written, it is distanced from its author, the first readers and the context that generated the discourse and becomes an autonomous text (1976; 1977). This is because the text may find itself in different historical and geographical locations of readers who may not even know the author, the first audience and their context (Ricoeur, 1976). Therefore, the meaning of a discourse may not depend only on what the original author intended. This will become clearer as I discuss the generation of meaning in discourse.

### **The relationship between the event of discourse and its meaning**

Discourse is described as an event in the sense that someone actually speaks to somebody about something by using language in time and space (Ricoeur, 1976). Ricoeur, however, distinguishes the events from its meaning and emphasizes the meaning of the events as that which makes the event important. In other words, the importance of the event of discourse lies in the interrelations that take place between nouns, verbs and conjunctions or the propositional statements of the discourse. Ricoeur describes the event of discourse as a temporary phenomenon, which takes place in the present and vanishes after the speech. On the other hand, the meaning of what is said and the code that gives shape to the language that is used in the discourse are rather stable, universal and are not bound by time. Hence, those who heard what is said may repeat it in their own words or even in a different language to those who were not present. In this way, the meaning of discourse may be repeated, translated, interpreted, added to or subtracted from or may be transformed into something new (Ricoeur, 1976; 1977).

### **How meaning is generated in discourse**

Ricoeur reveals that there are two sides of meaning: the first part of meaning consists of what the speaker intends to say. He explains that what the writer intends to say is what is referred to as the utterer's meaning or the intention of the author, which is the subjective side of meaning (Ricoeur, 1976). Sometimes, it is referred to as the psychological dimension of meaning. On the other hand, the meaning or the sense derived from the statement of the speaker is termed the utterance meaning, which is also the objective side of meaning or the grammatical meaning. He, however, makes it clear that what a

speaker wants to say is located in the utterance of the speaker (Ricoeur, 1976; 1977).

Ricoeur appears to be passionate about the fact that in spoken discourse the subjective intention of the speaker or what the speaker actually wants to communicate and the meaning of the statements made are generally the same (Ricoeur, 1976; 1977). He insists that this is not the case in written discourse. He argues that what the sentence means may be different from what the speaker intended to say once the message is written because there is the possibility of bad communication, or that the content of a written discourse may generate a meaning not anticipated by the author (Ricoeur, 1977). Ricoeur explains that what the text means is more obvious and carries more weight than what the author meant. This is called semantic autonomy (Ricoeur, 1976). This is where exegesis begins and the communication is then between the reader and the text in the physical absence of the author (Ricoeur, 1976).

Ricoeur states further that a written discourse has a universal audience. He explains that even though the author, at the time of writing, may have a section of the public in mind, anybody else can read the text, which is also not limited to the social situation of its first readers (1976). Ricoeur opines that the semantic autonomy of the text opens it up to a range of potential readers and an indefinite number of interpretations and concludes that hermeneutic begins where dialogue ends (Ricoeur, 1976).

Ricoeur discussed other dimensions of speech that add to the production of meaning, which will be considered in the next section.

### **Speech performatives or speech acts**

Ricoeur uses the theories of J.L. Austin and Emile Benveniste to explain the locutionary and illocutionary dimensions of the speech act, which add to the meaning of discourse (Ricoeur, 1977). A locutionary act is the act of saying, i.e. the act of performing a speech or delivering a message (1977). While in the process of speaking, locutionary act is being performed. An illocutionary act is what one does as one speaks, which adds some force behind what is being said (1976, 1977). If there is a fire and someone shouts or screams, the force of the screaming is an indication of danger and it is meant to call for help or alert others of the danger. That is illocutionary act, which also adds meaning to what is said. Perlocutionary act is the effect of what one says or does on the hearers (Ricoeur, 1976). There is also interlocutionary act, which acknowledges the presence of a hearer to the speaker in dialogue, which manifests the dialogical dimension of discourse (Ricoeur, 1976, 77). There is yet another dimension of meaning, which will be discussed next.

### **The theoretical and practical dimensions of meaning**

Apart from the dialectic of event and meaning in which Ricoeur differentiates the utterer's meaning from the utterance's meaning and speech acts, Ricoeur gives a further characteristic pair of meanings as *sense* and *reference*, which are located in both the utterer's and the utterance meanings (Ricoeur, 1976; 1977). While the sense refers to the abstract meaning of the sentence or the meaning of the statements of the discourse, the reference is the evidence or the external object of meaning. In oral discourse, the reference may be part of the context of the speaker and the audience. The speaker may



give examples or point to the object of discussion and this is called ostensive reference. On the other hand, in written discourse, since the author and reader do not share the same dialogical context, the reference may be suspended or it may be recontextualized in the present context of the reader as non-ostensive reference.

Ricoeur points out that it is only the sentence that allows the reader to distinguish what is said and the object that is being discussed. He emphasizes that the distinction between sense and reference is necessary and an inescapable character of discourse. Sense and reference are two sides of the same meaning of which one is the abstract and the other is the practical dimension of meaning. Ricoeur observes that though the sense is innate to the discourse, the reference moves language to go beyond itself by relating language to the world. It is by the reference that discourse can be true or false (1976; 1977).

The structure of the meaning of discourse is presented graphically in the chart below showing the chain of how meaning is generated.

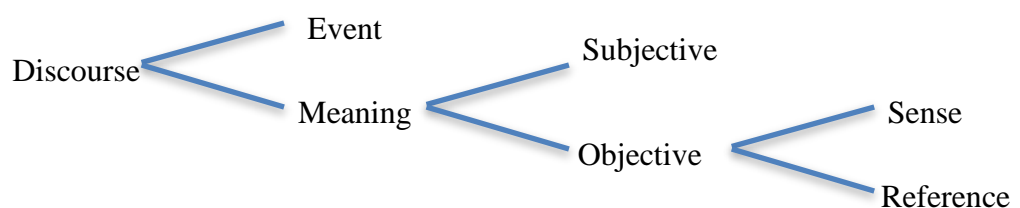


Figure 2: The structure of Meaning of Discourse (Source: Nsiah, 2017)

The chart shows that discourse consists of event and meaning, but it is not the event that is important but the meaning of the event. Again, the chart shows that the meaning of discourse is divided into subjective and objective meanings. Furthermore, I am more interested in the objective meaning, which is also divided into sense and reference. It is the reference that externalizes

discourse and traces it to the particular object under discussion in order to make what is said true or false.

### **Types of Biblical Discourses**

In describing discourse in relationship to interpretation, Ricoeur identifies five types of biblical discourses as reflections that manifest varieties of expression of faith. They are Prophetic, Narrative, Prescriptive, Wisdom and Hymnic discourses (Ricoeur, 1980). Interestingly, he does not mention letters, although he uses Pauline letters in many of his examples. These are discussed briefly as follows:

#### **Prophetic discourse**

Ricoeur (1980) describes prophetic discourse as oracular, where someone speaks for and on behalf of another. Its peculiar characteristic is the introductory formula, “thus says the Lord” or “Yahweh says this”. In this way, the prophet communicates with a particular audience on God’s instructions. Thus, the role of the prophet links revelation to the issue of divine inspiration since the human author, under the inspiration of God, reveals God’s will for his people (Ricoeur, 1980).

#### **Narrative discourse**

In the narrative discourse, information is narrated in a story telling form. It is however important to note that behind the story is the event, which happens in time and space, and in which God intervenes as the principal actant (Ricoeur, 1980). The event recounted is not just historical information, but a revelation of God and confession takes place through narration. In effect, narrative discourse recounts revelatory acts of God which are brought to

language in speech as history. Hence, narrative confession aims at God's trace in historical events (Ricoeur, 1980).

### **Prescriptive discourse**

Prescriptive discourse is seen as the practical dimension of revelation, where a prescription of what is symbolically perceived as the will of God is brought into practice. This is identified as revelation in the form of instruction, or law such as the Torah. In this way, divine law then is perceived as an imperative from above (Ricoeur, 1980).

### **Wisdom discourse**

Wisdom discourse finds its expression in wisdom literature. It is first perceived as the art of living well or the way to true happiness. Ricoeur views wisdom in relation to how it empowers the believer to endure suffering in a meaningful way by the example of Job. Job is able to move beyond what any logic can offer in the created order. He helps to raise suffering into a new quality of meaning that purifies fear and pity. This wisdom is held to be a gift from God, which is different from the knowledge of good and evil promised by the serpent to Adam and Eve in the Genesis account. During the exile, wisdom was personified as a divine feminine figure that had always existed and would always exist. She lived with God and had accompanied God in creation from the beginning. There was the perception that intimacy with wisdom was intimacy with God, which put wisdom in the realm of prophecy. In the apocalypse, the concepts of wisdom and prophecy converge to reveal divine secrets concerning the last days (Ricoeur, 1980).

### **Hymnic discourse**

Hymnic discourse is also known as lyric genre. It is found mostly in the Psalms: praise, supplication, and thanksgiving are the three major genres of this discourse. Whether in thanksgiving or lamentation, the words form the feelings in the process of expressing it, and revelation is the very formation of our feelings that transcend their everyday, ordinary modalities (Ricoeur, 1980).

Following Aristotle, Ricoeur also talks about rhetorical discourse in other areas as the process of composition, style and argumentation. For Ricoeur, rhetorical discourse is an event that takes into consideration the author, the audience, and the message. The composition of the discourse also takes into account the situation and expectation of the audience since the effectiveness of the discourse is dependent on the response of the audience. It should also be noted that Ricoeur talks about poetic discourse as a dimension of rhetorical discourse that relays information through metaphors that engage the imaginations and emotions of the audience for its interpretation. He draws attention to the fact that poetic discourse can be part of all discourses as a means of persuasion.

These characteristics of discourse help in the process of deciphering the meaning of a work. How then does discourse become covenantal? Although Ricoeur talks about the fact that hermeneutic situation is created when one reflects on the relationship between the old and the new testaments or covenants, he does not talk about covenantal discourse and does not put the two concepts together. I, therefore, adapt Ricoeur's method to study covenantal discourse.

### **Covenantal discourse**

A detailed examination of covenant is reserved for a later chapter, and so it suffices to state here that covenant, like discourse, is also an event that takes place in space and time between two people or groups of people. The event takes place in a given time and it is of temporary character. However, what is important is not just the event of covenant, but the meaning of the event, which endures even after the event is over. In other words, the relationship that is established in covenant is permanent, and new members are incorporated through renewal or reformulation of an existing covenant to meet different historical and theological needs and to make it a living reality. Covenant event, therefore, is a human experience that is brought to language in discourse.

The structure of covenant may be given as the covenant giver, the recipient, and the text that spells out the content of the covenant as well as the actual ratification that seals the covenant. Hence, a discourse may be said to be covenantal if it discusses the actual or historical events of covenant with all of its constituent parts. This is the case if covenant is considered as a human experience that is brought to language, as a way to re-enact the original event in the new context of the covenant community in order to make it a living reality. Draper describes covenantal discourse as a term that has been used in the same way as a sermon with the intention of “emphasizing the communal, performed nature of the material” (Draper, 2006, 74). In other words, the content of the discourse that discusses covenant issues may be performed orally to bring out its dialogical dimension. A sermon is a speech or a lecture that may be given by a clergyman or any religious personality on any topic,

but especially with a biblical, theological or moral character. A covenantal discourse then may be a sermon, exhortation, instruction, or a lecture from one person to another, which may be biblical, theological or moral in nature. In this study, it is adapted and used as discussions on covenant with a view to re-enacting the covenant event for the context of the converts in Galatia. My interest is to find out what kind of covenant event was being re-enacted and for what purpose. To be able to do this, the relationship between covenantal discourse and Galatians 4:21-31 is discussed.

### **Galatians 4:21-31 as a Covenantal Discourse**

Paul's letter to the Galatians is accepted by scholars as a discourse because it is a communication or a dialogue between Paul and the churches in Galatia. It is generally accepted as a discourse that is rhetorical in nature because it was meant to be persuasive enough to cause its audience to change their attitude and take a decision in line with the demand of the discourse (Kennedy, 1984; Adams, 2012). Although the discourse is in written form, it is possible that it was meant to be read aloud to its audience, the majority of whom may not have been literate.

I argue that the discourse is covenantal because it recounts the event of an existing covenant in order to help the Galatians to establish their identity and position in the unfolding story of Israel and renew their commitment to the divine human relationship.

Consequently, a greater portion of the letter is dedicated to reconstructing past events. Paul, therefore, recounted old stories in such a way that the Galatians themselves would recognize their role in the historical development of the covenant. In order to ascertain this, the structure of the

whole letter is examined to see where the passage under study is located and how the passage fits into the whole letter. I adapted and modified the structural outline of Betz (1979) as the first scholar to subject Galatians to a detailed rhetorical analysis. The whole letter may be divided into three parts as introduction (1:1-5), the body (1:6-6:10), and conclusion (6:11-18).

**i. Introduction or epistolary prescript -1:1-5**

This section forms the introductory part of the letter, which indicates the author as Paul with his co-workers and the addressees are the churches in Galatia. Paul describes himself as an apostle, one who is sent by Christ himself, or who had received a special commission by Christ. Paul greets his audience in the grace and peace of God the father, and Jesus Christ. He describes Christ as one who was raised by God, and who sacrificed his life in order to save others from their sins. The introduction reveals the dialogic character of discourse and some characteristics of a covenant. Christ is revealed as a victim who was immolated so that his blood atoned for sins of others. Paul describes himself as the one sent to draw his converts' attention to the efficacy of the blood of Jesus to the removal of sin. This section then, describes the role of Christ in salvation history, as well as the divine commissioning of Paul as a covenant mediator.

Then comes the body of the letter. The structure of the body of the letter is an adaptation of the structure proposed by Betz in a modified form. The body of the letter is divided into five parts as the exordium (1:6-11), narration (1:12-2:14), proposition (2:15-21), proof (3:1-4:31) and exhortation (5:1-6:10, Betz, 1979).

**ii. Exordium: 1:6-11 (Betz, 1979)**

This section is the opening part of the body. Kennedy (1984) suggests that rhetorical discourse usually begins at this section to seek attention, good will or sympathy of the audience towards the speaker and sets the stage for the dialogue. Paul ignored the usual expression of gratitude that is typical of his letters (Ephesians 1:3; Philippians 1:3). He went straight to express his astonishment at the promptness of the converts in turning away from the grace of Christ to a different gospel. One could clearly perceive the illocutionary act of anger or disappointment in Paul. He condemned those responsible for this confusion and called them troublemakers. This sets the tone of the letter indicating that the information that is coming is a serious one and the audience might be in crisis.

**iii. 1:12-2:14: narration (Betz, 1979)**

It is the statement of facts or what may be considered the background information to the theme under discussion. Here, Paul narrated the events of his own past to show how enthusiastic he was as a Jew, how he persecuted the church, how his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus changed his perspective on life. This narration was to legitimize his apostolic authority to teach the right gospel to his converts in fulfilment of God's own design for him to preach to the gentiles. Here too Paul confirms his role as a covenant mediator.

**iv. 2:15-21: proposition/the thesis (Betz, 1979)**

This is the main proposition or thesis of the discourse for which the author has designed an argument to support. Paul initially identified himself with his fellow Jews separating them from gentiles as righteous people



because of the law. Paul established the realization that while still under the law, the Jews were justified not by observing the law, but by faith in Christ. In this respect, Paul and his people had acknowledged that they were previously wrong with the law (2:18) and so they had come to believe in Christ. Consequently, they could not remain with the law, otherwise the death and resurrection of Christ would be meaningless. Therefore, the Jews were saved by grace and their faith in Christ and not by the law. Paul is differentiating the different roles of the law and faith in the ongoing divine and human relationships.

iv. **3:1-4:31: the proof section (Betz, 1979)**

This section consists of a series of arguments to support the proposition of the author. This section then is the key section of the discourse that is justifying the position of the author (The details of this section will be discussed later).

v. **5:1-6:10: exhortation/ethical teaching (Betz, 1979)**

This is the section that gives ethical instructions on how the converts are to behave towards God and relate to one another. Paul encouraged his audience not to go back to circumcision and to the law so the grace that is offered by Christ would be useful to them. He encouraged them to be firm in their faith in Christ, and to be in good relationship with one another. What is important above all is the fact that the converts are to be guided by the Spirit in all that they do. This appear to be some kind of stipulations of a new kind, to a covenant community that is made possible by the presence of the Spirit. These are signs of renewal, where outmoded elements are removed or modified and new ones are infused to meet the needs of the time.

**6:11-18: epistolary postscript (Betz, 1979,16-23).**

This serves as the concluding part of the structure of the letter where Paul encouraged his audience to live as new creatures.

From the above structure, it is clear that the passage under discussion (Gal 4:21-31) falls under what is rhetorically known as the “proof” section. The proof is a series of arguments that Paul designed to support or justify his position that the Galatians are justified by faith and not by the law, and to counteract the position of his opponents. The events here include the promises to Abraham, the giving of the law, the people’s experience under the law, the gift of Christ and the Spirit. The two main characteristics are Jews and Gentiles and their participation in the old and new covenants. Betz proposes six proofs as follows:

1. 3:1-5: an argument from indisputable evidence
2. 3:6-14: an argument from Scripture
3. 3:15-25: an argument from common human practice
4. 3:26-4:11: an argument from Christian tradition
5. 4:12-20: an argument from friendship
6. 4:21-31: an allegorical argument from Scripture (Betz, 1979, 19-21).

**1. 3:1-5: An argument from indisputable evidence**

This is the introductory part of the proof section. Paul was so upset by the behavior of his converts that he wondered if they were bewitched. He called them foolish or senseless Galatians. One could perceive some illocutionary element here that Paul was disappointed. He posed a rhetorical question, which he expected his audience to answer for themselves. The question revealed that there was no doubt that the Galatians had received the

Holy Spirit. He distinguished the way the Gentiles received the Spirit of God from how Paul and the Jewish people did. He appeared to place the Galatians at an advantageous position for receiving the Spirit by faith. Thus, Paul appealed to the Galatians' experiences of the Spirit, which took place only after they had accepted the message of Christ and believed in it, and the fact that the Spirit continued to be effective among them. For this reason, it was irrelevant for them to want to follow the law since they were already in the Spirit. If the converts were thinking that they could observe the law in order to become members of the covenant community, Paul was assuring them that they had become members already by their faith in Christ, baptism, and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

## 2. **3:6-14: An argument from scripture**

Paul used Abraham as evidence of a person who believed. He hinted on the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants in which the blessings of the gentiles were anticipated so that the expression "all nations" was interpreted as those who believed and who became children of Abraham. Thus, the covenant of Abraham was interpreted as the covenant of faith, so that faith was required of all those who participated in that covenant. Paul contrasted the covenant of faith with that of the law, which was not based on faith but on principles that must be obeyed. The law was able to give life if all of its dimensions were observed and cursed those who were not able to practice it. Paul is gradually justifying the inclusion of the Galatians to the family of Abraham.

3. **3:15-25: an argument from common human practice**

The third argument sharpens the contrast between the covenant of faith and that of the law. Paul emphasized that a ratified covenant could not be annulled, and so all the promises that God made to Abraham and his descendants in the Abrahamic covenant were still valid. In fact, the promise to the seed of Abraham was seen as having been fulfilled in Christ. Paul insisted that the promises were given 430 years before the law, by which time Abraham and his descendants were already gifted with the inheritance. The law was added to deal with sin and to serve as a guardian to give direction until the coming of Christ, who was destined to redeem all people from the curse of the law. The presence of Christ and his redemptive act made it possible for the gentiles to share in the blessings and inheritance of Abraham. Here Paul establishes the irrevocability of the election of Israel, and the fact that there is continuity to the seed of Abraham as it extends to the gentile believers.

4. **3:26-4:11: an argument from Christian tradition**

The fourth argument confirms how the Galatians fit into the history of Israel in becoming children of Abraham. Now, all those who believe in Christ and are baptized, both Jews and gentiles, are children of God and heirs of Abraham. The time when the law serves as a guardian or administrator is over. Now that we are children of God, we do not need any intermediary, as we have a direct relationship with God as a father. Here, the identity of the Galatians is firmly established. They are children of Abraham by faith and they are incorporated into the total historical development of Israel.

5. **4:12-20: an argument from friendship**

In the fifth argument, Paul appeals to the initial enthusiasm with which the Galatians received the good news from him and requests of them to remain with him so that he does not labour in vain. The arguments are climaxed with the allegory of Sarah and Hagar, which is discussed in full in the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

The letter to the Galatians may be considered as a discourse from Paul to the churches in Galatia. The discourse contains many narratives of past events such as that of the apostolic commissioning of Paul, the events of the Abrahamic covenant, some aspect of the Mosaic covenant, and the new covenant of Christ. The discourse seeks to teach and exhort its audience to find their identity in the history of Israel as a covenant community and the role they need to play in it. The discourse can be said to be a covenantal discourse. Now the next chapter deals with a detailed examination of Galatians 4:21-31 using the Hermeneutic theory of Paul Ricoeur. The aim is to generate both a naïve and a critical understanding of the discourse and confirm its covenantal character.

## CHAPTER THREE

### READING GALATIANS 4:21-31 WITH RICOEUR'S EYES

This chapter aims at reading Galatians 4:21-31 from the point of view of Ricoeur. The chapter is divided into two sections: section one deals with pre-critical understanding of the text and section two deals with explanation and validation of the pre-understanding.

#### **Section One: Pre-Understanding Stage**

##### **Introduction**

This section aims at generating pre-critical understanding from Galatians 4:21-31. This is the phase that Ricoeur refers to as naïve understanding or the prejudice of the reader, which is considered an important stage in the overall process of understanding (Ricoeur, 1976). Ricoeur also indicates that the richness of pre-understanding of a text depends on a number of issues such as: one's educational background, experiences in one's personal life including social and religious experiences, information that one may receive from others on the subject, the profession of the individual reader, and the richness of the text itself (Ricoeur, 1976). He again observes that the more one reads the text, the better one understands it. Furthermore, Ricoeur notes that whenever a new insight is generated from the text to replace one's former understanding, then the former interpretation and experiences with the text become pre-understanding. Hence, pre-understanding may be widened to include all former understandings that have been replaced by new insight, and which also forms part of the whole process of understanding.

However, in this study the pre-critical reading of the text is purposefully modified and adapted to include a contextual bible reading

process of Gerald West. West states that “Contextual bible study is essentially a communal process to which local community resources for interpreting the bible and the specialized interpretative tools of biblical scholars are used together to read the bible” (West, 2001; 173). This is because in Africa, pre-critical understanding is better generated from ordinary biblical readers. I am of the view that replacing ordinary readers pre-understanding with my own, would make the pre-understanding more pronounced and enrich the study. Hence, I adapted Ricoeur and West’s theories to this section of the research. The move is also done to create an encounter between Ricoeur’s theory and African biblical interpretation.

Generally, the Ghanaian bible user may be divided into two broad categories: the ordinary and the scholarly readers (West, 2001; Anum, 2007). The ordinary reader is referred to by West as the non-scholarly reader (West, 2007). Anum rather describes ordinary readers as those who read the bible pre-critically, those who are poor and marginalized, those who are probably less educated who use oral culture, contextual, spontaneous and subconscious readers are all considered ordinary readers (Anum, 2007). This category of people may either read the bible or hear it read to them. In this light, Omenyo and Atiemo (2006) describe some ministers from new religious movements in Ghana who always preach in their churches in local languages as functioning better in oral culture, and may be considered as very good examples of ordinary bible readers.

Scholarly readers on the other hand are described as western trained and middle class holders who possess the skill to read a biblical text (Anum, 2007). Sometimes they are classified as academic-trained readers, who are

literate, trained, objective and critical enough to be able to facilitate and collaborates with ordinary readers in a contextual bible reading process.

In this study, ordinary reader refers to one who is educated and literate, who may have been trained to read the bible at home or at church, but is not academically trained to read a biblical text with a particular interpretive tool.

On the other hand, the scholarly reader is the academic biblical reader, an exegete who may have been trained locally or abroad with the requisite interpretive tool to read the bible. Anum suggests that in the reading process, the ordinary readers and scholarly readers perform different functions. While the ordinary reader seeks to make a direct link between the biblical message and the particular social situation in which they find themselves so that the bible is used for practical purposes, the scholarly reader may read the text to contribute to academic progress and may read the text as document of history or as literature (Anum, 2007). It is important that the interface between scholarly readers and ordinary readers is carried out in such a way that a conducive atmosphere is created for the ordinary readers to participate as subjects of interpretation so that they are not dominated by the privileges of the trained reader. The trained reader, should possess the skill that can assist the group in shaping their thoughts and ideas for the benefits of all (West, 2007).

In this particular study, the researcher is the trained reader who reads with educated people who are not academically trained to read a biblical text but who use the bible frequently in their contexts for worship.

Again in this study, the pre-critical reading is done with pre-set questions. Although Ricoeur suggests that the text is to be read as if it is the first time reading material, West suggests that the scholarly reader prepares pre-set



questions that guide the encounter with ordinary readers to help them to remain focused. These pre-set questions are made to ensure that Ricoeur's theory was not a wholesale importation to Africa but was adapted to African biblical interpretation.

### **Reading Galatians 4:21-31 pre-critically**

A group of primary school teachers from Martyrs of Uganda Jubilee school in Kumasi was selected. I purposely chose this group because I wanted to ensure that they use the bible regularly in their work although they were not trained to do so. In this way they qualify to be called ordinary readers.

Twenty (20) Martyrs of Uganda Jubilee School Teachers in Kumasi were to meet me on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2015, after I had previously discussed with the Head teacher about my intention to form a study group to read the bible. Eighteen (18) Christians and two (2) Muslims. When I saw the list of teachers who volunteered for a bible reading exercises that the researcher discussed with the head teacher of the school, I was surprised to see the names of two Muslims. I was not sure whether they wrote their names out of curiosity, or were interested in the remuneration of lunch and transportation that were attached to the invitation or they were actually interested in reading the bible because they also lead the weekly school worship or perhaps they just joined their colleagues. I was actually very interested in what they would say on this particular sensitive passage for Muslims. In the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2015 I called all the teachers to remind them of the programme, and thirteen (13) out of twenty (20) of them who had promised to come. I did not get (seven) 7 of them on phone. But their colleagues called them. So in the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2015, eighteen (18) out of twenty (20) teachers

came: fourteen (14) men and four (4) female teachers. Seventeen (17) teachers actually read the text one came very late and only joined in the group discussions. Sixteen (16) Christians and one (1) Muslim read the text.

The ages of participants were between 25-55 years. Ten (10) were married with children, two (2) out of them had divorced, eight (8) of the men were not married. All the teachers belong to different Christian denominations. Six (6) of them were members of the various groups of the church of Pentecost, two (2) of them were Methodist, two (2) of them were Presbyterians, three (3) of them were Catholics, one was from Deeper Life Ministry, one (1) was an Anglican and one (1) belongs to a Spiritual church with one Muslim. At 9 O'clock am only one (1) female teacher was present. We waited until the rest came in one by one. We finally started at 10 am with fourteen (14) people, three (3) came to join later at 10:45am. One (1) joined later after the first break at 11:45 am.

We started the day with prayer, which was done by one of the participant who was a member of the church of Pentecost. He invited the Holy Spirit to come and lead the session. He prayed for the Spirit to give all participants wisdom from above and the inspiration to understand God's word and to make the reading a success. He also prayed for safe journey for those who had not yet arrived yet. The Researcher provided copies of the passage from the Jerusalem bible for each one of them. There were other translations as well from the participants and one *twi* bible was to help us understand better in the local language. An overview of the New Testament was given as a way of introduction by the researcher. The fact that the NT consists of twenty-seven (27) books: four (4) gospels, Acts of Apostles, Revelation and twenty-one (21)

letters. Thirteen (13) out of the twenty (21) letters were either written by Paul or attributed to him. Out of the thirteen (13) letters, seven (7) are undisputedly written by Paul and Galatians is among the seven (7) undisputed letters. A question was asked as to why Paul wrote Galatians. The researcher suggested that all questions be directed to the facilitator who will allow all participants to contribute. The researcher would only contribute if she was invited by the facilitator. One (1) of them was chosen as the leader to facilitate the reading and one female teacher was chosen by the group as their scribe. The researcher made it clear that she had come to learn from the group, how they interact with the bible and how they make sense of the text in their reading. She also said that there was nothing like right or wrong interpretation since she was interested only in their understanding of the text. What will actually be useful was their active participation in contributing to the discussion. The facilitator as a way of introduction said that Paul was a founder of churches, and he wrote letters to the churches he founded when they were in difficulties. Ten (10) of the participants agreed with the facilitator that they know Paul founded churches during his missionary journeys. Four (4) of them including the Muslim did not know that Galatians are some of the churches that Paul founded. Two (2) of them did not know that there were different churches in Galatia. One (1) of them did not know that the letter was written to churches, he thought that the title of the letter was just the name of a town and was finding out for the first time that the town was called Galatia.

Another person asked whether Galatian Christians were in a particular difficulty that resulted in the letter. Ten (10) responded in the affirmative. The rest did not know and were learning for the first time. When a further question

was asked as to what was the difficulty, the group could not answer and the facilitator directed the question to the researcher. The researcher directed the group to Gal 1:6-10. When that passage was read, it became clear that the Galatians must have received a different teaching from what Paul taught them and that they were confused as to what to do. Who were the teachers and what did they teach? The group could not answer. The researcher was consulted and suggested that they waited to see if any answer would come out of the discussions, otherwise, they would look else where for the answer. It is discovered that this particular passage is not very popular among Ghanaian Christians. Many of them were quite unfamiliar with the passage. We read it again and again and reflected on it for a while. The participants agreed that the passage is a difficult one and they had not used it before. They prayed again for the Holy Spirit to lead the discussion so that whatever they say would be under the inspiration of the spirit. The discussions followed the questions that had been previously set by the researcher as directed by Gerald West (2001). The researcher also asked permission from the respondents to record the discussions and for her research assistants to also take down notes so that they could cross check with that of the secretary. The text reads:

<sup>21</sup>Tell me then, you who are so eager to be subject to the Law, have you listened to what the law says?

<sup>22</sup>Scripture says that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave girl and the one by the freewoman.

<sup>23</sup>The son of the slave girl came to be born in the way of human nature; but the son of the freewoman came to be born through a promise.

<sup>24</sup>There is an allegory here: these women stand for the two covenants. The one given on Mount Sinai- that is Hagar, whose children are born into slavery;

<sup>25</sup>Now Sinai is a mountain in Arabia and represents Jerusalem in its present state, for she is in slavery together with her children.

<sup>26</sup>But the Jerusalem above is free, and that is the one that is our mother;

<sup>27</sup>as scripture says: Shout for joy, you barren woman who has borne no children! Break into shouts of joy, you who were never in labour. For the sons of the forsaken one are more in number than the sons of the wedded wife.

<sup>28</sup>Now you, brothers, are like Isaac, children of the promise;

<sup>29</sup>just as at that time, the child born in the way of human nature persecuted the child born through the Spirit, so now.

<sup>30</sup>But what is it that scripture says? Drive away that slave girl and her son; the slave girl's son is not to share the inheritance with the son of the freewoman.

<sup>31</sup>So, brothers, we are the children not of the slave girl but of the freewoman" (2016).

### **Generating Pre-critical Meaning**

The responses from the group were in both English and *Twi*. I translated the *twi* responses and they are arranged here in accordance with the pre set questions as suggested by West (2001).

1. *What do I know about the letter to the Galatians?*

The first participant responded that Paul preached in Galatia. The people were very enthusiastic about Paul and his message, they believed, were baptized and they received the Holy Spirit. But later they could not stand distractions and were falling apart. Another respondent said that after Paul left Galatia, some people came to teach something different from what Paul taught and that was why Paul was angry and was cursing them. A third participant added that those who came to teach the Galatians after Paul were Jews. They came to talk about the importance of circumcision, that if the Galatians did not go through circumcision they could not become children of Abraham. A fourth respondent added that the Galatians were gentiles who were being asked to go through circumcision. Since Paul himself persecuted the Christians before he became one of them, he knew what he was doing so he wrote to them to remain focused. A fifth participant said that if you teach a group and someone comes after you to say that what you taught was not enough or good it is very annoying that is why Paul was angry and expressed his displeasure. He added that Paul wrote to the Galatians not to return to the flesh after living in the spirit. A sixth respondent chipped in that the Jews believed that all Christians should follow the Mosaic law. A seventh participant added that Paul saw that the Galatians were not bearing fruits in the Spirit as he taught them but they were retreating into the flesh. The eighth participant said that Paul was responding to the teaching of intruders. The tenth participant agreed with the ninth participant that since Paul was commissioned to

go to the gentiles, he was writing against the law on circumcision and other dietary laws, which were foundation for Judaism. The eleventh member said that the letter is about the freedom of the Christian in Christ from every curse and from the law because they originated from promise and not from the law. The Jews were trying to control salvation from Jesus Christ. The twelfth respondent said that Paul was very critical in this letter. He had established churches and expected them to behave in a certain way but he realized that the Galatians were having issues with the law and were wondering whether without it they would be saved. The thirteenth person declared that Paul was so angry with the Galatians that he addressed them as foolish people. This is because they thought the law was going to save them from eternal damnation. The fourteenth respondent recounted Paul's early life where he was putting emphasis on the importance of the law as the basis for salvation until his conversion into Christ and his commission to the gentiles. He added that this is what Apostle Paul recounted in Galatians 2 with the aim to establish that even though the law is very important, Christians are justified by faith and not by works. The fifteenth person disagreed with the position of the fourteenth respondent and stated that the letter is to enlighten the Galatians and everybody on the differences between good and evil, and to teach that ceremonial laws cannot justify a person without faith. The sixteenth respondent stated that now that we are Christians, we should not think we are slaves again, we have passed that stage. The seventeenth participant told the group that some of the Jews were mixing the

gospels with the Jewish law and so they were preaching salvation by the law. This is what Apostle Paul corrected emphasizing that Jesus Christ came to abolish the law. The facilitator concluded that in the same way that people questioned Jesus about his disciples that they ate with unclean hands, similar experiences happen in the churches in Ghana. There are always new teachers who are causing confusion that make church members drift away. The researcher discovered that the participants were not familiar with the text. Although they know the letter to the Galatians very well, they were either not interested in 4:21-31, or the passage was too difficult or too technical for them.

2. *How do you recall the stories of Abraham and his family?*

The first participant said that Abraham was not promiscuous and that he was asked by his wife to sleep with his maid. Another one contributed that Sarah considered her age and was desperate for a child before asking Abraham to sleep with Hagar but God's promise was on Isaac. A third one said that it was not right for a maid to compete with her mistress that is why God asked Abraham to give support to Sarah in sending Hagar away. The fourth person said that, it was the custom of the day for a slave to give birth for her mistress, and that even Jacob's wives did the similar thing. The fifth participant said that Sarah was losing faith as she aged but she should have waited on the Lord. The sixth and the seventh participants said that Abraham also lost faith in God and followed his wife, because as the head of the house he should have encouraged Sarah to trust God and wait patiently on Him but he quickly agreed to sleep with his maid, which destroyed the



peace of the house. The eighth participant started with a question as to why should God closed the womb of Sarah for so long after promising to make a great nation out of Abraham. He added that this was the temptation that Sarah could not overcome but in life we should not rush or fall into a pit. The ninth participant responded that God did not close Sarah's womb but that her time was not ripe to fulfill her part of the promise and that when it was time the promise came true. He added that Sarah's conscience was in the flesh, which resulted in a child of the flesh. The tenth participant contributed that when Sarah told Abraham to send Hagar away, Abraham was reluctant because he regarded Ishmael as his son, but God intervened and assured Abraham that his promise was with Isaac and not Ishmael. Abraham obeyed every instruction of God and also trusted him completely. The eleventh person of the group added that at that time Abraham was 100 years when he took the slave girl and there was an issue who was named Ishmael. The twelfth member stated that Sarah realized that the respect of Hagar for her was going down and like any jealous woman subjected Hagar to mistreatment until she ran away. The thirteenth respondent declared that he was recounting the stories from Gen 15-17. God promised Abraham and Sarah a child. After years of waiting nothing was happening and Sarah was growing old. She in her own wisdom pushed Abraham to sleep with her Egyptian slave Hagar so that a son could be born as an heir to succeed Abraham. The fourteenth participant said that Sarah was helping to fulfill the promise of God but her decision did not end well. The fifteenth respondent

spoke that an angel of God told Hagar to return to her mistress and submit to her. The sixteenth one chipped in that the book of Genesis recounts how Abraham was faithful and obedient to God in all things in spite of the difficulties he met in life. The seventeenth respondent alleged that at one point in Egypt, Abraham introduced Sarah as his sister and Pharaoh almost took Sarah as his wife. A participant concluded that from all that had been shared, the message was that as Christian leaders, we should wait on God for his promise will be fulfilled. Another one added that it is important for family heads to have faith in God and to stand firm in difficulties, for in spite of the ups and downs in Abraham's life, he was able to please God by trusting and obeying him. All the rest supported this idea. The facilitator signaled the researcher to find out if there was something more to be added. The researcher encouraged him to continue. I noted that participants were very familiar with the stories of Abraham and his family. Some detailed information was mixed up. For example, Abraham was 86 years old when Ishmael was conceived and not 100 and was 99 years old when Isaac was conceived. Yet they concluded that in spite of all difficulties, Abraham pleased God by obedience to his instructions and trusting in his promises.

3. *How did Paul retell the stories of Hagar and Sarah?*

The first respondent said that Paul is creating two scenarios in Galatians; Hagar represent Mt. Sinai and the present Jerusalem where the law was received by Moses. He added that this is significant because Hagar was under bondage whereas Sarah represents the

Jerusalem above, which is about to come. The second respondent stated that Paul was dividing the family of Abraham, he was discriminating against Hagar and her son and calling them slaves. The third member disclosed that it is the Jewish nation that was described as slaves. The fourth and fifth participants expressed their opinion that Hagar represents a covenant of the flesh and she is like Jerusalem that persecuted the Christians and killed some of the apostles. Paul was emphasizing Christian freedom. The sixth participant spoke that the Galatians were not part of the law so they should not ask them to go back to the law. The seventh respondent said that Change is a difficult process but in the text we are told that in faith the Galatians became royals and adopted children, if they loose the faith then they go back to the flesh. The eighth member said that how could the law enslave a person? Things are not clear in the text. A ninth member asked what law is Paul talking about? Is he saying that we should not obey any law? A tenth member added that God made a promise to Abraham and that promise is the law. The eleventh participant asked whether Paul was actually asking us not to obey laws or was he only talking about the Jewish law? A twelve member responded that the law and the promise are one and the same thing. At this time the facilitator looked at the researcher to seek her approval on the on-going discussions. He asked the researcher to help them clarify the issue on law and promise. The researcher asked all the participants the local names for law and promise. Two participants answered that the Akan name for law is “*mmera*” and promise is “*anohoba*” (by word of mouth) The

researcher asked the others if they agree? One responded that promise is *bohye*. Another responded that both words are used for promise. And the rest confirmed her point. The researcher asked the difference between a law and a promise? A participant responded that while everybody must obey the law, not everyone is to make or receive a promise so the two are not the same. A participant declared that the passage is talking about two covenants: one is law, the other is freedom. Another participant said that the passage is difficult and strange, and it is not interesting at all. A respondent retorted that the text keeps praising Sarah and the Galatians as against the Jewish people who are described as children of a slave. So there is tension between those born of the spirit and those born in the flesh. The facilitator asked the researcher if she could clarify and explain things. The researcher asked the facilitator to continue to the end to see if things would become clearer. I have noted the tension between law and faith in the reading, why the law was described as enslavement and why Hagar is identified with the Jewish nation and Sarah with the Galatians.

4. *What law was the passage talking about that keeps people in the flesh and in bondage?*

A respondent shared that since the passage is talking about Abraham and his family it is the law of the covenant that God made with Abraham. Four others responded that the law of circumcision and other Jewish laws. Three participants appear to argue that it was only circumcision because during the time of Abraham God had not yet

giving the law to Moses. Two people responded that when Paul was writing the letter, the law had already been given so he was talking about circumcision and all the Jewish laws. Three respondents said that the Jewish people taught that salvation could come by obeying their laws, but today we learn that those who are under the law are in bondage. One person said that the passage is talking about the law of the church. One other person found it strange that Paul was asking the Galatians not to obey the law of God, because the Mosaic Law was given by God. Three people reminded the group that earlier on we said that Abraham obeyed all instructions of God so how would Paul say something different here? One of the three concluded that the text is confusing her. There appeared to be inconsistencies in the story as it is told in Genesis and in Galatians and readers are getting confused with the inconsistencies.

5. *What two covenants is the family of Abraham representing?*

The first respondent said that Paul is making a distinction between Grace and the law. While grace makes us royals, the law makes us slaves. The second participant added that since Moses received the law from Sinai, and Hagar is a slave who lives under the law, she represents Sinai. This means that Hagar is not free, and she lives under temporary condition. The third member expressed the view that if those who live in the flesh have no salvation then those who follow the Sinai covenant have no salvation. The fourth participant asked what a covenant is? Different local words for covenant were given as *apam*, *bohye*, *anohoba*. At this point, the researcher asked what those words

mean. A participant explained that *apam* is the local name for covenant, but *bohye* means promise and *anohoba* means promise by word of mouth but both words are closely related to *apam* since every *apam* involves *bohye* or *anohoba*. The seventh participant mentioned *Okor* as an example of a family covenant that is meant to unite all the members of the family. The eighth member came up with the idea that Abraham stands for God's promise, Sarah stands for life in the spirit and Hagar for the law and all those under the law are slaves. The ninth participant declared that our faith must be strong enough to enable us live righteous lives because when we make sacrifices to deities we become their slaves. The tenth and eleventh respondents shared that the two covenants are represented by Sarah and Hagar: Sarah stands for Spiritual Jerusalem, that is our spiritual life. Hagar stands for the physical Jerusalem with all its desires in the flesh.

Two other respondents suggested that the two covenants are the law and the promise of faith and Christians are to follow the covenant of faith. Two participants alleged that one covenant kills and the other gives life. Three other members declared that the two women represent law and grace. Another member added that Paul advised the Galatians to live in the Spirit and not in the flesh. The last person responded that the two covenants represent bondage and freedom.

The researcher inferred from the responses that the respondents perceive a contrast in the two covenants; one is about the law, one is about faith and promise, one is abolished, one is fulfilled, one is in the flesh, the other in the spirit, one is Hagar, the other is Sarah, one is a

false child, the other is a true child, one covenant represent bondage and the other freedom.

6. *How was the retelling of the story of Sarah and Hagar helpful?*

The first respondent expressed the importance of waiting on the Lord in life. The second participant shared that the retelling makes one feel good to be identified with Sarah and Isaac as they represented the church, and to be part of the descendants of Abraham. It was also good to know that there were other people who were teaching what might be destructive and not good for the salvation of Christians. Three (3) people shared that the passage gives strength to faith and hope of all believers in the future kingdom. The family of Abraham is symbolically used to represent the church as a family. Hence, Christians are one family not by flesh and blood, but in faith and in the Spirit and by the grace of God. This, by implication, implies that Christians do have a choice to make between freedom and slavery, and between faith and law. Three (3) other people suggested that what the passage is offering to believers is not so much the law, but the hearing of faith since, in the final analysis, what is heard is about the person of Christ and the gift of his Spirit that enables the believer to relate them well with God. The text may also imply that there are different religious and Christian denominations as is the case in Ghana; thus any believer who persecutes, discriminates against or insults another on doctrinal or cultural issues, lives in the flesh and in bondage and is to be cast out or ignored. A respondent added that he is in a covenant with his wife and they are to be together till death. Another member stated that there are always difficulties in life

especially financial difficulties, but we should not use dubious means to get quick money as the long term effect is always dangerous. The eleventh member declared that not all requests from the wives are good. It is important to pray over any request from the women before one can take a good decision. The twelfth participant agreed with the fourth contributor and added that on such occasions, it is important that the couple enter into dialogue so that the woman would be encouraged by the husband to be patient and trust in God. The thirteenth participant stated that it is not good to remain in the flesh alone. Life is difficult without faith and one needs to strive to remain in the spirit by reading the word. The fourteenth participant said that Abraham, like all of us needed the spirit of patience and perseverance. The fifteenth participant asserted that there are different Christian and religious denominations. The sixteenth participant prayed for steadfastness and trust that God will see us through to the end. Two (2) participants confirmed that God always keeps his promise and there is the need to remain in the promise. one (1) participant concluded that we had all learnt something that day, which was good for all. This section made participants more relaxed with the text. The two covenants are described variously as faith and law, law and grace, flesh and spirit, flesh and grace ,law and promise.

7. *How is the retelling of the story of Hagar and Sarah problematic?*

Some of the difficult elements in the passage are:



Three (3) participants claimed that the Galatians passage appears to contradict the relationship between faith and the law, which made reading the Galatian text uneasy in relation to the Old Testament story.

Two (2) participants questioned who was described as the desolate woman (Verse 27). Was it Sarah who was barren or Hagar who was without a husband?

Two (2) other participants were trying to find out who were to be cast out of the Galatian communities: Jews or Jewish Christians? Two (2) participants suggested that those who were to be cast out were Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and all those who persecuted other Christians because of doctrinal differences.

Two (2) respondents perceived the passage to be a possible source of conflict between Muslims, who may have allegiance to Hagar, and Christians' allegiance to Sarah, and even between different Christian denominations as to which church taught the true gospel. Three (3) participants thought that it was difficult for one to be a son and a slave at the same time since in Ghana even a child from an illegitimate union was recognized by law and shared in the inheritance of the father. Two people observed that the text made the plight of Hagar even worse, as somebody who was used and dumped. It appeared that the promise was to Abraham and Isaac; any parasite was to be removed. Again, just as the culture of circumcision was a problem for the Galatians, certain cultural practices were identified as problematic for Christians which required a dialogue between Christianity and culture in Ghana. For example, the items for the naming ceremony of children in the

Church were to be changed from hard liquor to soft drinks with the idea that if the child was given liquor at the ceremony the child would grow up to drink, or that the hard liquor was not good for the child. However, others argued that the difference in taste between hard liquor and water was very significant since it taught the child to be able to distinguish what might be good from what might be evil. Soft drink was not thought to be a good substitute, since it would taste sweet in the mouth and as water too is sweet, the difference does not come out and the truth of the practice is blurred.

8. *What lessons are learned from the retelling of the stories of Abraham and his family in Galatians?*

Two (2) participants learnt that Christianity is a religion of faith in Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit; that the new covenant of promise helps the believer to relate on a different level with Christ; that the old covenant of law and bondage is overtaken by the covenant of faith. Three (3) participants learnt that all Christians are children of Abraham, not in flesh and blood, but in the Spirit. Even though Christians may belong to different Christian denominations, they have one Father and so are all brothers and sisters. Three (3) other participants also noted that if one Christian persecutes another on doctrinal, social or cultural grounds, then that person is living in the flesh and in bondage and not in faith. As believers, we should desist from unnecessary acts of discrimination, accusations and arguments that bring division. Three (3) more respondents suggested that Christians are to depend on God for solutions to problems rather than

depend on their own strength, that the salvation of Christians has its source in Jesus; it does not depend on physical circumcision but on spiritual circumcision of the heart. Four (4) participants admonished Christians to rather encourage one another to live godly lives expected of them so as to be part of the freeborn children of the heavenly Jerusalem. The facilitator concluded that if any one has two wives, they should pray and do something about it. I noted that participants contextualized the lessons in the passage to their own situation.

9. *I also noted some ideological elements in the text:*

The text narrates the story of two women in the life of Abraham and their respective children. In the story only Abraham is mentioned by name. The women are described according to the role they played in the life of Abraham: one is his slave, who becomes his mistress, and the other is his wife, and the two children are described as sons. The way the two women are described depicts a situation of rivalry, which is very common in a polygamous home in Ghana. When a man sleeps with his house girl and an issue comes out of it, more often than not, this makes the wife jealous, especially if she does not have a child of her own. In such cases, the wife may decide to exercise her authority in a harsh way to make life difficult for the house girl or send her out of the house. The story as it is told here depicts such a situation.

A contrast is gradually being built between the two women very early in the narration. What is the purpose of the contrast that the text seems to create in the family of Abraham? If one is aware of the background to the story, that it was Sarah who gave Hagar to

Abraham, then it sounds like Hagar is being used and dumped, just like a slave. The text appears to imply that it was a mistake on the part of Abraham and Sarah to have tried to have a child on their own and that they should have waited for God's time. This may be the reason why Ishmael was a son through human efforts and Isaac by a promise. The sexual union between Hagar and Abraham did not receive divine sanction, and Abraham may be said to have responded to the desires of the flesh by sleeping with his servant girl. Sarah is described as giving birth by a promise. What promise was given in connection with Isaac? This may be the promise that God gave to Abraham before the birth of Isaac, and the promise to Sarah herself by the three visitors who came to Abraham.

### **Conclusion**

In an attempt to generate a naïve understanding of the text, the respondents were confronted with the tension in the passage as the author appeared to warn his audience against the observance of the Jewish law, and identified the Jewish nation and Jewish covenant with the slave girl Hagar. Sarah is also identified with a gentile church and the eschatological Jerusalem. The law is identified as that which enslaves. The Galatian converts were made to believe that it was not by deeds of the law but by faith that one was saved and if it were by faith that one was saved, then believers belonged to the covenant of faith and not that of the law. Again, Christians may belong to different denominations, but they have one Father, receive the same Spirit, and are born in the same Lord. This should be a source of unity rather than disunity.

In the next chapter, I will examine the text critically as it is required in the explanation stage. What comes out of the critical reading will be used to validate some of the issues that are raised in the pre-understanding.

### **Section Two: The Explanation or the Validation Stage**

This section is the second phase of the Hermeneutical arc of Ricoeur, which is the explanation stage. Ricoeur suggests that understanding leads to explanation. In other words, if one understands a text, one may be able to explain it to another person. The more one explains, the better one understands. Moreover, what comes out of explanation may be used to validate some of the issues that were raised at the pre-understanding stage. By explanation, Ricoeur is referring to a critical examination starting with the structural analysis of the text. Here, he recommends that the text should be segmented and each segment is to be examined, word by word, and sentence by sentence. He indicates that since words are polysemic and sentences may be ambiguous, the meaning of each word should relate to the context of the sentence, and the meaning of the sentence in the context of the segment. There should be coherence within and between the segments. Paul Ricoeur also advocates that every text is a discourse. Hence, this particular text is considered a written discourse. Again, the meaning of the discourse may be subjective and objective and I am interested in the objective meaning. This is because the text is distanced from the intention of the author and the context of the original reader. Consequently, the autonomous text can be reconstructed from various angles and can yield multiple meanings.

## **Analysis of Galatians 4:21-31**

### **Introduction**

Following Betz's structural outline, it is discovered that the text under study forms part of the proof section of the discourse (3:1-4:31). I have also established earlier that there are six arguments in the proof section and that 4:21-31 is the sixth argument concluding the proof section of the discourse.

In the development of arguments to support one's position, Kennedy suggests that an author may give the best proof first and build on it to support his position or may bring the best proof last. Longenecker (1990) claims that this passage under study was a supplementary argument, an after-thought that was to reinforce the earlier arguments and that the aim was to emphasize the superiority of the new covenant over the old. Luther contends that this argument was an afterthought which was meant to strengthen the previous arguments (Pelikan, 1963). Betz (1979), on the other hand, suggests that this last argument was Paul's strongest one, and the conclusion (verse 31) did not conclude just the allegorical argument but the whole of the proof section. Hays (2000) maintains that this final appeal was designed to win his audience decisively by demonstrating that the law-free mission was prefigured in the Torah, and so it was perhaps the strongest argument. I am of the view that whether the argument was the strongest or not will best be determined after the analysis of the text. For the sake of clarity and consistency, and following Ricoeur's structural segmentation model, the discourse is divided into six parts, which are:

- i. The introduction (verse 21)
- ii. The background information (verses 22-23)

- iii. Allegorical interpretation (verse 24a)
- iv. The theses of the unit (verse 24b)
- v. Argument to support the thesis (verses 24c-30) and
- vi. The conclusion (verse 31).

The discussion will therefore follow the outline above:

i. **Introduction (verse 21)**

This introductory section of the unit begins in a dialogue form. The statement *Λέγετέ μοι, οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι, τὸν νόμον οὐκ ἀκούετε;* translates as “tell me, you who desire or wish to be under the law, do you not hear/listen to the law?” This introductory part may be divided into three stages. The first part of the dialogue begins with *Λέγετέ μοι* (tell me). *Λέγετέ* is a second person plural form of the word *λέγω* (I speak/say) and *μοι* is the first person personal pronoun singular, dative, which is usually translated (to/for me) expressing the receiver of the object of the verb. The short phrase may be translated “speak to me” or “tell me” something. It signals the beginning of a conversation between one person and a group of people. Here, it is referring to Paul and the congregations in Galatia. This direct address appears to be in line with a Hellenistic convention that supposed a letter as one half of a conversation (Betz, 1979). It also confirms Ricoeur’s position that a text is a discourse, a communication between two people about something (Ricoeur, 1976). What the writer is dialoguing about with his readers is perhaps located in the second half of the conversation. This is followed by the second stage: *οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι*, “You who desire/wish to be under the law”. This confirms that the dialogue is about a law. When one is under a law, one may be following that law, or may be under the protection of the law

or may have to live and operate within the confines of that law. In this case, Paul drew the minds of the audience to their apparent desire to be under a certain law. The information that there is a ‘desire’ is an indication that perhaps, the said law had not yet been fully adopted by the audience, although the text has given some hints earlier that some rules on the Jewish calendar were already being observed (4:10). Hays (2000) confirms that the expression “under the law” occurred earlier in the letter with a negative connotation (3:23, 4:4), indicating that when one is under the law, one is restricted or confined, to be liberated at the appropriate time, yet he thinks that its use here is not clear (Hays, 2000). The expression connotes a sarcastic implication as if what is said implied something else. It may also be that Paul was sounding a warning to his audience that there was more to the law than met the eye and so they needed to be careful in the attempt to observe it. The text does not say that the law was not to be observed, but it appears that it was not encouraging its observance. It is unclear what law was being discussed and why readers were being warned. Perhaps, it will become clearer as the reading proceeds.

The last part of the verse is τὸν νόμον οὐκ ἀκούετε; i.e., “do you not hear/listen to the law?” The word ἀκούετε from ἀκούω usually translates as “hear” or “listen”. Sometimes its meaning is stretched beyond just listening/hearing to “understanding” (1Cor 14:2). It may also connote the idea of “learning” about something (1Corinthians 5:1). It may be stretched further to involve listening or hearing as well as making a judgment (1John 5:1, 2:7, 24; John 7:51). Martyn (1997), Longenecker (1999) and Hays (2000) corroborate these notions and different uses of the word ἀκούω when they



observe that it involves the process of hearing or listening, understanding and obeying what is heard and understood. It is also important to note that ‘to listen or hear’ emphasizes the oral dimension of the text as a discourse. It connotes the idea that even though the text is written, it also functions as a speech to be read and to be heard.

Betz (1979) suggests that in other manuscripts the word is ἀναγινώσκετε, which is to “read” instead of ἀκούετε which is to “hear or listen”. The idea of reading the text stresses the written dimension of discourse. These two dimensions give indication that although the text is a written material; as a discourse it can be read aloud and performed to communities of faith as well as read by individual readers. Even though some scholars argue that the text was originally meant to be heard, taking the text as a written discourse, the issue of reading cannot be completely ruled out. Hence, the text is implying ironically that if readers really listen or read, understand and apply the law, they will know the enormity of the choice they were desiring to make, since it is almost impossible to do all the biddings of the law. Again, one cannot easily tell from the text which law is being referred to here, yet it appears to be common enough to be a standard that can easily be identified for it to be described as τὸν νόμον (the law). Sometimes the same word is described as ‘rule’ or ‘principle’ (Romans 7:21, 23, 8: 2b). It may refer to any kind of law (Romans 3:27). It is sometimes used to refer to the Mosaic law (Rom 2:25, 3:19, 4:14 and 7:2; Gal 3:12, 17, 17, 5:23). It is also used to describe the Pentateuch (1Corinthians 9:9; Galatians 3:10, 3:19). The word may also mean scripture in general (Romans 3:27, 8:2; Galatians 6:2).

However, the reader also discovers that the law sometimes functions in the Pauline letters as ἐφρουρούμεθα (3:23), from φρουρέω, “to guard”, which may be taken positively or negatively. Now positively, the law is that which protects, directs, leads, to teach (2 Corinthians 11:32, Gal 3:24), and negatively it imprisons, confines and keeps one in custody (3:23-25). But these functions of the law are described as for a temporary period, until faith is revealed in the coming of Christ (3:23-25). The segment may be described in this thus: “you who are desiring to follow the law, are you able to read or listen to, understand and appropriate the law as it is? This is a very probing question that heightens the expectation of readers to want to know the information that follows such a question.

The content will be clearer as the conversation proceeds. Yet, this introductory section of the discourse is the preliminary preparation that sets the stage for delivering the core message of the discourse, which is also known as the background information, and this is discussed in the next segment.

ii. **The Background Information (verse 22-23)**

After preparing the stage and creating a conducive atmosphere that put the audience in an expectant mood, the main facts of the discourse are now given. Following Aristotle, George Kennedy (1984) proposes that invention in a rhetorical discourse deals with planning the kind of arguments to be used in a rhetorical speech. He observes that an argument in a discourse may be based on external or internal proof. Kennedy argues that there are three kinds of proofs in the New Testament: naming of witnesses, quotation from scripture and evidence of witnesses (Kennedy, 1984). The statement of facts begins with γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι.

γέγραπται is a third person singular perfect passive verb from γράφω (I write). When γάρ (for) is added, it becomes a standard formula that usually introduces biblical quotations (Galatians 3:10, 13, 4:27, Romans. 15:9, Matthew 4:4). Here, it may be translated as “it is written” or “scripture says” to show that what is going to follow is a quotation from scripture. However, what followed the standard formula does not look like a quotation from anywhere (Longenecker, 1999; Betz, 1979). For a detailed examination and understanding, the statement of fact that is supposed to be a quotation is divided into two parts and discussed as follows:

The first part, which is Ἀβραὰμ δύο υἱοὺς ἔσχεν, translates as, “Abraham had two sons” The information is not a quotation, they are located in different parts of Genesis to show some form of modification to what perhaps used to be a standard. Yet, fact is true because we read from Genesis that Abraham had two sons called Ishmael and Isaac (16:15, 21:3). At the same time, the fact may also be problematic since Abraham had other children besides the two. In this regard, Betz proposes that the text is not interested in giving accurate historical information since Abraham had more than two sons (25:1-6). This may perhaps become clearer in the second half of the statement.

The second part of the statement is ἓνα ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης καὶ ἓνα ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθέρας, which also translates as “one from the slave girl and the other from the free-born woman”. The feminine noun παιδίσκη, is used in other passages to mean “a female slave” or “maid servant” (Genesis 16:1, Matthew 26:69, Luke 12:45, Acts 16:16). We can infer from the Genesis stories that the slave girl who had a son with Abraham was Hagar, since she was described even in

the Genesis story as παιδίσκη (Genesis 16:1). The identification of the free-born woman can also be made from the Genesis story as Sarah who was the wife (the free-born woman) of Abraham who also had a single child with him (Genesis 21:2-4). It is to be noted, however, that while the stories in Genesis supplied the term παιδίσκη as applied to Hagar, the term ἐλευθέρας is a singular, feminine form from ἐλεύθερος (free, independent) was not used in any of the Genesis stories. If the present text contains ἐλευθέρας, then it is giving us a clue to confirm the assumption that there is a re-reading of the Genesis stories in the present text and ἐλευθέρας has been coined into the text intentionally. At this point, it is difficult to tell the purpose of the re-reading and why the term ἐλευθέρας is inserted into the text. What is clear, however, is that with the presence of this new word, the status of the two women in the life of Abraham contrasts sharply each other. While one was a slave or a house-maid who was dependent on her master or mistress, the other was a free, independent woman. Again, the names of the two women are not mentioned. If readers are able to identify these characters, then three possible assumptions could be made here: (a) the readers' initial assumption that the audience are very familiar with the Old Testament for them to be able to identify the characters so described (Longenecker, 1999); (b) Paul is directing the readers to go and read Jewish scripture in order to understand better what is going on (Adams, 2012); (c) or that Paul had talked to them about Jewish scripture in his previous encounter with them. Otherwise, it is presumed that the Galatians were taught Jewish scripture by the supposed teachers who came after Paul. Now before the word ἐλευθέρας (freeborn or independent woman) was coined into the discourse, each of the two children was described as "son" of

Abraham. As soon as their respective mothers were introduced by their social status, this affected the social status of the sons. Furthermore, it is also discovered that information on Hagar is found in Genesis 16, while information on Sarah is found in Genesis 21. This confirms my earlier suggestion that the statement as it is told in Galatians is not a direct quotation from scripture as it is to be expected, but a summary of the stories of Abraham and his family, which is found in several chapters of Genesis, especially chapters 16-21 (cf. Longenecker, 1999; Betz, 1979). This intentional deviation from the *status quo* gives an indication that scripture is being interpreted, which allows the meaning of the text to be extended for a new purpose (Hays, Robins). The new interpretation perhaps is meant to strengthen the argument by giving it an Old Testament foundation. Let us see what the text does with this contrast in the second half of the statement of facts.

Next, we have ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης κατὰ σάρκα γεγέννηται (“But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh”). The conjunction ἀλλ' is a strong adversative particle translated as “but”, “indeed”, “yet” or “certainly”. It is often used after a negative (Matthew 5:17, Mark 9: 37, Ephesians 1:21) or may be followed by a negative that is contrasting a positive statement (1Corinthians 10:23, John 1:31, 8:26, 12:27). So, when ἀλλ' is used with ὁ μὲν, it expresses a contrast between two clauses such as “but on one hand...on the other hand”. Martyn (1997) maintains that its use here is not to draw a contrast but to correct the teachings of supposed opponents of the patriarchal stories (Martyn, 1997). But Longenecker (1999) thinks otherwise, arguing that it sets up an antithesis to further stretch the truth about Hagar and her son Ishmael. Σάρκα is a noun, accusative from σάρξ, σαρκός (flesh,

bodily). It refers to that which is natural. Thus, earthly birth can be understood simply in terms of *κατὰ σάρκα*, “according to the flesh,” or “the natural processes of procreation”. The word *γεγέννηται* is a third person singular passive verb from *γεννάω*, that is, “to be, become, beget”; if it is used of a woman, it means “to bear”, “to produce’ or “cause to be”; so Ishmael is born by natural processes of procreation. *ὁ δὲ ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθέρας δι’ ἐπαγγελίας*, on the other hand, means that the free woman gives birth *δι’ ἐπαγγελίας* (through promise). The *δι’* is a preposition from *διά* and it takes two cases. When it is used with the accusative case, it is translated as “because of” but when it is used with the genitive case, it is translated “through” “by” or “during”. *ἐπαγγελίας* is a feminine genitive noun from *ἐπαγγελία* (promise); thus *δι’ ἐπαγγελίας* means “through/because of/by a promise”. Isaac’s birth is by a promise. Now the contrast is clearly between the two sons of Abraham. The promise that is mentioned here is perhaps with reference to God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:4–6 and 17:15–21 (Nsiah and Anum, 2014; Longenecker, 1990; Martyn, 1997). The expression “according to the flesh” is found in Romans 1:3, 4:1, 8:4-5, 12-13, 9:3,5; 1Corinthians 1:26, 10:18, 2 Corinthians 1:17, 5:16, 10:2-3). The text is not saying that Ishmael is illegitimate, but that he was born in the ordinary course of nature, while the birth of Isaac is contrary to nature in view of the ages of the parents and as Sarah might had stopped menstruating (Bruce, 1982). If the statement of facts is reconstructed, it will be as follows: it is through God’s intervention that Sarah was able to give birth, for she had passed her child bearing age. On the other hand, Hagar was a young woman within her child bearing age and so she could give birth normally. The contrast is that of the two sons of Abraham:

one child's birth is by grace, while the other is by nature. Furthermore, the one born naturally was by the slave woman, and the other by the wife. So the status of the two women affects the status of their children.

Three important clues are given on the family of Abraham. One is very general and the other two are particular to the respective sons. It is a fact that Abraham had these two sons. It is also true that one of the two mothers was a slave while the other was the wife. One can also say that the slave who was younger and within child bearing age gave birth naturally, but it would have been humanly or naturally impossible for the wife to give birth, had it not been by the grace of God, who had earlier made a promise to the couple. The statements may be reconstructed again using part of verse 22a as the main proposition and other propositions as inferred from the main one. From the diagram below, one can see at a glance that a contrast is gradually being built into the family of Abraham. Starting from Abraham himself from whom all other characters are related, a contrast is built between the two mothers based on the social status and then from them to their respective sons. The slave woman begets nature while the free-woman begets grace.

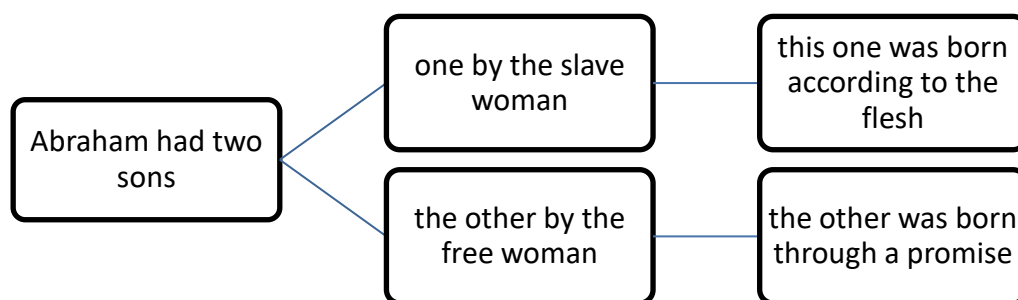


Figure 3 shows a contrast in Abraham's family (Source: Nsiah, 2017)

It is to be noted that although Ishmael is the first-born son, which is supposed to be a privileged position, he is described in negative titles that

disqualify him. He is described as a slave in contrast to a free-born and the flesh in contrast to a promise. Ishmael himself had no control over this; he was just born into it. Meanwhile, Isaac enjoyed positive titles for he is described as a free-born in contrast to a slave and by a promise in contrast to the flesh. These privileges enjoyed by Isaac are just by the grace of God and not by merit; he was just born into it as well. The contrast between the two children is well established. They serve as background information to whatever argument is going to follow. Now the purpose of the contrast may be clearer in the arguments that support the thesis in the next segment.

iii. **Allegorical Interpretation (verse 24a)**

The first part of the section (24a) begins with ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα. Now ἅτινά is a relative pronoun, nominative, neuter, plural from ὅστις (whichever/whatever/everything that). ἐστιν is from εἰμί (I am); ἅτινά ἐστιν may be translated as “which things or these things are” and serves as a kind of summary to the background statements that have been narrated in the previous verses ( 22–23). It is also serving as a transition to the information that has been provided in the next section of the discourse. However, the Greek word ἀλληγορούμενα is a participle from ἀλληγορέω, which has been explained earlier to mean that it deals with a story with two levels of meaning. In this context, it may be translated in two ways: it is possible to interpret it to mean that the stories of Abraham’s family were originally written in allegory and that the story has a meaning other than what appears on the surface (Betz, 1979; Bruce, 1982). It is also possible that the stories of Abraham and his family are being interpreted allegorically in the present text (Hays, 2000; Longenecker, 1999). This will mean that the present



text is finding a new significance in the original Genesis story of Abraham and his family (Betz, 1979). If this is so, it will fit into Ricoeur's idea of a text's capacity to generate meaning probably not anticipated by the author (Ricoeur, 1976). It should however be recalled that Paul had already appealed to the story of Abraham (3:6, 16-29). Again, the persuasive force of allegory was doubtful due to its indirectness (Castelli, 1994; Betz, 1979). Some scholars take the indirect nature of allegory to be its weakness, but others take it to be its strength because it allows the audience to do their own interpretation and appropriate the implied meaning of the utterance for themselves (Castelli, 1994; Betz, 1979). Castelli (1994) goes on to say that allegory is a rhetorical trope, while Ricoeur (1977) calls it an extended metaphor. They both suggest that allegory has the capacity to persuade its audience by drawing them into the argument and allowing a collaboration between author and audience in the generation of meaning. Allegorical interpretation begins with what is familiar to the audience, and then interprets it into something new or completely different or sometimes remarkable (Castelli, 1994; Davies, 2004). In this way, author and audience have a common initial understanding from where they move to the unknown (Draper, 2006; Castelli, 1994). This makes it possible for one to believe that the Galatians knew the Jewish scripture since it appears to serve as the starting point or background for the argument. The allegory also explains why Paul did not quote any specific text but made a summary from different stories. The summary gives him the opportunity to select the areas that he needs to interpret for the purpose for which the interpretation is done. The method also allows Paul to eliminate the aspects of the information that are irrelevant for his purpose (Hecker, 2014; Castelli, 1994).

iv. **The Thesis Statement (verse 24b)**

The allegory itself is located in verse 24b, which serves as the main thesis of the argument. It reads as follows: αὗται γάρ εἰσιν δύο διαθήκαι (for these women are two covenants). αὗται from οὗτος (this) is sometimes used as an adjective and a substantive. The function of the conjunction γάρ here is to help to continue the discussion on the women that began earlier (verses 22-23). In this context, the demonstrative pronoun αὗται (“these”) refers to the two women (Sarah and Hagar). The statement then reads: “for these women are two covenants”. One needs to take note of the fact that women cannot be covenants; they are not abstract concepts; they are persons in contrast to animals, women in contrast to men, wives and mothers in contrast to husbands and fathers. Covenant, on the other hand, is a universal concept, which may mean some form of a relationship, which anybody may decide to do and not only women. If the women are said to be two covenants, the statement is metaphorical. Ricoeur describes metaphor as miniature discourse with a double meaning, one literal and the other figurative. Yet he notes that the figurative meaning is derived only from the literal meaning. He points out that live metaphors are events of discourse, for they are temporary and fleeting, because as soon as they are incorporated into the language system of a society, the metaphor dies. A metaphor is created when two terms that are not previously related are put together in a metaphoric utterance. When this is done, the terms undergo a process of transformation during which the meanings of the words are twisted so that an unnoticed relationship springs up and this results in the extension of meaning (Ricoeur, 1977). Davies (2004) suggests that Paul is allegorically manipulating metaphorical words in this

discourse to be able to create this antithesis for his different groups of audience. In this case, women and covenant are put together in the utterance. If they are interpreted literally, they do not make sense, but they begin to make sense in the meaning that is created in the utterance. Now whatever the resemblance is for which the women and covenant are put together, this is not clarified in the text, and may become clearer in the arguments that support the thesis.

v. **Arguments to Support the Thesis (verses 24c-30)**

This section is divided into two parts. The first part consists of verses 24c-27 and second part of verses 29-30. Verse 28 is the transition between the two arguments. The discussion will be done in the order stated above.

Argument I in Support of the Thesis (24c-27)

The text describes one of the covenants as μία μὲν ἀπὸ ὄρους Σινᾶ εἰς δουλείαν γεννῶσα, ἥτις ἐστὶν Ἀγάρ (“indeed/on the other hand, one is from Mt Sinai that begets into slavery which is Hagar”). ὄρους is genitive from ὄρος (mountain). So ἀπὸ ὄρους Σινᾶ means “from Mt Sinai” and δουλείαν is accusative feminine singular noun from δουλεία meaning “slavery”. So one covenant is from Mount Sinai, which gives birth to slaves and that covenant is Hagar. These may be put in statement form like this:

Main Proposition: The women are two covenants

First Inference: one (covenant) is from Mt. Sinai

2<sup>nd</sup> Inference: that (covenant) begets slaves

Conclusion: that (covenant) is Hagar

This is a complete argument where the main proposition is supported by two other inferred propositions that lead to a conclusion, which is also

inferred from the main proposition. Interestingly, if these statements are taken literally, none of the covenants in the stories of Abraham in Genesis that are being recounted has any reference to Sinai. The covenants that are related to Abraham are the promises and the circumcision. There is no Hagar covenant and none mentions her name. The covenant that can be said to have a relationship with Sinai is the Mosaic covenant in Exodus which is not in Genesis and which is not directly related to Abraham. If the text is connecting Hagar to the covenant on Sinai, which took place so many years later, then there is an attempt to re-read or interpret the Exodus covenant in the present text (Martyn, 1997). In the figurative interpretation, the Sinai covenant is said to give birth to slaves and it is associated with Hagar. The text uses the status of Hagar as a slave girl and says that she corresponds to the Sinai covenant. There is a resemblance between the status of Hagar as one who is under authority of her master, and the fact that those under Sinai covenant are under the authority of the law. This resemblance is used to extend the meaning of the slavery status of Hagar to those under the Sinai covenant, for they are both under the authority of a law. This is a metaphorical use of the words covenant and slavery. In actual fact, Hagar is not a covenant, and Sinai covenant itself is not Hagar or a slave. Only that the meaning of the slavery status of Hagar is extended to the Sinai covenant, to allow the author to describe those under that covenant as slaves, and to describe Hagar as a covenant (cf. Ricoeur, 1976). Here, Paul is describing the law negatively as that which enslaves, and subjects those who observe the law to the same slavery situation as Hagar. Hence, a figurative meaning that is different from and yet derived from the literal meaning is generated from the readings. This might be the reason why

at the beginning the author warned readers about the law (verse 21). It was probably because the author was building an argument that those under the law were slaves. This may be reconstructed as follows:

One covenant is Mount Sinai

This covenant gives birth to slaves

Hagar gives birth to slaves

Therefore, Hagar is Mt. Sinai

This analogy means that it is the slavery status of the Sinai covenant that is compared to the slavery status of Hagar. By implication, the author is saying that the Sinai covenant enslaves. The issue of covenant will be taken up fully in the next chapter. It suffices to state here that the main element in the Sinai covenant is the giving of the law. If the text is saying categorically that the Sinai covenant enslaves, then, by implication, the text is saying that the law enslaves. One can also say that the law is Hagar since both enslave. The question that the reader asks is why the author describes the law in such a negative way. What about the positive uses of the law? Again, why is Hagar, who is a foreigner, the one who is compared with the law? Probably the other half of the segment may supply answers to this question.

By way of advancing the argument, the feminine participle γεννώσα (bearing) may be applied to the covenant, which metaphorically acts like a woman to beget people into slavery. The word may also be applied to Hagar to signify that her children share her status of slavery. So, Hagar and covenant are put together as two terms that give birth to slavery. The meaning of covenant is stretched and twisted to act like a woman who gives birth.

The argument on Hagar and the Sinai covenant is further stretched in (verse 25). The verse is difficult to read and there are divergent views as to how it is supposed to have been written. It goes like this: τὸ δὲ Ἄγαρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ; “now Hagar stands for Mt. Sinai in Arabia”. In some manuscripts, the name “Hagar” is omitted. But the article τὸ is qualifying Mt Sinai, they are both in the nominative and Arabia is in dative form. If “Hagar” is omitted, the text would read as follows “Now Sinai is a mountain in Arabia” or “Mt. Sinai is in Arabia.” Some scholars (Betz, 1979) think that without Hagar, it is difficult to associate this geographical information with a crucial argumentation of this nature, hence it is more probable that the name was there (Bruce, 1982; Betz, 1979). Accepting such a reading, the question then is: How can “Hagar” be identified with Mt. Sinai? The name is associated with an Arabic word *hagar*, *hagra*, *hajia*, which means ‘rock/cliff’ but it was used to refer to a mountain in the Sinai area (Betz, 1979; Martyn, 1997; Hays, 2000). Hagar (the mountain) is identified with the law, which was given on Mt Sinai. If this is the case, then Hagar the slave girl is associated with a cliff in Arabia where Mt Sinai is, the place where the law was given and where her children who are under the law are in bondage.

Interestingly, the slavery status of Mount Sinai is by analogy extended to the present city of Jerusalem and her children and there is no reason assigned for this extension in the text. One may however infer from the text that the possibility of the same resemblance that existed between Hagar and Mount Sinai may exist between Mount Sinai and the present city of Jerusalem. It is possible that those living in Jerusalem are observing the Jewish law from where the Judaizers came (Betz, 1979). If Hagar stands for Mt Sinai and they

are in slavery to the law, and if Mt Sinai is in Arabia, which corresponds to the present Jerusalem, then by analogy, Jerusalem is in bondage to the law. The analogy can be put in this way:

Premise i Hagar is Mt. Sinai in Arabia

Premise ii Mt. Sinai is living in bondage with her children

Premise iii Mt. Sinai corresponds to the present Jerusalem

Therefore, the present Jerusalem is in bondage with her children so the Sinai covenant and the present Jerusalem are linked to the fact that they both share one status of slavery. The reason why the present Jerusalem is being connected to Hagar the slave and Mt Sinai, where the law was received was that the text is insinuating the fact that the people in Jerusalem are keeping the law. Since the text has already established that those under the law share the slavery status of Hagar, it may be concluded that by implication all those who keep the law, together with Jerusalem, epitomize those who keep the law and perhaps encourage others to keep it also, as our text is insinuating (4:21). We have full information on one of the two covenants in the allegory and there is a need to find information on the second covenant.

The next sentence reads: ἡ δὲ ἄνω Ἰερουσαλήμ ἐλευθέρα ἐστίν, ἣτις ἐστὶν μήτηρ ἡμῶν (“but the Jerusalem above is free/independent which is our mother”). In this sentence, the conjunction δὲ (but, now, then) is serving as the transition between the present Jerusalem and the future Jerusalem and brings out the contrast between the two. This will conclude the comparison that was started in verse 24. The text simply reads “while the present Jerusalem is in bondage together with her children, the Jerusalem above is free and is our mother”. One can say then that one covenant is the present city of

Jerusalem and the other covenant is the Jerusalem above. Yet, the Jerusalem above is not a woman as the major premise indicated.

The possessive pronoun ἡμῶν (“our”) joins the author to his audience, and refers to all believers in Galatia and indeed all believers in Christ. The word ἐλευθέρα (free/independent) links the analogy now to Sarah, the free woman, and connects her to the eschatological Jerusalem that is to come. The sense of the text is that Sarah, like the heavenly Jerusalem, is a mother to all Christians and all who live not under the law but in faith.

This goes to emphasize that apart from the fact that the present Jerusalem is in bondage, it also means that the law is something that is temporary; it is in the here and now, and it keeps its observers under bondage. So those who are under the law are those who live under the temporary conditions of the law. In effect, those who emphasize the law are in bondage just like Hagar and her children and they represent the present-day Jerusalem, that is the geographical Jerusalem in space and time. If this is the description of the other covenant mentioned in verse 22, then that covenant is different from the first one. The characteristics of this other covenant are: It is connected to the Jerusalem above to indicate its eschatological character. It is established in freedom, which also connects it to Sarah the free woman. Its connection with Sarah also reveals that it gives birth through a promise. The conclusion is that this covenant does not give birth physically/naturally, but it is the mother of all who believe and it gives birth in the Spirit; it is eternal, it will be fulfilled in the eschatological Jerusalem, but it has already begun in the believing community in Galatia and indeed all believers. Now the



characteristics of the two covenants are given below showing the similarities and the contrasts between them

**Table 2: Characteristics of the two metaphorical covenants**

Represented by Hagar	Represented by Sarah
From Mt. Sinai	-
Begets children into slavery	Begets into freedom
Corresponds to the present Jerusalem	The eschatological Jerusalem
Gives birth according to the flesh	Gives birth through a promise
They are identified with Ishmael	Identified with Isaac
They are governed by the law	Faith and the Holy Spirit
They are physical and temporary	They are spiritual and eternal

(Source: Nsiah, 2017)

It is important to note at this juncture that the discussions on covenant will be taken up separately again after the general analysis of the text so that the flow of thought is not broken.

The last part of this section is verse 27, which contains a quotation from Isaiah 54:1, εὐφράνθητι, στεῖρα ἢ οὐ τίκτουςα, ῥῆξον καὶ βόησον, ἢ οὐκ ᾠδίνουσα· ὅτι πολλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐρήμου μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα (“Sing, O barren one who did not bear; burst into song and shout, you who have not been in labour! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than the children of her that is married”). It is difficult to immediately notice the function of this poem in the present argument. The only familiar phrase there is “barren woman who did not give birth”. This expression may refer to Sarah as someone who was once barren and now she is being promised and

given the hope that her children will be more. Hays confirms this and argues that a careful examination uncovers the relevance of the poem. The Greek word, στει̃ρα (barren) in the quotation is used to link the passage to Sarah who used to be barren before Isaac was born and this is metaphorically used to call to mind the condition of Jerusalem during the exile. Since it was with a miracle and the power of God that Sarah was blessed with a child, in the same way, God will restore the fortunes of Jerusalem with a miracle, so that the city that had remained barren when her children were deported would be repopulated. If Sarah is allegorically the figure of the heavenly Jerusalem in the present argument, then she would sing for joy when she is populated in the eschatological Jerusalem, since Jerusalem is also a barren city (Hays, 2000). The metaphor of Jerusalem as our mother is also found in Psalm 86:5 and Esdra 10:7. This made Hays suggest that the apocalyptic imageries being used here must have been common in Jewish apocalyptic themes. However, the newness of its use here is the fact that gentile Christians are included in those who will populate the eschatological Jerusalem (Hays, 2000; Longenecker, 1990). This new dimension is part of the promise made to Abraham that he would be a blessing both to Israel and other nations (Genesis 12:1-3). Consequently, we have: ὅτι πολλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐρήμου μᾶλλον (“her children will be more”). This indicates the fact that the children of Sarah in the Jerusalem above will go beyond the believing Jews to include the believing gentiles. Again, the children of Sarah, our mother, will stand in direct contrast to the children of Hagar who represent the present Jerusalem. Since the text projects an eschatological reality that exists in the future and this is being applied to the situation of the audience, it stands to reason that, by implication,

the audience is already participating in that eschatological reality including the present reader. If this is so, then we can infer from the text that the promise made to Abraham and his seed is being fulfilled in Christ (cf. 3:16; 5:1).

Martyn (1997) stresses that the quotation from Isaiah 54:1 is not about two women or two cities but the poem is giving two contrasting images of a single city that was once barren and will be re-populated which is metaphorically applied to Sarah. Bruce (1982) adds that formerly the gentiles were sterile in the sense that they bore no fruits for God, but now that they have responded positively to the gospel; by God's grace, they have become fruitful.

Martyn (1997) again observes a shift from the patriarchal stories in Genesis to that of prophet Isaiah to be able to use the pair of opposites in that text to supplement the allegorical imageries of Hagar and Sarah and to bring out the contrast that is being created between the two scenarios. The function of verse 27 is explained further as the metaphorical use of Sarah as a mother in the eschatological Jerusalem who will have more children because they will include believing gentiles.

**b. Transitional verse-28 between the arguments**

The quotation in verse 27 brings the first argument to an end. Verse 28 has as its introduction the particle  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  that functions here as a conjunction that serves as a transition that connects what has been said before and also looks forward to what will come after. As has been said earlier, this conjunction never comes first in any sentence. It may be translated as 'and', 'now', and 'then' (Mark 5:11; 1 Corinthians 16:12); sometimes it is translated as 'also' or 'rather' (when it comes after a negative, Luke 10:20, Ephesians 4:15). It can

also be translated as ‘but’. The verse begins with ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, “and/but you brothers (and sisters)”; the personal pronoun ὑμεῖς (you plural) then refers to the addressees who are Gentiles as against Jews, but are “in Christ” κατὰ Ἰσαὰκ ἐπαγγελίας τέκνα ἐστέ (“are, like Isaac, children of the promise”). They are addressed affectionately as brothers and sisters. The addressees are thus linked to the status of Isaac as the child of promise and they are represented by him. Paul defines the identity of his converts and inserts them into the history of Israel and salvation history. By their association with Isaac, they become, by analogy, sons and daughters of Abraham with his independent wife Sarah. The gentiles may be so called the true children of the heavenly Jerusalem (Longenecker, 1999). What actually links the gentiles to the family of Abraham by Sarah is found in Galatians 3:26-29. It is by their faith and baptism in Christ. Hence, a new criterion is set for one to become a member of the covenant community. Therefore, they are “brothers and sisters” with all who come to God by faith through Christ (Bruce, Betz). Hence, while verse 28 gives some sort of a summary of verses 22-27, it also looks forward to what follows in verses 29-30. Consequently, it serves as a transition between the two arguments that support the thesis of the unit. Having elaborated the first argument, we will now discuss the second argument.

c. **Argument II in support of thesis-verses 29-30**

It seems that the Greek word ἀλλ’ (but) introduces a contrast statement to verse 28 and provides a transition to verse 29 (cf. Longenecker, 1999). The verse begins with ὡσπερ, “just as”, a conjunction that shows that something is being added to what has been described so far as the present situation of the audience is concerned. The contrast between Abraham’s two sons, the one

born κατὰ σάρκα, “according to the flesh”, and the one born κατὰ πνεῦμα, “according to the Spirit”, that was started in verse 23 is being picked up again here in verse 29. Interestingly, the Greek word παίζοντα in Genesis 21:9 (LXX), even though it refers to the son of Hagar playing with Isaac, is translated in Galatians as follows: “he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit” (ὁ κατὰ σάρκα γεννηθεὶς ἐδίωκεν τὸν κατὰ πνεῦμα). The passage thus speaks of the persecution of Isaac by Ishmael. Here, however, Isaac and all the people he represents are described as born κατὰ πνεῦμα (“according to the Spirit”) and this is used synonymously with δι’ ἐπαγγελίας (“as a result of promise”) in verse 23 and ἐπαγγελίας τέκνα (“children of promise”) in verse 28.

Interestingly, the story as it is told in the Old Testament does not record anything about Ishmael’s persecution of Isaac, as is implied in Galatians by the statement, “the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit” (ὁ κατὰ σάρκα γεννηθεὶς ἐδίωκεν τὸν κατὰ πνεῦμα, Gal 4:29). However, it must be pointed out that some Jewish traditions in the Targums and rabbinic writings sometimes understand the Hebrew word used (*mēšahēq*, “making sport”) in Gen 21:9 as denoting something hostile in nature. At other times, this word is seen to depict Ishmael and Isaac as arguing over who was more righteous or over the inheritance of their father (See Longenecker, 1998). This may be an indication that the Old Testament story is being interpreted here and the re-reading picks up the relationship of the two children to be hostile. In this way, the text is allowed to say that the son of the flesh persecuted the son of the Spirit. This, by implication, means that Isaac is the figure of those who receive

the Spirit, and Ishmael represents the Torah-observing Jewish Christians. These Torah-observing Jewish Christians are characterized as persecuting the gentile converts and law-free Christians (Hays, 2000). But to identify Ishmael rather with the law and the Jews and Isaac with the gentiles is rather the opposite. But in this context, the argument is designed in such a way that Ishmael is identified being first as the former covenant, which is related to the law, and Isaac the later covenant of faith and spirit in Christ.

Verse 30 shows another fascinating development. The verse begins with ἀλλὰ τί λέγει ἡ γραφή; ἔκβαλε τὴν παιδίσκην καὶ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς (“But what does the scripture say? ‘Cast out the slave and her son?’”). ἀλλὰ is a strong conjunction that may be used after a negative or positive to contrast previous statements. It is translated as “but” or “nevertheless”, so that here we have: “but what does scripture say?” After this rhetorical question, Sarah’s words in Genesis 21:10 are applied to the situation in Galatia. Genesis 21:10 is the reaction of Sarah to 21:9 where Ishmael is said to be playing with or mocking Isaac. The Hebrew word used in Genesis 21:9, as has been pointed out, is *měšahēq* and is the Piel form of the verb and means “to play with”. The Hebrew verb *měšahēq* is rendered in the Septuagint as παίζοντα, so the action of Ishmael denotes both the idea of playing with in a positive sense or actually mocking another person. Interestingly, Sarah goes beyond physical attack on her son to the issue of inheritance. The Greek word that was used there is ἔκβαλε, which is from ἐκβάλλω, a compound form of the verb βάλλω (throw). So ἔκβαλε is the aorist second person imperative form, which literally means ‘throw out by force’. So the boy and his mother should be sent out of the house of Abraham. The reason given is this: “for the son of the slave shall not

inherit with the son of the free woman" (οὐ γὰρ μὴ κληρονομήσει ὁ υἱὸς τῆς παιδίσκης μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἐλευθέρως). The idea is that this son will not claim part of Abraham's inheritance in the future. Here, the statement is not attributed to Sarah but to "the Scripture" (ἡ γραφή). Interestingly, the exact words are used with only a slight change. The change was necessary so that the story could be adapted to new situations for different purposes by changing "my son Isaac" (Septuagint: τοῦ υἱοῦ μου Ἰσαάκ), to "the son of the free woman" (τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἐλευθέρως).

So, this directive is not against all Jews or Judaism in general; what the text is saying here is much more specific; the message is really to be seen as directed against the troublers of gentile Christians. In effect, believers should "cast out" all those who behave as "persecutors", especially the enforcers of Jewish laws and practices and their influence from the Christian congregations because this will lead to their retrogression (Longenecker, 1999; Nsiah & Anum, 2014). Contrary to this, Betz (1979) thinks that the message is directed to all Jews. Unlike in Romans chapters 9-11 where the import of a similar message is revised to give a chance for the salvation of Jews, Galatians does not give any option to Jews, so that the gentiles are to choose either to follow Judaism and be excluded from salvation or remain in Christ and be saved (Betz, 1979). But the inheritance that is promised Abraham is for the children of the promise, those who have been divinely chosen (Bruce, 1982). It is also possible that the message of this verse indicates the fate of individual persons according to the choice they make in life. It is not the responsibility of anyone to cast another out. This is however not supported by the text. The analogy here is best understood in the following way:

1. The son of the slave girl is born according to the flesh
2. The son of the flesh persecutes the one born in the Spirit
3. The son of the flesh is to be cast out
4. Therefore the son of the flesh cannot share inheritance with the son of the Spirit.

This analogy can be understood to mean that the slave girl's son persecutes because he was born in the flesh, and the reason for him to be cast out is because he persecutes those born in the Spirit and because he persecutes those in the Spirit, he cannot share in the inheritance with them. These statements can be put logically as follows:

The slave's son is born in the flesh.

The son of the flesh persecutes the one of the Spirit.

The son that persecutes cannot share inheritance with the persecuted son

Therefore, the son that persecutes must be cast out.

Three factors that lead to the expulsion of Ishmael are slavery, flesh, and persecution. The consequence of these factors is expulsion. This section of the argument complements and completes the first one in 24-27. The two children share in the status of their respective mothers. This is something that they were born into, and they had no control over it. Apart from this fact, Ishmael persecuted the son of the Spirit, and so should be cast out and also deprived of inheritance. Now why is this analogy important for readers? This will come out in the conclusion.

#### vi **Conclusion verse-31**

It is the opinion of some scholars that this verse serves as the conclusion to the whole proof section that began in chapter 3:1ff (Longenecker, 1999; Betz,



1979; Martyn, 1997). It begins with the word διό (therefore), which is a way of concluding an argument. The audience is addressed affectionately as ἀδελφοί (brothers) to show that Paul's anger and disappointment is going down. The conclusion of the argument is with a claim that "we are not children of the slave woman" (οὐκ ἐσμὲν παιδίσκης τέκνα). This indicates the fact that Paul is confirming the identity of his converts, which he defined earlier (verse 28). Here Paul identifies himself with his audience and he represents all believing Jews; those who do not pose a threat to believing gentiles are not children of the slave woman but of the free woman. Hence, Sarah is the mother of all the believers, of Jews who received the promise like Isaac and gentiles who had come to believe in the eschatological church that is already being experienced. This conclusion points to the fact that the argument is on those who inherit Abraham in the covenant community. Since in the natural family of Abraham, it is not Ishmael the first born who did inherit but Isaac, so it is in this analogy. It is not those who cling to the former covenant of law and bondage that will inherit Abraham, but those born of the Spirit, who live in faith and in freedom because the blood of Christ served as the price for their sins. The last word points to the free woman in verse 30 and also looks forward to what is ahead in 5:1 to show that the next section is guided by one of the leading concepts in the present section (Betz, 1979). Those who suffer persecution correspond to Isaac and those who persecute them correspond to Ishmael; thus verse 28 is repeated with a slight modification. Henceforth, all believers who are born of the Spirit, and who do not persecute those in the Spirit, may share in the inheritance with them. They have Sarah as their mother and Isaac as their brother.

vii. **Reflection**

The main issues that came out of the reading are: there are two covenants: one is represented by the law and the present city of Jerusalem. The other is represented by faith, freedom and the eschatological Jerusalem. The former one is temporary, natural and it enslaves. Those who hold on to this covenant would cease to exist at an appointed time. The latter on the other hand, is spiritual, permanent, free and by grace. Those who hold on this covenant would inherit the kingdom. The conclusion is that this covenant represents all the divine support needed to remain in the covenant relationship with God. In this new covenant community, those who depend on their own strength to follow the law and encourages others to do the same would be thrown out.

Now I will discuss in the next chapter the events of biblical covenant and what kind of covenant will match the characteristics that have been described in the two covenants in Galatians 4:21-31, and what there is between the law, covenant, promise and freedom and their implications. This will help me to understand better the covenant metaphors that have been used here.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### GENERAL PERCEPTION OF THE EVENTS OF BIBLICAL COVENANTS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter attempts a general survey of Biblical covenant as one of the most important issues that came out of the readings in the previous chapter. The chapter seeks to understand the Abrahamic and Sinai covenant and what led to the establishment of new covenant. The aim is to understand covenant in the New Testament using the Old Testament as the background. I am doing this with a view to understanding and establishing what type of covenants are described in Galatians 4:21-31, what covenant events the passage is re-enacting, and what is the purpose of the re-enactment. The following areas will be discussed:

- 1 The Concept of Covenant
- 2 Suzerainty Treaty
- 3 Promissory Oath
- 4 Covenant in the New Testament.

#### **1 Concept of Covenant**

Covenant comes from the Greek word *διαθήκη*, which is a translation of the Hebrew word *berith*. Mendenhall and Herion (1992) argue that the Hebrew word *berith* has undergone different stages in its development and has described different shades of relationships under different historical, cultural, social and political contexts. They see *berith* as a key biblical metaphor that describes the relationship between God and His people, Israel. They assert that covenant “is a valuable lens through which one can recognize and appreciate

the Biblical ideal of a religious community” and the instrument by which the Kingdom of God is established (Mendenhall & Herion, 1992).

The root of the word *berith* is, however, unknown as there have not been a univocal stance on it. Mendenhall and Herion emphasize the fact that in order to better understand biblical covenant, it is important to study Ancient Near Eastern treaties as the latter are said to have had a great influence on the former. Scholars such as Thompson (1964), Weinfred (1970), Beckwith (1987), Hegg (1989), Marshall (2003), Niehaus (2010) and others agree with this assertion. Marshall (2003) claims that the Hebrew word *berith* may have an Akkadian origin. It is either from the verb *brh* ‘to decide’ or from the preposition, *berit*, ‘between’, or from the verb *biritu*, ‘to clasp’ or ‘fetter’ from which the noun which means a ‘bond’ is derived. Beckwith (1989) and Beacham (2011) agree that *berith* comes from the Akkadian word *biritu* to ‘clasp’ or to ‘fetter’, which denotes a ‘bond’, ‘pact’, ‘treaty’ or ‘accord’. They add that this connotes agreement that involves obligations and liabilities in the relationship that the two parties establish. Busenitz (1999), Nowell (2000) and Lopez (2003) confirm that the root of the word is ‘fetter’ and it means a “bond”. Lopez adds that the word can also mean a judicial sentence or an ordinance. McCarthy (1978) firms this up with his explicit comment that a covenant was a binding juridical reality. Guinan (1992) asserts that obligation forms a constituent part of *berith* as the word itself implies obligation. Cross (1998) describes covenant as a means by which non-kinship members were integrated into the structure of the family by extending to them the rights and obligations of the kinship group. Busenitz (1999) looks at another dimension of the word “covenant”, from the Latin *covenire* as “coming together for a

common purpose”, thus stressing the communal dimension of covenant. He observes further that the root of *berith* connotes the idea of sharing a meal with a view of entering into an obligatory alliance with another, although this root meaning does not reflect its common usage. Fensham (1996), Busenitz (1999) and Lopez (2003) declare that *berith* is closely related to *karat*, ‘to cut’. Beacham (2011) states that ‘to cut’ is to officially enact the bond to ratify and confirm the formal agreement in a covenant. The ancient rites that enacted a bond involved sacrificing an animal and the fact that the two covenanting partners walked between the two halves of the animal (Marshall, 2003; Fensham, 1996; Beacham, 2011 and Lopez, 2003). With this addition, they bring out a ritual dimension of covenant. For this reason, Fensham (1996) proposes that *berith* reflects both the “act” and the “rites” in the making of a covenant. Haran (1997) stresses that it is the ceremony that establishes a covenant rather than the text or the document.

Fensham (1996) and Nowell (2000) clarify that in the Ancient Near East the rite that sealed a covenant was of a dual character that involved a blood rite and a ritual meal. Nowell (2000) further submits that both activities signify sharing of life. She opines that sharing a meal was a traditional way of becoming responsible for the nourishment of one another and sharing of blood is a way of integrating others into the family. Lopez (2004) says that it is the dual ritual activities of sacrificing an animal and the sharing of a meal that ratifies a covenant and attests that both actions generate fellowship and bond between the two partners. Fensham (1996) explains further that animals such as sheep, donkey or bull were used for the rituals and they were slaughtered

and divided into two, part of which was burnt in honour of the gods and the other used for the covenant meal.

It can therefore be concluded from these reflections that covenant is translated from the Greek word *διαθήκη* that is derived from the Hebrew word *berith*, which also might have originated from the Ancient Near East, connoting a decision, reached by two partners, to enter into a formal relationship that is backed by an oath and which is sealed with dual ritual celebrations.

Busenitz (1999) suggests that covenant, is always witnessed by a third party. He continues that usually divine witnesses are preferred to make the covenant sacred and the bonds efficacious. For this reason, Marshall (2003) asserts that a covenant is closely related to religion since more often than not there are deities as third-party witnesses. Mendenhall and Herion (1992) and Nowell (2000) further submit that it is one or both partners of the covenant who take the oath and promise to keep the agreement and make it work. This implies that a covenant can be bilateral or unilateral, conditional or unconditional. All these characteristics, as they are picked from the various authors, are neatly captured by Beckwith (1987) that in Old Testament usage *berith* involved a relationship of obligation between two persons or groups of people or between God and man. He asserts that in such a relationship, one or both parties assumed some obligations either by word of mouth or through some solemn ceremonies. The obligations were backed by oath and contained some solemn promises (Beckwith, 1987).

One may conclude that *berith* involves relationships of obligations, which are backed by an oath, ceremonies and promises. These characteristics

will be looked at, as we survey the various covenant relationships in the Bible. These elements are discussed further in the types of covenant.

### **Types of covenant**

In the first place, Beacham (2011) considers the genre of every covenant to be a legal document that must be treated like any formal contract or agreement document. Busenitz (1999) maintains that a covenant may be established between two individuals, families or nations; alternatively, an agreement is made between a superior and an inferior person. When the obligation falls on the superior towards the inferior, it is called a grant; when a superior sets up a condition that obliges only the inferior, it is called a treaty (Busenitz, 1999). Lopez (2003) says that the word berith is sometimes used as treaty, constitution, pledge, alliance of friendship or marriage depending on the purpose and the nature of the relationship. He asserts that among the ancient Akkadians, synonymous words or phrases were sometimes used as substantive terminology so that a word that meant stipulation, for example, could be used to mean “treaty” so that the part stood for the whole and vice versa. Boloje and Groenewald (2015) give four different types of covenant as follows:

- a) A bilateral parity covenant is made between two equal individuals or groups,
- b) A bilateral suzerain treaty between a superior power and a vassal state,
- c) A loyalty oath given by a powerful king or deity to a less powerful individual or state.
- d) A solemn promise of one party to another to offer or grant a certain benefit known as promissory grant.

However, Beacham (2011) and Thompson (1964) contend that in spite of the various sub-categories of covenant that existed in the Ancient Near Eastern societies, there were basically two types of covenants, namely, a suzerain treaty and promissory oath. These two categories were the most popular of the Hittite tradition and of vital importance in understanding the divine and human covenants in the Bible. These two categories of covenant determine whether a covenant is conditional or unconditional, and whether they are of temporary or permanent duration. Hence these two categories will be the main focus of this study.

### **Suzerain Treaty**

In the Ancient Near East, a treaty was either parity or suzerain. A parity treaty is a bilateral agreement between two equal partners while a suzerain is a unilateral form of agreement that protects the interest of the suzerain and ensures the obligation of the vassal. Even though some obligations are embraced by the suzerain, in order to protect the vassal with his resources, prowess and power, it is the vassal who swears by his life and the lives of his dependents to perpetually keep what is specified in the treaty. The treaty, therefore, defined the behaviour and loyalty expected of the vassal (Beacham, 2011). Scholars have identified forms of the Hittite treaty and so the elements in them will be discussed.

### **Elements of the suzerain treaty**

In an attempt to study the relationship between Hittite treaty and biblical covenant, Hahn (2005a) reviews current research on covenant from 1994 to 2004 and suggests that burgeoning studies on covenant in the modern period was sparked by Mendenhall's research on Ancient Near Eastern treaties



and the Mosaic covenant. Hahn (2005a) posits that this research provoked reaction from other scholars that generated lot of studies in the area. Many other scholars such as Thompson (1964), Weinfeld (1970), Fensham (1996), Nowell (2000), Lopez ((2003), Niehaus (2010), Beloje and Groenewald (2015) have also referred to Mendenhall's work and credited him as a key authority in the study of biblical covenant in relation to Hittite treaties. This review begins with the work of Mendenhall as it appears in Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary of 1992, which he co-authored with Herion.

Mendenhall & Herion (1992) identify various elements in the ancient treaty form. They provide the recurrent elements as follows:

i. ***The identification of the covenant giver***

Every Hittite treaty begins by identifying the covenant giver. The particular Hittite King, who was entering into a covenant with a vassal state, was identified by his name, his titles, genealogies and whatever attributes that made him great and distinguished him from others. This identification was to show how a powerful king was entering into a gracious relationship with an inferior vassal and to elicit the confidence of the vassal in him. Mendenhall and Herion reason that the relationship was supposed to be exclusive since the loyalty of the vassal was considered to be of paramount importance. As a result, the vassal could not enter into a relationship with other independent monarchs or risked committing treason, the punishment of which was death. This first item, demonstrated the pomp of the king, prepared the stage for the background of the treaty to be narrated. The research notes that Thompson (1964), McCarthy (1978), Marshall (2003),

Lopez (2004) and Beacham (2011) confirm that the beginning of every treaty was to identify the author of the treaty. Beacham adds that it was the names of both parties that were mentioned in the documents together with their physical descendants. He adds that since the relationship was exclusive, those who were not mentioned could not participate in the relationship. Freire (2013) suggests that it was in the parity treaty that both partners were mentioned equally and that the suzerain treaty document often omitted the name of the vassal and treated the vassal as a passive participant who was reminded of the majesty of his lord and deliverer who was magnanimous in this relationship, and to whom the vassal owed gratitude. Several scholars agree that this was immediately followed by a historical prologue.

ii. *The historical prologue*

Mendenhall and Herion (1992) observe that in the treaty document, the King recounted all the good things he had done for the vassal in the past. The purpose of this section was to serve as the foundation for the present obligation of the vassal and to preserve a past relationship. McCarthy confirms this section as having both ethical and juridical purposes. The ethical purpose is to note that in gratitude for past benefits, a vassal reciprocated by obeying the wishes of the king in order to maintain the relationship but this also put a juridical obligation on the vassal. Marshall adds that sometimes the historical background was narrated to include the fact that it was the suzerain who put the vassal on the throne. Other scholars (Lopes, 2004; Niehaus, 1020) agree to the presence of the historical prologue in the format of the

Hittite treaty, but Freire (2013) comments that sometimes the historical prologue was skipped and the treaty proceeded smoothly without it, since what was considered the most important element was the stipulation. Thompson (1964) disagrees with this comment and insists that the historical prologue provided the main reasons for establishing the covenant. He argues that sometimes there existed more than one document for establishing a treaty and so the lack of the prologue in one document did not justify its complete absence in the treaty. Thompson explains that it was even possible that occasionally the historical prologue was orally declared or was both orally declared and then recorded. He suggests that the historical prologue was never completely absent. The stipulation is the next element to be discussed.

iii. *Stipulations to be observed*

This was the legal section that set the tone and determined the behaviour expected of the vassal in the treaty. Sometimes the stipulations were said to be divided into public and private sections (Mendenhall and Herion, 1992). They insist that the private section involved the internal affairs of the vassal state. They explain that usually a suzerain king did not get involved in the internal affairs of his vassal states except if it bordered on security and allegiance to the suzerain king. They observe that only the requirements that the vassal and his dependents were to observe in the treaty were what concerned the suzerain king. Freire (2013) asserts that sometimes the stipulations included royal marriage with specified regulations to ensure total control even in the internal affairs of the vassal. Thus, Freire

contradicts what Mendenhall and Herion suggest. In order to ensure total compliance, there were always witnesses to the covenants. This is the next element to be discussed.

iv. *A list of human and divine witnesses*

These were third party witnesses to the treaty. Witnesses usually consisted of an exhaustive list of deities in the localities of both parties that were called upon as witnesses to observe the behavior of the vassal in order to punish or reward when necessary (Mendenhall and Herion, 1992). Mendenhall and Herion note that usually spiritual deities were preferred because it was believed that they had the capacity to probe the genuineness of the obedience of the vassal to ensure that it was in conscience and was not taken superficially. According to Freire (2013), it was the oath in which names of deities were called upon as witnesses that distinguished a covenant from a contract at that period. He submits that the gods were called to be witnesses only in covenants. Contracts were contracted at court without swearing, and there were human witnesses, but not the gods. He suggests further that the role of the deity is associated with the blessings and curses that are discussed in the next item.

v. *Blessings and curses*

Mendenhall and Herion (1992) maintain that the blessings and curses described in detail what were the rewards or punishment of the vassal according to whether he was obedient or disobedient to the treaty requirements. Freire (2013) states that this section was not taken lightly as it determined the authority of the oath on which the

agreement rested. It was the threats of the gods to punish covenant breakers and reward faithful vassals, which ensured its effectiveness. Once the form and content are clearly understood by both parties and validly accepted, the covenant was ratified as is discussed next.

vi. *The ratification of the covenant*

Again, Mendenhall and Herion suggest that a formal ritual was celebrated to seal every treaty. They reason that there was no specific and rigid formula that was observed in the ritual ceremony. They continue that usually it consisted of a local rite, and so it exhibited variety in form and content. Yet, they observe that there was always the sacrifice of an animal that was identified with the life of the vassal and his dependents that was being placed under oath. They explain that these were to be slaughtered like the sacrificial animal should they violate the oath. They note that sometimes the sacrifice was followed by a common meal.

vii. *Provision for preserving and reading the covenant*

Mendenhall and Herion maintain that a copy of the finished document of the treaty was supposed to be placed in the local temple. They posit that the aim was to involve the local deity and implore his protection. They also discover the belief that the involvement of the deity helped to make the treaty sacred and to ensure its compliance. Another important reason that was given by Mendenhall and Herion was that the public reading of the document was a way to create a forum to get the whole nation involved. This was done by providing the opportunity

for the document to be read publicly and periodically so that everyone would learn the values and principles of the treaty.

The above seven elements were found to be standard in most ancient treaties. I sought to confirm these elements from other scholars who had done similar studies and discovered the following:

With the exception of the ratification, Lopez (2004) has all the other six elements listed above. He, however, adds an element of oath swearing and handing over ceremonies.

- i. Marshall (2003) confirms all seven elements to be present in all ancient suzerain treaties.
- ii. Walsh (2004) affirms six of the seven elements listed with the exception of the ratification ceremony to be present in all ancient suzerain treaties.
- iii. Thompson (1964) and Hafemann (2007) both agree on five of the seven elements listed, leaving out the ratification and deposit of document ceremonies. However, Thompson raises the ratification and deposit ceremonies separately.
- iv. Niehaus (2010), writing later, appear to acknowledge only four of the seven elements, namely, identification of the speaker, historical prologue, stipulations and ratification ceremonies. He ignores the witnesses, the deposit, the blessings and curses. This notwithstanding, it can be confirmed that the elements outlined by Mendenhall and Herion are present and standard in most ancient treaties with some modifications.

There are a number of issues that can be discerned from these elements and I will like to tease them out as follows:

- i. The elements define the kind of relationship that is to exist between a suzerain king and a vassal that they were more official and formal.
- ii. Deities themselves were not directly partners in the treaties. They served as third party witnesses, enforcers of the covenant and also ensured the sacredness of the covenant.
- iii. The elements confirmed that the relationship between a suzerain and a vassal was exclusive, although personal relationships with deities were very common in pagan cultures and people did have favourite deities whom they went to for various needs; a vassal was obliged by oath to be faithful and loyal to a suzerain king alone or committed treason (Foster, 2010) and suffered its consequences.
- iv. The elements ensured security and accountability. Since the commitment was backed by oath and it was mutual, it ensured the security and accountability of both partners. Although the obligation was on the vassal to follow the covenant requirements, it was also incumbent on the suzerain to see to the protection and the fulfilment of other covenant benefits of the vassal (Foster, 2010).

One can conclude that ancient suzerain treaty ensured some kind of exclusive relationship between a suzerain king and a vassal. Such a relationship was backed by some legal requirements and it was sealed with ritual celebrations. The legal obligations and the ritual ceremonies were, however, meant to protect and safeguard fidelity to the relationship so established.

The Sinai covenant will now be studied to see if the signs of these elements are discernible. I will again begin with the work of Mendenhall and Herion and corroborate their findings with views from others. Some elements in the structure and format of the Sinai Covenant will be discussed and awareness of the similarities and differences with the Hittite Treaties will be drawn.

### **Sinai covenant**

Mendenhall & Herion (1992) acknowledge the debate that surrounds the historicity of the Sinai covenant. They sound a note of caution that the suzerainty treaty may be compared to the Sinai Covenant only when one is sure that the latter was actually a historical event that occurred.. Otherwise, if it was only used as a literary attempt to explain God's relationship with His people during the pre-monarchic era, then the similarity may not be essential. However, the presupposition is that the Sinai covenant was a historical fact and contained some elements of ancient suzerainty treaty (Mendenhall & Herion, 1992).

It is however observed that a number of these elements in the Israelite covenant were modified to suit their proper situational needs. The basic description of the Sinai Covenant is found in Exodus 19-24. Guinan (1992) suggests that the account can be grouped into three: what God does, the response of the people and requirements. The following elements are identified:

- i. Identification of the covenant giver and the historical prologue: Mendenhall & Herion observe in the Sinai Covenant that the first two elements of the suzerain treaty, the identification of the covenant giver



and the historical prologue had been put together into one in the Decalogue (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 6). They explain that this was to emphasize the monotheistic God of the Mosaic Covenant. They maintain that God was identified as Yahweh who had done so much for the people by saving them from slavery (Exodus 20:2). What they are not sure of is whether the name Yahweh was adopted from the name of any local deity or not. They also pay attention to the fact that the relationship between God and the people went beyond what was expressed in Exodus 20. They give some hints that the people had experienced God in the clouds of fire and smoke that were enough to tell them about the power of Yahweh and the fact that they could put their trust in Him. Mendenhall and Herion, therefore, observe some undercurrent elements of persuasion, which were convincing the people to trust and obey God behind the simple identification that was discussed. Raddish (1990), Barrick (1999), Niehaus (2010), Lopez (2004) agree to the presence of the preamble and the historical prologue in the Sinai Covenant in principle, but do not agree where these elements are located. However, Barrick (1999) suggests that the preamble is found in Exodus 19:5-6 and the historical prologue found in Exodus 19:1-4 implying that they were not necessarily fused together as suggested earlier. Marshall (2003), Lopez (2004) and Niehaus (2010) agree that they are located in Exodus 20:2, which implicitly supports the suggestions of Mendenhall and Herion. But Niehaus further states that the historical background is actually found in Exodus 3-19, which demonstrates the history of a relationship

between a suzerain king and a vassal. This is a demonstration that scholars do not agree on the extent to which the Sinai Covenant paralleled an ancient treaty.

ii. *The stipulations*

Mendenhall & Herion (1992) point out that the stipulation is located in Exodus 20:1-17, Deuteronomy 10:4 which contains the ten words (Commandments) written on two tablets (Exodus 20). They make mention of the fact that this is probably the most important visible external document of the Sinai Covenant. They suggest that the stipulations contained simple instructions of what was expected of a covenant/faith community which was in two forms, vertical and horizontal relationship. Mendenhall and Herion explain that the former was on the people's relationship with Yahweh and on how to worship Him better, while the latter dealt with how they related to one another. They observe that the stipulation revealed an intrinsic connection between Yahweh and social justice. How the people treated each other was a sign that they were devoted to Yahweh. Mendenhall and Herion (1992) comment that while the suzerain king was not so much concerned about the internal affairs of the vassal state, God cared about the interpersonal relationships in the faith community. Hence, a special area of concern is the treatment of the poor, the oppressed and the alien (Exodus 22: 21, 23:9). Even though it is believed that this may have been added by a later editor due to the fact that the people themselves suffered in foreign lands and they were saved by Yahweh, it would be contradictory if they were not kind to one another, to the poor, the

oppressed and other aliens (Mendenhall and Herion, 1992). Barrick (1999) on his part claims that the stipulations were located in Exodus 20:3-23:19. Williamson adds a few verses to the suggestions of Barrick (1999) and finds the stipulations at Exodus 20:3-23:33 to which he receives support from Niehaus, only that he finds further elaborations on how to live under the covenant in Exodus 25 through to Leviticus 27. What is important here is that the stipulations are massively present in the Sinai Covenant. Barrick (1999) thinks that this is the most conditional of all God's dealings with his people and the disobedience of which had serious consequences. Another equally important element of the Sinai Covenant is the ritual to seal the covenant, which is treated next.

iii. *The ratification ceremony*

The ratification ceremony came in two forms: Mendenhall & Herion draw attention to the fact that the ritual ceremony of the Sinai Covenant contains verbal assent (Exodus 19:8, 24:3), where the people agreed to do all that Yahweh had prescribed. They maintain that this was uncommon in suzerain treaties where rituals were usually performed rather than that verbal assent was given. They note that in this particular covenant the verbal assent was followed by a dual ritual ceremony of sacrifice of an animal and a meal (Exodus 24:1-11). They further observe that the blood of the animal was sprinkled on the altar, which represented God, and on the people. The people were thus identified with the fate of the animal. In effect, the people pledged their lives to obey the divine will. They add that the narration in Joshua

(chapter 24) is able to bring out clearly the Hittite suzerainty treaty enactment. Guinan (1992) suggests that sharing blood and a meal signifies sharing of life and belonging to the same family. He makes reference to when a bull is offered as a symbol of peace, adding that it adds to the familiar relationship that the covenant is establishing between the people and God, and also among the people themselves. Niehaus (2010) confirms that the young bulls were for peace offering and symbolized the peaceful way in which the covenant was cut. He explains that the blood performed purificatory rites and the possibility of forgiveness in the future. Barrick (1999) does not include a ratification ceremony as part of the formal structure of the covenant, but includes certain ceremonial obligations of the covenant people as part of the Mosaic Law (Exodus 25:1-31). This involved blood sacrifices that function as purificatory rites and regularly reinforce the stipulations as well as offering the people the opportunity to worship. He adds that to be guilty of any ceremonial law was to be guilty of all stipulations to show that it was an integral part of the stipulations. Lopez (2004) appears to follow Barrick in excluding the ratification ceremony in the formal structure of the covenant and yet acknowledges its presence in the Sinai Covenant. He treats the verbal consent of the people as an oath of allegiance. He considers the sacrificial ceremony as signifying what was to happen to covenant breakers. Williamson (2003) attests to the fact that the ratification ceremony is located in Exodus 24:3-8 involving a sacrificial ritual that was somehow unique from all ritual celebrations. Even though some aspects of it correspond

to later celebrations (Exodus 29:16, 20, Leviticus 1:5, 11), it has its own peculiar character. He submits that the blood, however, consecrates the people, especially the priesthood. He suggests that the sign of the covenant was the Sabbath, which was made manifest only after Moses received the instruction to build the tabernacle, a sign that the two were closely associated. He argues that the presence of the tabernacle was to enhance the divine-human relation and give importance to the covenantal priesthood. He thinks that this aspect may probably have been a later element that was inserted. Other elements worthy of attention are discussed as follows:

iv. ***Deposit and public reading, witnesses, blessings and curses:***

Mendenhall & Herion discern that the stipulation did not contain deposits and provisions for periodic renewal and public readings, but add that these elements were not absent from the traditions of Israel. They remark that two stone tablets were deposited in the Ark of the Covenant as Israel did not have a temple yet. They point to the idea of depositing a text in the “sanctuary” (Joshua 24:26). It is also possible that these texts were read periodically (Exodus 23:17, Deuteronomy 27:11-26) and the recitation of the *shema* might have been a way that Jewish Rabbis renewed the covenant (Mendenhall and Herion, 1992). Lopez (2004) confirms this element in Exodus 25:16, 21, 40:20 and Deuteronomy 10:1-5 on the two tablets which were stored in the Ark as a witness against violators (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). He continues that the law was to be read periodically (Deuteronomy 31:10-13).

Mendenhall and Herion (1992) opine that the list of gods as witnesses was not applicable in a monotheistic system of this covenant and so some of the members of the community became the enforcers of the covenant so that all stipulations became socially enforceable laws. It is suggested that the pillars served as witnesses (Exodus 24:4), but others think that they were only symbols and not witnesses as they were left behind. A song was composed to serve as a witness (Deuteronomy 31:16-30); the book of the law, heaven and earth were all called upon as witnesses (Mendenhall and Herion, 1992). Marshall (2003) confirms that witnesses were present as indicated here (Joshua 24, Deuteronomy 10:5).

Mendenhall & Herion (1992) detect that the blessings and curses are massively listed in Deuteronomy 28 where there are 14 blessings and 68 curses. They think that the multiplication of the blessings may have come from later elaborations (Mendenhall & Herion, 1992). Marshall (2003) agrees that the whole of Deuteronomy contains the blessings and curses of the covenant. Lopez (2004) asserts that the blessings and curses here are not incantations and do not have anything to do with magic as it seemed to be the case in ancient treaties. More information on this element is found in Leviticus (26:3-33). Barrick (1999) locates the blessings and curses in Exodus 23:20-22).

### **Conclusion**

The treaty confirmed certain fundamental ideological assumptions that needed attention and these are identified as follows:

1. The Sinai covenant was modeled after ancient suzerain treaty in a modified form: God is the suzerain king and Israel the vassal state.
2. God is a partner as well as the enforcer of the covenant.
3. The nation Israel had benefited from the generosity of God and must in gratitude obey his wishes.
4. The Stipulations or the Ten Commandments became the national law for Israel
5. The people pledged their life to obey the wishes of God the suzerain kind, otherwise suffered the consequences of disobedience.
6. The relationship between God and Israel was exclusive, Israel risk committing treason if she adulterated the relationship with God. The punishment for treason was death.
7. God promised to protect Israel and became a father to them if they would remain faithful children.

The research has helped to understand the covenant in its context and its unique character among others. One of the fundamental differences is that the Hittite treaty was made between two pagan kings one of whom was superior to the other and the deities were called upon as witnesses. It was not the same as the divine/human covenant that took place on Sinai between God and the people, where God was a partner, a witness and an enforcer of the covenant. Due to the nature of this particular covenant, the ritual that sealed the covenant became the worship of the community. Henceforth, the standard to determine Israel's fidelity to God was measured in how they worshipped and obeyed God's requirements.

At this juncture, it is interesting to note that the concept of ‘*berith*’ is understood to mean bilateral obligations between two parties who by oath agree to do/not to do something they specify. Both Israel and God were bonded by the Sinai Covenant. The elements in this covenant may be simplified as relationship, legal and cultic, and these characteristics will be looked for in all the other covenants.

### **Promissory Oath**

Scholars are also of the view that besides the ancient treaty format, there was another form of agreement known as promissory oath. Mendenhall and Herion (1992) are of the view that an aspect of a promissory oath was called ‘divine charters’ which did not have any specific form. It originated from Ancient Near East mythology in which a deity or a king freely promised by oath to give special privileges to a chosen human, especially one who had been a successful warrior or a faithful servant to the king or deity. Weinfeld (1970) argues that a classical form of promissory oath is the royal land grant found in the Babylonian *Kudurru* document which was practised in other parts of the Ancient Near East like among the Hittites and Neo-Assyrians. Weinfeld explains that formerly the *Kuduuru* was used as barrier stones to protect personal property, which were adopted into the land grant covenant. He proposes that the royal land grant was an unconditional and perpetual benefit that was given to one who had faithfully and truthfully served his master. He reasons that the grant was usually left open ended, depending on whether the descendants of the servant were able to maintain their father’s loyal service. They came to effect after the ratification ceremonies were done. Beacham, (2011) adds that the focus of the grant was on the obligation of the master to



the loyal servant, and the main feature of the grant was the list of favours that a master promised his servant.

Hegg (1989) suggests that originally the grants were personal documents and so were varied in their formulae, hence modern scholars are only able to tap the recurrent elements. He observes that the grant was employed at a time when governments were not powerfully structured to guarantee the security of private property. Consequently, the document had divine curses and blessings so that the land was put under the care of a deity for protection. This was particularly useful if an individual was asked by a king to settle in a hostile environment. To Hegg, the most important aspect of the grant was the gift of land and dynasty. Wienfeld (1970) identifies some recurrent elements as follows:

- i. historical introduction,
- ii. border delineations,
- iii. stipulations,
- iv. witnesses,
- v. blessings and curses.

He argues that in principle these elements are closer and similar to those of the suzerain treaty discussed above, but in practice the dissimilarities in them are enormous. He maintains that while the obligation of the suzerain treaty is on the vassal, the obligations in the royal grant are on the master. Again, in the grant the curse is directed towards the one who infringes on the rights of the vassal, whereas in the treaty the curse is on the vassal who breaks the treaty. Wienfeld (1970) again draws attention to the fact that while the grant protects the right of the servant, the treaty protects the rights of the king. Similarly, the

grant is a reward for faithful and loyal service, while the treaty guarantees future loyalty. Hegg (1989) posits that the oath ceremony that ratified the grant was not often spelt out in the document, even though it was an essential part of the grant. He reveals that at other times the royal seal served as a physical presence of the oath that was verbally taken. To him, these are the elements that may have been present in the covenants with Abraham and David.

Raddish (1990) adds that the historical prologue in the land grant described the king, his title and attributes, and then introduced the one to receive the grant. He adds that the boundary of the land was then demarcated in concrete terms to be followed by the stipulation, which had two sections. The first section describes what the king would do for the servant, and what the servant was to do as well. This is followed by human witnesses, comprising those who worked on the land and prepared all documents for transfer; after that came the blessings and curses in which the king ensured the rights of the servant. All those who showed favour to the servant were blessed and all those who cursed the servants were cursed.

Hegg (1989), Busenitz (1999), Harrington (2004), Lopez (2004) and Niehaus (2010) agree that the covenant with Noah, Abraham and David were different from the Sinai Covenant and were understood as land grant since it was God alone who was obliged to make the covenant work, and the covenants were given for loyal and faithful services of the recipients. They also agree that the land grant has a format that is closer to the treaty with slight modification.

Grisanti (1999) confirms the four basic differences between the royal grant and treaty discussed earlier by Weinfeld (1970) and demonstrates in the table below showing the basic differences between Grant and Treaty:

Table 3: Showing the similarities and differences between Grant and Treaty

Grant	Treaty
The master makes a commitment to the servant	The suzerain imposes obligations on the vassal
The grant represents the commitment of the master to the servant	It is the vassal who has obligation to keep the wishes of his master
The aim of the grant is primarily to protect the interest of the servant	The treaty protects the interest of the master
It is given as a reward for loyal service, there is no demand on the servant	It ensures future loyalty of the servant.

(Source: Grisanti, 1999)

It may be observed from the table 3 that in the grant the attention is on the servant, and in the treaty all attention is on the king.

Before a comparison is made between the elements of the ancient land grants and Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, a note of caution should be sounded that scholars do not agree on the degree to which the Old Testament covenants were influenced by the ancient land grant. It is accepted that the Old Testament covenants share some similarities with prevailing customs and practices of the Ancient Near East. Yet, the covenants were not completely copied from ancient customs; they were adapted to suit proper and various situational needs. Again, the Old Testament covenants were considered God's revelation to His people and so God inspired available customs and practices and used them to communicate Himself to His people (Raddish, 1990).

### **Abrahamic covenant as a royal grant**

Mendenhall & Herion (1992) reason that the biblical traditions of Abraham are from the monarchic period as their existence in the pre-monarchic era are almost absent. They explain that the tradition appear to have gone through some modifications before it was incorporated into the biblical tradition. They believe the Abrahamic covenant tradition originated from the same source as the Davidic covenant and that the promise to Abraham and his descendants was readily applied to David. They note that this was the case until after the fall of Jerusalem, when there was no king and a political community and the recipient of the covenant was depoliticized to include the whole population, and this was perceived as the will of God. Many scholars accept the covenant between God and Abraham as a land grant given to him for faithful service (Mendenhall and Herion, 1992; Weinfeld 1970; Busenitz, 1999; Lopez, 2004). The covenant with Abraham is found in Genesis 12:1-3, 15 and 17. There is, however, a debate among scholars as to how many covenants God made with Abraham.

Williamson (2003) argues that scholars are divided as to whether God made one or two covenants with Abraham (Genesis 15 and 17). He considers Genesis 12:1-3 as a prelude to the covenants in chapters 15 and 17. He contends that while those from the diachronic perspective suggest that the two covenants originated from different sources, those from the synchronic perspective view Abraham's relationship with Yahweh as having developed gradually through each stage of God's revelation, and Abraham's understanding and maturity in that relationship unfolded with each stage. He sees the synchronic view as positing that only one covenant was made with

Abraham and subsequent covenants were simply renewing, confirming or amplifying the one single covenant. From the synchronic approach, therefore, the covenant accounts in Genesis 15 and 17 are not just from different sources, but Genesis 17 is a renewal of previously established covenant or the next phase of its development. Genesis chapter 17 adds to the promissory dimension of the covenant in chapter 15, which was previously not present but which was important obligatory information on the covenant. Williamson (2003), however, argues that the covenants in Genesis chapters 15 and 17 are different in nature. One is unilateral, the other bilateral; one is temporal, the other eternal. There is a thirteen-year gap between them, and Genesis chapter 17 is consistently projected into the future (17:2,7) as if the covenant has not yet taken place. Williamson concludes that there are two distinct but related covenants that God made with Abraham. He suggests that when the two are put together, they complete the agenda that God set in Genesis chapter 12:1-3. While Genesis chapter 15 concentrates on the divine promise to make Abram a great nation, chapter 17 stresses his international relations and its benefits. He debates that perhaps the future covenant in chapter 17 is ratified in chapter 22:2 in the sacrifice of a ram. He opines that by this time Abraham had proved beyond doubt that he was an irreproachable person towards God, which is an important characteristic of a land grant. Yet Williamson (2003) did not bother to delineate the elements of a land grant in the covenant. Lopez (2004) and Niehaus (2010) do not fully agree with Williamson and argue for a single covenant that is confirmed and renewed. They go further to identify elements of the ancient suzerain treaty in the Abrahamic covenant. Although they accept it as a land grant, they suggest the elements are the same. Lopez

identifies a preamble in Genesis 15:1, a historical prologue in Genesis 12:1 but adds that some scholars suggest that Genesis chapter 11:26-31 as a historical prologue that climaxes in Genesis chapter 12, while others consider all chapters 1-11 of Genesis as the historical prologue. Lopez argues that there are no stipulations as all responsibilities to maintain the covenant rest on God, yet he identifies some debatable conditions in Genesis 12:1, 17:1-2, 9-14. Nevertheless, these were explained by saying that circumcision was only a sign to the covenant, since by the time that instructions on circumcision were given, God had already given the covenant at Genesis 12:1-4 and 15. He is emphatic regarding the idea that subsequent covenant breakers miss the promised blessings, but their infidelity does not annul the covenant. Lopez (2004) also maintains that the kind of blessings and curses in the grant are different from those of the treaties, since they affect only the fate of those outside the covenant.

Lopez (2004) draws attention to the fact that although Abraham and his descendants receive blessings in Genesis 12:1-3 and are confirmed in Genesis chapters 15 and 17, there are also conditional blessings (17:1-2, 9-14). The fifth element that is identified was the sacrificial oath. Lopez (2004) reasoned that it is God who initiated, ratified and sealed the covenant with an oath. God introduced the covenant in Genesis 12:1-3 and ratifies it in Genesis 15:9-20. Since he alone passed between the two halves of the animals (Genesis 15:17) and grants the land (Genesis 15:18) without any stipulations. God repeats the oath (Genesis 22:16) to confirm His promises.

Niehaus (2010) has a different structure to the Abrahamic grant. He identifies the preamble (Genesis 15:1, 7a), the historical prologue (Genesis 12-

14, 15:7b), the stipulations (Genesis 26:5), blessings (Genesis 15:4, 6-7b), granting the land (Genesis 15:18-19) and ritual ceremony (Genesis 15:9-11, 17). Niehaus is of the view that although Genesis chapters 12-14 do not fall within the pericope of the narratives of the covenant, they form the background to the actual narratives. He contends that if the Abrahamic covenant paralleled ancient land grants, the implication was that Abraham was a king and the king must have acquired the land by conquest. He analyzes the two covenants in Genesis chapters 15 and 17 differently. He finds the preamble in chapter 17 as God identifying himself as *El Shaddai*, the God of the mountains (17:1). According to him, this means that God either founded the mountains or He was as strong and unshakable as the mountain. He identifies stipulations (17: 10-14 15, 17) and blessings (17:2), and adds that previous blessings (15) were confirmed. Table 4 below shows the elements suggested by Lopez (2004) and Niehaus (2010). Although the two do not agree on the details, they have the same elements that may be delineated as follows:

**Table 4 showing the different demarcations of the elements of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis.**

Genesis	Lopez	Niehaus
Preamble	15:1	15:1,7a; 17:1
Historical prologue	1-11; 12:1	12-14; 15:7b
Stipulations	12:1; 17:1-2, 9-14	17:10-14, 15, 17; 26:5
Blessings	17:1-2, 9-14	15:4,6-7b; 17:2
Land Grant	15:18	15:18-19
Ratification	15:9-20; 22:16	15:9-11, 17

Source: adapted from Lopez (2004) and Niehaus (2010)

Both of them agree in principle but not on the details, yet they agree that there are no curses in the grant covenant, even though Lopez suggests that curses were for those outside the covenant who infringe on the rights of the receiver of the grant. Again, the obligations are on God who swore to be faithful to His servants. He explains that what appears to be conditions are explained as signs of the covenant. However, it is observed that the explanations given by Lopez and Niehaus on the stipulations followed the stipulations in the suzerain treaty and they are quite different from the explanations provided by others. This is mainly because despite the fact that they consider the covenant to be a land grant, they pattern its elements after those of the suzerain treaty. Hegg (1989), Weinfeld (1970) and Grisanti (1999) confirm that the content and terminologies used in the covenant to Abraham and David follow that of Assyrian land grant and that its characteristic elements are quite different from the Hittite treaty, even though they have some similarities. They function differently and so they are better understood from the land grant perspective.

Weinfeld (1970) identifies the first characteristics of a land grant as a promise. He says that Abraham was promised the land because he obeyed God and remained in His loyal service. The grant was therefore a gift. Weinfeld adds that the land was promised to Abraham (Genesis 22:16-18; 26:5) in a language that was very similar to the Assyrian grant, especially the one Ashurbanipal gave to his servant Bulta because Bulta had served him truthfully and wholeheartedly and stood up for him, building a good name in his presence. He sees a similarity in this and what God said to Abraham for being obedient to Him by keeping His commandments, laws and statutes. He



observes that in return for this faithfulness of Abraham, God promised to give him many descendants, lands and blessings (Genesis 26:4-5).

Weinfeld (1970) also identifies the notion of perfect service in the Assyrian grant as also present in the Abrahamic covenant. This is expressed in the form of Abraham walking blamelessly before God (Genesis 24:40, 48:15, 17:1; 14:1-7).

The third characteristic he identifies is that the Abrahamic grant was unconditional and everlasting. If any descendant broke the covenant, that person would not enjoy the blessings but that did not annul the covenant (Weinfeld 1970, Thompson 1964, Hegg, 1989 and others).

They add that familiar metaphors that were typical of diplomatic vocabulary of the time were used. The covenant was sealed with sacrificial offering in which God, the suzerain, passed between the parts of the animals to commit himself to keep the promise. Weinfeld (1970) explains that the blazing torch, and the smoking oven were theophanic language. There are traditional practices in the *surpu supra* document where one takes an oath by holding a torch over a stove or furnace. There is also the oath of a slaughtered sheep by which one takes the oath by touching the wound of the animal. Weinfeld concludes that the torch and oven were probably part of the ritual of taking an oath in the Ancient Near East and the rite of cutting an animal was also practised in oath taking. The elements he suggests for royal land grants are summarized as follows:

Historical prologue	Genesis 11; 15:7; 17:1
Border delineations	12:7; 13:14, 17; 15:18-21; 17:18 22:17
Stipulations	12:1-3; 13:15-16; 15:1-6, 13-16; 17:1-8, 9-14; 22:17-18

Witnesses 12:3; 15:8-12, 17; 22:16

Blessings and Curses 12:3

It is observed that the Ratification ceremony was present and important even though it did not appear to be part of the formal element. From this analysis, one does not see much difference between the element provided by Weinfeld (1970) and those by Lopez (2004) and Niehaus (2010). The difference is that according to Weinfeld (1970), Hegg (1989) and Grisanti (1999), the stipulations are not obligations on the vassal but commitment of the master to protect the interest of the servant. The curses were on all those who infringe on the rights of the servant and blessings were on those who showed interest in the servant. These were just the opposite of the stipulations in the treaty and these were what made the Abrahamic covenant quite different from the Mosaic covenant.

One can conclude that the royal land grant also established a formal relationship between partners, in this case between God, Abraham, and his descendants. The relationship is coloured by adoption metaphors that help to establish kinship relations. The relationship is supported by an oath on the part of the suzerain to keep his promises. The promises were eternal and did not depend on the fidelity of the descendants of Abraham for its maintenance and sustainability. *Berith* at the time was a promissory oath through Abraham to the community. Participants in the grant, however, were defined by the rites of circumcision, they were to live blamelessly before God and were to remain in His faithful service. All these confirm that covenant is about relationships. This time the obligation was on God who promised to sustain the relationship. Yet the people were to be circumcised, live a righteous life and serve God

faithfully as Abraham had done. Another important land grant that is of interest to our study is the Davidic covenant, which is discussed next.

### **New Testament View of Covenant**

It has been established that the Hebrew word *berith* is translated in Greek as διαθήκη and in English as “covenant”. Scholars also agree that διαθήκη is also translated as ‘will and Testament’. Beckwith (1987) states that at the time of the translation of the Septuagint, the word διαθήκη was translated as ‘Testament’, although originally it was used for disposition. Hahn (2005b) agrees that the word διαθήκη may have come from διατίθεμαι, which means, ‘to dispose, determine’ or ‘to distribute’. He notes that although this was not the common meaning of the word, it has come to denote the testamentary disposition of property in relations to one’s death. He continues that the usual Greek term for covenant was συνθήκη, but during the work of the translators of the *Septuagint*, the word διαθήκη was used instead of συνθήκη. Hahn (2005b) suggests that the use of διαθήκη here has generated the debate that since the scribes could not have made a mistake because of their consistency in the use of the word, it is assumed that probably whenever διαθήκη was used, the word Testament was implied. He adds that sometimes the word ‘Testament’ did not make sense where διαθήκη was used, and the word ‘covenant’ was more appropriate. Interestingly, Hahn (2005b) notes that the meaning of the two words appears not to be the same. He declares that a Testament ensures the distribution of one’s property after death, while a covenant is an obligatory relationship that is backed by oath with no reference to the distribution of property or death wish. One common characteristic of the two terms is that they both deal with a legal document so much so that

sometimes a covenant is identified with the ratifying oath, especially in the book of Joshua. He continues that in Deuteronomy “oath” and “covenant” were used interchangeably. Another interesting character of the covenant is that the oath is taken before a god. Once it is taken, a covenant cannot be violated (Joshua 9:15). Violation results in a harsh punishment.

Beckwith (1987) confirms that while testament can be changed or modified, covenant cannot be changed. He declares that if *berith* is translated as testament, it assumes a meaning that was unknown in the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, testament becomes effective at the death of the testator, which cannot be said of God, and which makes the word all the more unsuitable as a description of God’s relationship with man. However, if the translators went ahead to use a word that meant testament, it might have been a better option than its alternative. He argues that the alternative word *σὺνθήκη* connotes equality between the partners entering into a relationship. This was considered unsuitable to describe the relationship between God and his people. Beckwith suggests that *διαθήκη* seemed to denote the disposition of a sovereign, which was not tied down only to ‘last will’. The problem with the idea of the death of the testator was seen as a problem only when testament is considered in relation to Roman law alone, which required the death of the testator to be effective. Beckwith suggests that a Graeco-Syrian law allowed a testament to be sanctioned during the lifetime of the testator. Such a testament come into force as soon as it was written.

Beckwith (1987) concludes that it has been debated whether the word *διαθήκη* should be translated as “covenant” or “testament”. In the New Testament, sometimes *διαθήκη* is used as ‘testament’ and at other times it is

translated as 'covenant'. The two parts of the sacred literature of the Church, for example, have been called Testaments and have been translated as covenants. Each use of the word διαθήκη is considered on its merit since the debate continues unabated.

### **Covenant in the early Church**

Mendenhall and Herion (1992) assert that the best source of information on covenant in the early Christian community is the narrative that recounted the Last Supper. Although Lundbom (1992) hints that some scholars do not accept the Last Supper as a covenant meal, they think that the Last Supper information was very brief originally and has gone through some modification and expansion to indicate that the blood of Jesus seals the New Covenant. Mendenhall and Herion (1992) do not agree with this and accept the fact that the Last Supper is identified as the new covenant in the cup of wine that Jesus gave to His apostles (Matthew 26:29; 1Corinthians 11:23-25). The Eucharist, therefore, is one very important medium to encounter, study and understand the Christian concept of covenant, since it is considered the New Covenant. In the Eucharist, covenant is understood as a sacrament and this is discussed next.

### ***Covenant as sacrament***

Mendenhall & Herion (1992) propose that the Eucharist, which was also considered a (new) covenant with its association with the Last Supper, became a very fundamental basis for Christian gathering. Again, they state that the Eucharist was already identified as Sacrament very early in the life of the early Church. They maintain that the Latin word *sacramentum* was used to refer to the oath of loyalty that a soldier pledged to the Roman Emperor. If this

was the understanding of sacrament in those days, then it is possible that the early Christians understood the Eucharist to contain some elements of oath taking. The explanation here was that in the case of the early Christians, the oath taken was to a personality beyond the emperor, i.e. Christ, whose Kingdom transcended the Roman empire. Mendenhall and Herion (1992) go further to advocate that probably the Roman persecution of the early Christians reflected this notion that the Christians swore allegiance to a King other than the emperor and that King was Christ.

Mendenhall & Herion (1992) recommend again that this New Testament concept of covenant is reminiscent of the loyalty oath of Ancient Near East in a number of ways:

The first is the issue of oath taking that has just been discussed. The second similarity of Christian Eucharist to Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) covenant was the use of bread and wine, which first appeared in Mari in Assyrian loyalty oath. It was used in covenant banquets as a symbol of internalization of the covenant obligation by the vassal king. The oath had to be digested into the intestines like the bread and wine. Another similarity is found in the terminologies like “remembrance” which reflected ANE covenant thought. The root of the word, which is not found in Greek but in the code of Hammurabi, was to swear or to invoke. This means that “remembrance” connotes a meaning that goes beyond simple recall, to include a commitment on the fact that remembering past benefits received undeservedly is the basis for one to make a decision, either in the present or in the future and take an action in gratitude to the giver of the favour. Interestingly, such understanding of remembrance is implied in the ideology of the Sinai covenant as a grateful

acknowledgement of undeserved favour and one's response to it (Mendenhall & Herion, 1992).

Another interesting and important similarity that was pointed out by Mendenhall & Herion (1992) was that when Christians eat the bread and drink the wine, they identify themselves with the sacrificial victim, in the sense of a vassal being placed under a loyalty oath of the ANE. In addition to this, Christians metaphorically identified themselves as the Body of Christ. This means that the individual Christians were members of that Body and together they represent the spirit of Christ who is the Victim for the sacrifice. The concept bears fruit in the lives of Christians, if they are able to manifest the possibility to accommodate the diversity of members that come to unity which transcends the cultural and ethnic moral values of the individual groups. In this way, the Christian community is not governed by particular cultural norms and ethical principles as was the case with the rabbinic Judaism of the time. Hence, willing participation of the ritual of the Eucharist is the Christian oath of allegiance to the Lordship of Christ. This is the motive behind the psyche of those who stood firm in front of earthly authorities to be put to death (Mendenhall and Herion, 1992). The new covenant was a historical reality that was socially enacted that brought together different people of cultural and ethnic backgrounds who shared a common commitment to some values in Christ, which transcend ethnic, social and cultural values of the individual groups and subjected one to the rule of Christ.

Lundbom (1992) states that Christians understand themselves to be the new covenant community. Their perception of 'new' was rather more inclusive than their Qumran counterparts. Christians viewed themselves as

new, inclusive Israel that accommodates all nations rather than the exclusive obedience to the law in early Judaism. For this reason, Christians did not put emphasis on the law but on Christ, on faith in Christ and life in the Spirit. This puts the New Testament concept in sharp contrast to those of Judaism and the Qumran community of the Essenes (Lundbom, 1992). He continues that the concept “New Covenant” is found in Luke (22:20), where Luke talks about the blood of the covenant, which appears to revolve round a modification of the Sinai covenant in Exodus (24:8). Matthew’s version of the institution narrative adds the issue of forgiveness of sins (27:28), which appears to point to Jeremiah (31:34) where he indicated that the sins for everyone would be forgiven. These are signs of continuity between the covenants and this issue of continuity is discussed further.

What is very important for this study is the discovery that there are basically two types of covenant relationships in the ancient East that have characterized biblical covenants which are Suzerain treaty and promissory oath. Either of these relationships involves some form of legal observation, which might be enhanced by ritual celebration that had become part of the regular worship of the covenant community. One or two or all three characteristics of relationship, legal observation and ritual celebration are present and emphasized in every covenant. However, the character that is emphasized in a particular covenant is determined by the socio-political and religious context as well as the influence from the religious and/or political leaders of the time who act as mediators of the covenant.



## **Pauline Concept of Covenant**

Campbell (1993) debates whether covenant was one of the dominant theological discussions of Paul, since the term occurs only eight (8) times (Romans 9:4, 11:27; 1Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6, 14; Galatians 3:15, 17; and 4:24) in the undisputed letters of Paul. He however, hints that Paul might have avoided the term, because, it might have been used by his opponents, with a different interpretation, and that covenant realities are abundant in Pauline letters. In this section, each passage will be discussed briefly, so that Paul's view of covenant will be teased out.

### ***covenant in Romans***

In Romans 9:4, διαθήκαι is the plural form of διαθήκη. Fitzmyer (1992) suggests that the singular form is found in some manuscripts, but is quick to comment that the plural is what is meant in this passage, since it refers to the covenant of Abraham and the one on Sinai. The verse is interestingly describing the privileges that the people of Israel had so far received from God including the covenants, the giving of the law and the promises among others. The passage talks of Israel in a figurative but collective sense as adoptive son, recalling when they were constituted as a body and the chosen people of God (Fitzmyer, 1992; Scott, 1993). Fitzmyer notes that this description is honorific, it depicts the ideal Israel as envisaged by God. Hence, the description connotes a divine favour on Israel as the firstborn son of God. To this honour and favour also is demanded from Israel obedience of a son to his father. The verse uses covenant terminologies throughout. It speaks of sonship and adoption as Israel was constituted as a body, the people of God, the cult that depicts Israel as a worshipping

community, the patriarchs and the promises that were given to them (Fitzmyer, 1992). The description of the verse centers around the privileges of Israel in the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. By their adoption as sons, they are privileged to become members of the family of God with the right to inheritance. These privileges are made possible through the institution of covenant.

The covenant in Romans 11:27 is also an interesting text. One part reads ἡ παρ' ἐμοῦ διαθήκη, meaning “and this is my covenant with them”. ἐμοῦ is genitive or possessive, which helps to render the phrase “my part of the covenant” or “the covenant which is from me”. The thought will be clearer in the next statement, which reads: ὅταν ἀφέλωμαι τὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν. The word ἀφέλωμαι is the aorist middle first person singular form of the verb ἀφαιρέω, which is translated variously as to “take away”, to “remove”, “drop” and sometimes to “cut off” (Luke 1:25, 10:42; Hebrews 10:4; Rev 22:19, Mk 14:47). τὰς ἀμαρτίας is the accusative, feminine plural form of ἀμαρτία, which means “sin”. The translation here is: “this then is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins”. The taking away of sins is because of the covenant; in other words, one of the favours of the covenant is the elimination of their sins. The statement alludes to combination of texts that are weaved to create something new. Isaiah 59:21 talks about “covenant that I myself will make” and 27:9 is about the fact that the guilt of the people will be taken away. Jeremiah 31:31-33 talks about God’s new covenant in which the laws will be written on the hearts of the covenant receivers. The idea of taking away sins and elimination of the law, is an important indication that the new covenant incorporated new offers like forgiveness of sins that were not

available in the previous covenant Pettegrew, (1999). So in fulfilling his side of the new covenant, God will take away the sins of the people, God will deal with whatever it is that makes them unfaithful. This is a message of hope, in which Israel will recognize the true form of their own religion and be saved (Fitzmyer, 1992). In effect, covenant in Romans emphasizes the irrevocability of the election of Israel, since whatever makes them unfaithful will be eliminated.

### *covenant in Corinthians*

Covenant also occurs in 1Corinthians 11:25. Here the text says: τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι (“the cup of the New Covenant in my blood”). It is found in all the synoptic gospels with various adaptations. It is commonly held that the source of the information may have been the Markan tradition and the others modified the information for their various needs (Thiselton, 2000). Others argue that the Pauline material may be the oldest which was later modified to suit new conditions of the various communities (Barrett, 1993). However, my purpose here is to find out the use of the term διαθήκη in the various discourses of the Pauline materials.

As is found here, the word καινὴ (new), though absent in Matthew and Mark, is still reflected in verses 29 and 25 respectively in the eschatological consummation in the kingdom (Thiselton, 2000). While both Matthew and Mark have ‘this is the blood of the covenant’, Luke and Paul have ‘this cup is the new covenant in my blood’ (Thiselton, 2000). Some scholars suggest that the change by Paul is to pay attention to Jewish sensibilities with regard to drinking blood but this is not supported by the text. Each form of the words presupposed that the shedding of the blood of Christ inaugurated the new

covenant between God and humankind (Barrett, 1980). The wording alludes to the covenant theme in Exodus 24:8 where the blood of the sacrificial animal is poured on the people to ratify the covenant (Barrett, 1980; Fee, 1987). This also echoes Jeremiah 31:31-34 as he predicted a new covenant in place of the old one in Exodus 24 that was broken (Bruce, 1982; Fee, 1987; Barrett, 1980; Thiselton, 200). This new covenant is different from the old one in substance. The covenant symbolizes the sacrifice, which sealed the promises of God, only that this time, the victim is Christ himself. The last supper and the crucifixion are the context through which participants enter the new covenant. As they enter into a covenant with God, they also enter into a covenant with one another. The purpose of the text here is to correct abuses of the supper that is to be eaten in honour of Christ who sacrificed his life for us. In view of this, all who believe and participate in the supper are “remembering” the death of Christ. The use of covenant here emphasizes the religious or cultic and eschatological dimensions of covenant and the fact that the old covenant is fulfilled in Christ. It also points out that forgiveness of sins is embedded in the new covenant. The forgiveness is achieved in the atoning blood of Christ, who was the victim for the sacrifice.

2 Corinthians 3:6 also mentions the issue of new covenant. The verse continues the thought that was started in the previous verses with the idea that it is God who “has qualified or made us worthy or competent to minister to the new covenant” (ικάνωσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης). Ικάνωσεν is the first aorist active indicative third person singular from ικανόω, which is “to make sufficient, qualify, make adequate or competent” for something. The function here is to be διακόνοι, from διακόνοϛ, which can be a minister,

administrator or a servant with the idea of performing a duty for another, in this case on behalf of God. The duty that one is qualified to perform is “the new covenant” (καινῆς διαθήκης). In the first place, the idea of “new” leads one to desire to look for the “old”. But to be able to understand the thought here, it is important to read the whole verse. The other part of the verse is: “not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life” (οὐ γράμματος ἀλλὰ πνεύματος· τὸ γὰρ γράμμα ἀποκτείνει, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωοποιεῖ). Now γράμματος is the singular genitive neuter noun from γράμμα, literally “what is written”; and also of the alphabet: letter, a document or scripture (2 Timothy 3:15). As a document or scripture, it is sometimes used to refer to the law, alluding to it as a document or a book of the covenant in Exodus 24:7, or the words of the covenant (Deuteronomy 30:10) where these refer to the commandment or the statutes written in it (Dunn, 1998). When the law is used this way, the physically visible letter of the law is emphasized, which perhaps is the sense in this context for a purpose. Here, a comparison appears to be created between the old and the new where one is a covenant of letters and the other a covenant of Spirit. The covenant of Spirit is the new covenant as against the old one of letters.

While the new covenant of the Spirit gives life, the old one of letters kills. Which two covenants are being talked about here? Which covenant is described as γράμματος, a neuter singular noun translated variously as a letter of the alphabet, a piece of writing (Act 28:21), scripture (2Timothy 3:15)? A covenant that is related to a written code is the Mosaic covenant (Exodus 24:7). Interestingly, here the law is associated to covenant only with a negative connotation that, that covenant kills as against the new covenant that gives

life. The use of the term “new covenant” in 1Corinthians 11:25, which is associated with the sacrificial death of Christ, with its redemptive effect in the Spirit for those who believe, sheds light on our present text. The two covenants are the old Mosaic covenant, which is based on obedience to the law and the failure of which leads to death, and the new redemptive covenant of Christ that brings life. Here again, the religious aspect of covenant is emphasized and a comparison is found in two divine covenants of which, one is old and the other new, and the new makes up for what is lacking in the old. Again, this study is important as it sheds light on the contrast between the old and the new covenants and the fact that the old is perfected in the new. In effects, covenant in Corinthians is a sacrament and participants in that sacrament have become members of the covenant community. Christ is the victim of the new covenant, and his blood is for forgiveness of sins. The cross and the last supper are the entry point into the covenant. While the old covenant kills, the new covenant gives life. Again people are made worthy to minister of the covenant.

***Galatians 3:15, 17***

Galatians 3:15 begins with Ἀδελφοί, κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω (“Brothers, I speak according to human terms, or in a general human way”) which serves to indicate a direct communication with the audience in a cordial way to prepare them for the message. Betz (1979) suggests that κατὰ ἄνθρωπον (according to man) is probably intended to set up a contrast between human action and that of God. Next comes ὁμως (nevertheless, yet, or all the same), a conjunction which indicates that what follows may be a comparison, contrast, or different opinion. This is followed by an analogy that uses the term

διαθήκη in judicial terms (Bruce, 1982): ἀνθρώπου κεκυρωμένην διαθήκην οὐδεὶς ἄθετεῖ ἢ ἐπιδιατάσσεται (when a human will/testament/ covenant is ratified /confirmed/ sealed, no one rejects or adds to it). Hays (2000) suggests that the use of the term διαθήκη here is ambiguous. It seems to be referring to will and testament, yet the passage is speaking in covenantal terms. Its use here appears to have a double sense in connoting a relationship between the secular and theological dimensions of covenant since both senses deal with the issue of inheritance. Matera (2007) adds another dimension that the Septuagint (LXX) renders the Hebrew word *berith* as covenant because it is looking at the divine/human covenant not as a mutual agreement between two people, but a declaration of an individual will so that God's covenant can be considered as God's will and testament. In this way, διαθήκη, even though is translated theologically as covenant, becomes something like a legal document in the sense of 'will'. If διαθήκη is taken this way, then it shares characteristics with the secular use of the term, though it also goes beyond the secular meaning. What the text is saying is that on the human and secular level, a legal document, once ratified, can neither be annulled nor can anything be added to it by a third party. It is presumed that the Greek word οὐδεὶς (nobody, no one) here does not include the testator, since, in principle, a person may modify his/her own last will and testament, but this cannot be done by a third person without the consent of the testator at any time, provided he/she is of a sound mind (Betz, 1979; Hays, 2000; Bruce, 1982). The word covenant here refers to a legal document in everyday human activity, specifically, the last will and testament, which is usually effective or ratified at the death of the testator, and once he/she is dead, no one can modify it. Hugenberger (1994) argues that

Paul is differentiating between covenant and testament. The two are the same in the sense that they are legal institutions, yet the difference is that once a covenant is ratified by oath, it cannot be altered unlike a testament. Hahn (2005) contends that *διαθήκη* here means covenant, because Paul always use it to mean covenant and that is how the term had been used in the LXX, by other New Testament writers and the Apostolic Fathers. He explains further that with the exception of Hebrews 9:16-17, *διαθήκη* has always been used in the new testament to mean covenant. Moreover, he confirms that a testament may be amended; it is only a covenant that cannot be amended. He concludes that the use of covenant in this verse is reminiscent of the ratification of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 22:15-18 with a divine oath. If this is the case, the text is comparing two things; if a human covenant cannot be annulled or modified once it is ratified then what? The thought here is not complete to understand the comparison; it is important to look at the complementary information in verse 17.

Now to continue the comparison from verse 17, the dialogue begins with *τοῦτο δὲ λέγω* (so this I say). The author continues by speaking of a covenant that has been previously ratified (*προκεκυρωμένην*) before God. *προκεκυρωμένην* is the perfect participle passive feminine from *προκυρώω*, “of a will or covenant: cause to be in force earlier, make valid in advance, previously ratify”. The text is translated as “the law that appeared 430 years later does not annul the covenant previously established by God, to do away with the promise”. The text is gradually building the idea of covenant from human, secular and, specifically, from a legal field and progressively raising it to a divine activity in Christ. God is the one who initiated and ratified the



covenant. The other half of the verse is interesting as one would have expected that the comparison between the secular and theological or human and divine dimensions of the covenant would be brought to a close. But the text is taking a detour route to complete the analogy. Up to this point, it is not yet clear which of the biblical covenants that were ratified by God is being referred to here. This will become clear as we move to the second half of verse 17.

The verse starts with *διαθήκη* (covenant) and ends with *ἐπαγγελία* (promise). It appears that the two words are being used interchangeably. If this is correct, the word *ἐπαγγελία* gives us the hint that the covenant being talked about here is God's covenant promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 15). The law (the Mosaic Law) cannot bring to an end the promises that God himself had ratified. There appears to be discrimination here. While it is established that it is God who validated the covenant/promises, the text does not indicate who gave the law. It appears as if another being gave the law. Even though the text does not explicitly say so here, the perfect participle allows the text to depersonalize the giver of the law. Again, further hints are given that the law was given by an angel through an intermediary (Galatians 3:9), confirming the denial of divine origin of the law (Dunn, 1998). Probably, this is done intentionally to indicate that perhaps the testator of the promises or covenant and the giver of the law are not the same so that one can conclude therefore that the giver of the law is a third 'person' who cannot annul the promises that have been ratified previously by God. Consequently, the law is dissociated from the idea of covenant to make it appear as if the law was not given in the context of covenant. The priority of the covenant/promises is emphasized as against the law and the legality of the law is emphasized as

against the divine nature of the promises and its eternity. Lastly, the Abrahamic covenant is reinterpreted in relation to Christ. Williamson (2000) claims that Paul differs from his fellow Jews in terms of which covenant is of primary importance that constituted the Jews as the people of God. Paul thinks that the Abrahamic covenant has a historical primacy over the Mosaic covenant, which also gives it a theological primacy once it is ratified. This will certainly be against the expectation of the Jews who emphasize the importance of the law. The analogy can be reconstructed in the following way for clarity and the understanding of the reader:

1. A ratified covenant cannot be annulled
2. God ratified the covenant promises to Abraham
3. Therefore, the promises to Abraham cannot be annulled. This analogy is valid and brings out the meaning of the text, but it has a weakness in the sense that it puts God's covenant on the same par with human covenant. Hence a reconstruction of the analogy will be like the following:

1. if a human covenant cannot be annulled once it is ratified
2. More so, a divine/human covenant that is ratified cannot be annulled
3. Therefore, God's covenant, once ratified cannot be annulled.

A third analogy may be put this way:

1. The promises in the covenant preceded the law
2. The promises were ratified before the law
3. The law cannot annul the ratified promises that preceded it

One can conclude that the term *διαθήκη* is used in Galatians 3:15, 17 to mean covenant, which describes a divine-human relation in which God

declares his will (promises) to Abraham. The divine ratification of the promises in the covenant is stressed as against the depersonalization of the giver of the law. From here, the distinction and the priority of the promises are set over the law. Again, the permanency of the promises is set up against the temporary nature of the law since the covenant is re-interpreted to have been given in Christ. One can firmly conclude that what is important for Paul's concept of covenant is God's promises to Abraham and since it is given in the context of a covenant, it can never be annulled.

In Galatians 4:24, Paul describes two allegorical covenants, which represents two forms of relationships that have characterized the covenant experiences of the Israelites with God. The first covenant is said to be coming from Mt Sinai and it is personified as Hagar who gives birth to slaves and who also correspond to the present Jerusalem (4:25). I argue that this covenant is the Mosaic covenant and is interpreted as all the human efforts and struggles with which the people attempted to respond to and sustain the covenant relationship with God but which only led to slavery. The other covenant is associated with the eschatological Jerusalem, the free woman Sarah and the promised child Isaac and her children are born of the Spirit. This covenant is interpreted as that of Abraham, which is transformed in the new covenant of Christ. This covenant is interpreted as all the divine support by which the spirit of Christ gives to individual members of the covenant community to remain and sustain the covenant relationship with God.

### **Conclusion**

A number of elements can be teased out of Paul's view of covenant from the various discourses. In Romans 9:14, Paul appears to talk about the

privileges in the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. These are the adoption, the sonship, the glory, the promises, the liturgy, the patriarchs among others for the covenant community. In Romans 11:27, Paul talks about a new covenant, which is sealed with the blood of Jesus so that it has the capacity to take away sins to enable the covenant community to remain faithful to God. Participants enter into this covenant in the context of the crucifixion and the Eucharist, which unites the individuals to God and to one another. 2 Corinthians 3:6 talks about the fact that the disciples are made worthy to be ministers of the new covenant. There is a comparison between the old Sinai covenant, which is described as a covenant of letters and the new covenant of the spirit, and the fact that while the letter kills, the spirit gives life. Now in Galatians, Paul again made comparisons between a human covenant which cannot be annulled once it is ratified to drive home the fact that God's covenant promises that were ratified by him cannot be annulled by the law that came later. Finally, in Galatians 4:24, Paul again discussed two covenants one of which is related to the Sinai covenant, which is metaphorically identified with Hagar and the present city of Jerusalem and then the covenant of eschatological Jerusalem, which is associated with Sarah, Isaac and the gentile Christian community.

I argue that since the Sinai covenant is identified with a suzerain covenant and the Abrahamic covenant is identified with the promissory covenant, in all the readings, there is a dichotomy between the suzerain and promissory covenant. Therefore, in all the readings, one notices a dichotomy between the suzerain and the promissory covenants in terms of emphasizing the promises in the Abrahamic covenant as against the law in the Mosaic covenant. Paul appears to argue for the promissory covenant against the

suzerain covenant since the former, which is based on a promise in the interest of the receiver, puts receivers in a better position to maintain a dynamic and faithful relationship with God than the latter, which is based on obligatory stipulations to be observed which always lead to failure and indebtedness, which is the same as being in the state of slavery. It is also discovered that the law and promise distinguished between two important types of covenants, one that may lead to slavery and the other leading to freedom.

The discussions on biblical covenants have clarified many issues on the two metaphorical covenants in Galatians 4:21-31. They particularly clarify that the election of Israel is irrevocable in spite of whatever happens, and that the covenants revolve round the faithfulness of God, who ensures continuity of the descendant of Abraham to extend from Israel to the gentiles. The next chapter will elaborate the total comprehension of the discourse from the discussions that have taken place so far.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### COMPREHENSION AND APPROPRIATION

#### **Introduction**

The last phase of Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory discusses a more sophisticated mode of grasping the meaning of a text that he terms comprehension, which subsequently leads to appropriation. This chapter is divided into two sections: the first section deals with how pre-critical and critical readings, together with discussions on biblical covenants, have helped me to comprehend the discourse to generate further meaning. The second section appropriates the meaning generated from the discourse in the Ghanaian context.

#### **Section One: Comprehension**

This section discusses how understanding and explanation of Galatians 4:21-31 and the discussions so far have helped me to discover the elements that make the text a covenantal discourse. It is my ability to bridge the distance between the world of the text and my own world that culminates in my comprehension of the discourse. In this connection, I discovered that during the pre-critical reading and explanation, the dialogic character of the text came out clearly. Again, the elements of the discourse registered (Draper, 2006), or the structure of the discourse (Ricoeur, 1976), which are author, reader, text, context and method are clearly identified from the readings. These elements are what I delineate in this section and discuss how they contribute to the generation of meaning of the discourse. The identity of the author, the audience, the context, the text, and method will be re-constructed from the text itself as follows:

1. **Characteristics of the author**

I am aware that Galatians is among the undisputed letters of Paul. He wrote the letter with other brothers who were with him (1:1). Paul identified himself with his co-authors as those who had been saved by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, in accordance with the will of God, the Father of all believers (1:3-4). Paul preached the Good News with these co-workers (1:8-10). He wrote this particular letter in response to a crisis situation in Galatia. The people were confused and had attempted to follow a different gospel. One could detect from the letter that Paul was a passionate preacher and was very much concerned about the perseverance of his converts. He was disappointed, perhaps angry, and was not happy with what was going on in Galatia. He omitted the usual thanksgiving portion that characterizes his letters such as is found in other letters (Ephesians 1:3; Philippians 1:3). In Galatians, instead of thanksgiving, he was astonished at their fickle mindedness in following another gospel and condemned those responsible for this confusion (1:6-10). He described them as foolish people who were perhaps bewitched (3:1). Paul spoke with such authority because he considered himself as an apostle sent by Christ himself. He narrated how this took place to confirm his authority (1:11-24). He was an ambassador, a witness, and since he was sent to the Galatians, he acted in the capacity of a mediator between the Galatians and Christ. His vocation to the gentiles was accepted by the other apostles as well and agreement was reached that while they were called to preach to the Jews, he was called to the gentiles (1:11-24, 2:1-10). He was the last apostle. If this is the case, then the message of Paul had divine origin; it is the good news of

Jesus Christ. Hence, Paul condemned authoritatively any other gospel since his message is the true gospel.

## 2. **Characteristics of the implied audience**

They were gentiles who understood Hellenistic Greek (3:14; 2-29; 4:8-11). They had previously accepted and believed the good news preached by Paul enthusiastically; they had been baptized and experienced the Spirit (1:8-9, 3:1-5, 4:12-20; 5:7). They revered Paul like an angel from God and accepted his teaching as the true gospel. This means that they had accepted the salvation brought by Christ and had become new members of the covenant community and heirs to Abraham through faith (3:7, 14; 5:2-6). The good news from Paul then must have been their foundational text. As had been established earlier, the implied readers were confused by the teachers who preached a different version of the gospel to them, which seemed to draw their awareness to the importance of the Jewish scripture (3:6-18, 4: 21, 5:3-4, 6:12-13). Apparently, this changed their attitude as they attempted to observe some of the Jewish law. Either through their encounter with the other teachers they had become more familiar with Jewish history, or Paul was directing them to go and read and find out more about Abraham and his family. It is also possible that Paul taught them previously before they were baptized. This is because if they were unable to get into the dynamics of the text, it would have been very difficult for them to understand the discourse. The assumption is that by the time they were encountering the letter, they might have been familiar with Jewish scripture to a greater extent. This is seen from the way the discourse is cast. In the discourse, the names of the two wives of Abraham and the names of their respective children, for example, were initially not



mentioned (4:22-23), they were described by their social status. To be able to understand and get the identities of the characters, one would have to know the background history. Again, Paul warned his audience to consider very well their desire to follow the law, since the law was necessary for a period of time till the coming of Christ. Such metaphorical and idiomatic expressions would be difficult to understand if the audience did not understand the traditional Jewish experiences of the law through history as a principle that had guided the relationship between God and the people, from the experience at Mount Sinai through to the exiles. Such a background would help the converts to appreciate that with the presence of Christ who had saved them from the curse of the law, what was needed, which they had already received, was faith, baptism and experience of the power of the Spirit. Where they had reached, it would be retrogression for them to go back to the law. Therefore, they needed to stand firm in Christ, be united as a group in order not to be distracted.

One can conclude that the implied readers had become new members of the covenant community through faith, baptism and the giving of the Spirit. They were, however, tempted to observe the law and Paul by this discourse was trying to bring them back to the true gospel as a way of renewing their commitment to the covenant.

### 3. **Characteristics of the context and the text**

What is going on in the covenantal discourse in Galatians 4:21-31 can be said to be a covenant renewal. This is because the members of the churches in Galatia were new members to the covenant community, who had received the faith, had been baptized and received the Spirit (3:1-5) and were thus incorporated into the covenant community. However, they had been confused

by the different teachings from the teachers who came after Paul. The different gospel they received had affected their attitudes and behaviour (1:6-9, 4:9). They had started observing the Jewish law such as circumcision (5:3-4, 6:12-13) and keeping special days (4:10). Paul considers this change of behaviour as an attempt to break the covenant they had already entered in. For this reason, he said 'you who desire' (4:21). He also said that it was because you believed that the Spirit was given you and not because of the law (3:1-4). Again, he stated that one who went back to the law or the old covenant was rejecting Christ and had fallen from grace (5:1-4). In the face of such confusion, Paul was worried and he described the Galatians as his children and himself as a woman in labour suffering all over again (3:19). He wished he was with them in person so that he could figure out how to talk to them (3:20). In his absence, he offered an argument that was historical and faith oriented. The aim was to help the community and offer the conditions for renewal of covenant in two metaphors, using the story of Abraham and his family.

One covenant is identified as the Sinai covenant, Hagar, the slave wife of Abraham and the present Jerusalem. In this way, the whole Jewish history, from Abraham through Sinai to Jerusalem, with all the experience of the exile to the present state, was told in few words. In describing this covenant, however, the author describes the law in a metaphorical way as all the human efforts that were made to respond to God's covenant invitation and the fact that this effort with all of its demands, lead to slavery (4:22). This Sinai covenant is patterned on ancient treaty. It modeled God as suzerain king who outlines his wishes to his servant. Israel then becomes a vassal state that

pledges her life to obey the wishes of the suzerain. All defaulters are severely punished and the faithful ones are protected.

The other covenant is identified as the Jerusalem above (4:26). This covenant was carefully associated with the family of Abraham through Sarah and Isaac (4:26-31). This means that life in the eschatological Jerusalem was already anticipated in the promises that were made to Abraham. Since Isaac was the first natural son to inherit the blessings that were promised to Abraham, and the gentile Christian community in Galatia were identified with Isaac, by implication the gentile Christians in Galatia were personifying all those who were promised long ago to share in the blessings of Abraham (Gen 12:3, 17:6). Niehaus (2010) confirms this when he says that God is not bound by time and that before he created the world, he lived in the eschaton. If this is the case, then the first covenant that is described by Paul and personified by Hagar and his son, as born in the flesh, serves as the historical prologue for this second covenant, for it recounts all that had taken place in the history of the Jewish people from Sinai to Jerusalem including the exile. Now, what is a historical prologue?

- A historical prologue recounts the background upon which a covenant is established. It serves as the reason for which the present covenant is established or renewed (Mendenhall and Herion, 1992). If that covenant of the ancestors which was based on the law only resulted in slavery, then there is a good reason not to go back to that covenant again, but to remain in the one that leads to freedom, one that is based on faith and the strength of the Holy Spirit. In this way, believers will not depend on their own human efforts but they will be empowered by

the Holy Spirit to be faithful to the covenant. This may be the reason why in many different ways, Paul describes the old covenant as one that kills and as a covenant of letters, as *παιδαγωγός*, which means that it is a covenant which lasts until faith comes with Christ. These are good enough reasons not to go back to it and to remain in the new covenant of faith. In this way, Paul hopes to renew the commitment of the Galatians to the covenant community. If this is a historical prologue, one important element to identify, which will confirm that this is a covenant renewal, is the covenant giver. That is discussed next.

- Now who is the covenant giver?

The covenant giver is usually identified by name as a king with titles and genealogies. The narration is recounted to show how a great and powerful king is entering into a gracious relationship with an undeserved servant or son. Here, Paul identifies the covenant giver as Christ who is presented to the Galatians as Jesus Christ crucified (3:1), who “supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you” (3:5). He also redeemed us from the curse of the law so that we can receive the blessings of Abraham through faith (3:13-14). It is through Jesus Christ that gentiles can become children of God and heirs to Abraham (3:26-29). He is the one who sets the believer free (5:1, 13) and saves you by grace (5:4). In this way, the name and the deeds of the covenant giver are recounted in various ways in the letter rather than his genealogies. The covenant giver is Jesus and his title is the Christ and

he is a descendant of Abraham (3:16). If this is the case, it is important to find out the stipulations on which the covenant rests.

- Stipulations: The stipulations in the covenant are ethical imperatives that are massively presented in Galatians 5:1-6:10. They are in two forms, indicating vertical and horizontal relationships. In the first place, the members of the covenant community are exhorted to remain firm in their relationship with Christ, and since they have been set free, they should not overburden themselves with circumcision or the obligation of the law. If they go back to the law, then they have separated themselves from grace (5:1-4) and by implication broken the covenant. They are encouraged to be confident in their faith as the only means of salvation (5:5-6). The members of the community are encouraged to have good relationship among themselves. They are to be united in the Lord so that they are not led astray (5:10). They are not to use the gift of freedom for self-indulgence, but are to be servant to one another in love and be guided by the spirit (5:13-19). They are not to worship false gods and not to indulge in sorcery since they only lead to antagonisms, rivalry, jealousy, bad temper, quarrels, etc. “The fruit of the Spirit” is rather given as love, joy, peace, kindness, etc. (Gal 5:22) that are expected in the relationships of the members of the community (5:20-26). Another important mandate that is given to them is the need to be each other’s keeper and to avoid unnecessary boasting as a way of keeping the law of Christ (6:1-10). These are the stipulations for the renewal of the covenant. Now it is important to find out if the covenant is ratified in any way.

- Ratification ceremony: this covenant renewal was not sealed by blood (3:11-14). Once their sins are already atoned for in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross once and for all, each individual becomes a member of the covenant community by verbal assent to the faith they received, baptism as well as the Holy Spirit (3:1-4). So accepting and believing in the good news of Jesus Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit is the condition for entering into the covenant. Mendenhall and Herion (1992) say that participation in the Eucharist is the ratification and oath swearing ceremony for Christians, since the Eucharist was a remembrance that goes beyond mere recall to the swearing of an oath of allegiance to the person of Christ. In this connection, the first witnesses were the Christian martyrs who were killed for the faith. They go on to point out that when the church became a state religion under Constantine and all persecution stopped, the witnessing dimension of the church diminished and was confined to evangelism and physical presence in the world and charitable deeds to the poor and underprivileged.
- Blessings: the blessings of the covenant are that they become children of the promise, the gift of faith, receive the Spirit, freedom and adoption (3:23-29), grace, heir to Abraham and inherit the kingdom (3:14). Other blessings are the gifts of the Spirit, which are peace, joy, love, gentleness, kindness, self-control, patience and trustfulness (5:22).

- Curses: they will be cast out of the community, they will be enslaved, they will live a temporary life (4:22-23, 30); they will have no future inheritance and they will not inherit the eschatological kingdom (5:21).

Promise and land grant: the eschatological kingdom is promised to all believers (4:30; 5:21). These are elements that are found in ancient covenant forms that are present in the letter to the Galatians. They do not have to be in the pericope of the study area to be accepted as part of the elements of the covenant (Niehaus, 2010).

This idea of covenant renewal is not just a hypothetical theory but may be corroborated with the covenant renewal of Josiah in 2 Kings 22-23. The renewal was initiated by the political leader to help the community to escape some impending curses as a result of disobedience to the covenant that became known by the discovery of the book of covenant. What was conspicuous in this covenant was the public agreement by the community to obey the stipulations of the covenant. There was no ritual celebration only verbal agreement. This is an indication that the covenant stipulation or the law was the most important element at that time. Similarly, in the covenant renewal in Malachi, during the second temple era, what was important was the ceremonial dimension that had become a means of worship of the community and social responsibility of the covenant community. Furthermore, the covenant renewal in Nehemiah 9-10 where the people prayed to God to deliver them from foreign domination, what was important was the legal document. There was no ritual celebration. Covenant renewal may be carried out to respond to the particular need of a covenant community in a particular contextual situation. In this particular covenant renewal, the faith of the people

was emphasized rather than the law, which enslaves and this is valid. Paul then is the covenant mediator like other Israelites prophets.

This is confirmed by the way Paul relates to these two covenants throughout his undisputed letters. He uses different metaphorical expressions to compare two covenants in various ways where they occur together and Paul always sets the Abrahamic covenant as a priority over the Mosaic Covenant. Interestingly, he does that on the basis that the Abrahamic covenant came before the Sinai covenant. He adds that the Abrahamic covenant is based on promises and concludes that like any covenant, it cannot be annulled once it is ratified, and so the Sinai covenant, which is based on the law, cannot annul the first covenant of promise. In Romans 9:4, the privileges associated with both covenants are discussed, and although the reader did not discuss the verse in detail, it is perhaps the only place where both covenants are discussed together in a positive way. In 2 Corinthians 3:6, the Sinai covenant is described as the old covenant of letter which kills in relation to the new covenant, which is the transformed promissory covenant as the one of the Spirit, which gives life. In Galatians 3:15-17, the Abrahamic covenant is described as a covenant of promise, which preceded the covenant of law. Once the former is ratified, it cannot be annulled by the latter that came 430 years later. Here too, priority is given to the promissory covenant over the Mosaic covenant. In Galatians 4:24, the Sinai covenant is described as one that enslaves, while the promissory covenant leads to freedom. Apart from these, Paul also describes the law as *παιδαγωγός* which is a caretaker or even a slave (3:24) whose duty was temporary and is now overtaken by the coming of Christ. The new covenant is further described as sealed by the blood of Christ, its laws are written on



human hearts for internalization. The new covenant is incorporated with forgiveness of sins because the sins are atoned for by the blood of Christ (1Cor. 11:25). Scholars suggest that if Paul describes a covenant of the eschatological Jerusalem that is related to freedom that is based on faith and its children are born of the Spirit, he is re-interpreting the Abrahamic covenant in the context of the new covenant of Christ.

The conclusion is that the discourse is covenantal and Paul is acting as a covenant mediator in his attempt to encourage his new converts to renew their commitment to the covenant.

#### 4. **The context of delivery**

Even though I did not reconstruct the world behind the text, I can deduce that the discourse might have taken place during worship and hence must have a religious character. It is possible that the text was not available in many copies and so a messenger read the text aloud to the audience in the Greek language of the time. Adams (2012) suggests that the audience responded to the good news at first hearing since they did not have the opportunity to read the text over and over again. In the context of worship, Paul speaks to the audience in the following ways:

As a spiritual teacher, Paul could boldly describe his audience as foolish people who are probably bewitched. Such an expression connotes that the audience are behaving as if they are under the control of a bad spirit, which denotes the seriousness of the situation of the convert. Paul also relates to his converts as a mother, for he describes them as his children and yet he talks about the problem of going through labour pains again. So Paul is metaphorically a mother who gave birth to the Galatians and spiritually a

father to them (4:19-20). As a spiritual father, he speaks passionately to them about what the converts should become. He was concerned about the decision they take in the present for their future wellbeing. The Galatians were also described as brothers (1:11; 3:15, 4:12; 5:13; 6:1, 18) to indicate that in Christ they are all equal. One may conclude that in the context of such a relationship, the converts must have accepted the message of Paul as the true gospel and might have responded positively to the message.

##### 5. **The method of delivery**

It is generally accepted that the communication between Paul and the churches in Galatia was in a written letter form. It is also accepted that the letter must have been read to the people during worship and that is why it is also considered to be a speech. A letter is also considered one half of a conversation, a discourse that is argumentative and persuasive. The argument is developed from the narrative stories of the past events of Abraham and his family, which were believed to have a bearing on the present situation of the Galatians. The retelling of the old story is to help the Galatians to take decisions in the present. Paul's strategy then was a rhetorical strategy of retelling the past for a future wellbeing in an argumentative form in a persuasive way (Adams, 2012). Paul's covenantal discourse, therefore, is not generic but a rhetorical process by which language is used to describe a real life event to re-enact the experience for the present audience and the present context.

Paul did not only use rational argument to convince his audience, he also appealed to their emotions by challenging them to consider their experience of the Spirit and the power they received that enabled them to

move beyond their human strength. In this connection, the desired effect on the Galatians is not just logical, but also affective.

The conversational character of the letter manifests itself from the way the letter is cast in a dialogic form addressing the implied readers sometimes in the second person plural (1:3, 6, 8, 3:1-14, 4:12-21, 28). Sometimes Paul identifies himself with his audience and uses the first person pronoun in plural form (4:26, 31; 5:1; 6:9-10). Again, the discourse character of the letter is seen in the many events that are recounted in the letter. It is important to indicate that it is the meaning of the events that is important and not the events themselves, how they are recounted, and the effects of the retelling on the implied readers. The following events are identified in the discourse:

- The events of the vocation of Paul are recounted in the letter with a particular flavour for a purpose. The retelling is to put emphasis on the life of Paul before Christ, and how he enthusiastically persecuted the church, his being called directly by Christ on the way to Damascus and the commissioning to the gentiles. This is to throw light on his capacity as an apostle that underlies the authority with which he preached the good news as one who is sent, an ambassador, a witness, hence, the genuineness of the good news that he preached (1:11-24). Because of his credentials, the Galatians accepted his teaching as the truth without doubt, and they revered him so much as if he was an angel or Christ himself (4:12-15). The importance of this event lies in the way Paul lived like every Jew and how the encounter with Christ changed his perspective in life. His calling is similar to that of the Israelite prophets. Although a prophet is called in anticipation from

his/her mother's womb, the calling manifests itself at a point in time in the life of the prophet when he encounters the divine. The call of Isaiah was in the year of King Uzziah's death and was manifested through a vision (Isaiah 6:1), the call of Jeremiah came during the time of Josiah King of Judah, although he was already chosen from his mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:1-5). Similarly, the word of God to Ezekiel was vividly described to explain when and where it took place and how he encountered the divine in a vision (Ezekiel 1:1-12). Paul recounts his own prophetic vocation to emphasize its prophetic character that gives him the authority to teach for and on behalf of Christ.

- The Events of the Covenants: what is recounted is God's covenant relationship with his people. Paul considers the relationship with God as embodied in two covenants, the one with Abraham and the one with Moses. His interest in the covenant with Abraham lies in the promises, the blessings to be enjoyed in those promises, as well as the heirs to those promises. There is a particular emphasis on the faith of Abraham in those promises that sustains his trust in God in difficult moments and this is what justified Abraham. The covenant with Moses is recounted with emphasizing the law and the fact that the people were unable to keep their part of the law. These two covenant events were described in various metaphorical utterances throughout the letter until they are climaxed in the allegory of Hagar and Sarah. The Abrahamic covenant is described as the covenant of faith. It is the faith of Abraham that is credited to him as righteousness. The promises in that covenant were given through faith, the inheritance was given through

faith and the people of faith share the same blessings with Abraham. The covenant of promise came before that of the law, and once it is ratified, it cannot be annulled by the law that came later. The other covenant is described as covenant of works of the law, in which life is received by complying with all the works of the law. The law was given to deal with crimes. It cannot give life/saving justice and serves as a guide for a temporary period until the coming of Christ.

- The last event that was described are the events of Christ. He is described as the promised seed of Abraham (3:16); he redeemed us from the curse of the law (3:13) and was crucified for us (3:1); he causes miracles among you; he sends his Spirit upon you (3:5) and promises are given through him to all people of faith (3:8-9). In him the blessings of Abraham have come to the gentiles and in Christ all believers become adopted children of God. All these events confirmed that Paul's letter to the Galatians is a covenantal discourse that is meant to renew the commitment of the members of the Galatian churches to the covenant community and to be faithful to the covenant.

The mode of delivery confirms the discourse character of the letter and the type of events they re-enact confirms the covenantal character of the discourse. The purpose of the re-enactment is the renewal of the commitment of the implied audience to the covenant.

Now the effectiveness of a discourse depends on the how it is able to influence its audience to follow the demands of the discourse. Again, the response of audience to a discourse depends to a large extent, on the method

of delivery. Here I will attempt to identify the possible responses of the implied audience to this particular covenantal discourse.

**The effect of the covenantal discourse on the implied audience:**

Every persuasive discourse requires particular response from the audience. It is the response that confirms the effectiveness of the discourse. Adams (2012) suggests that there are three ways that audience may respond to discourse:

- Mimetic response: this is a response to a discourse whose characters are portrayed as real persons and the reality discussed are set in the real life experiences of the characters. Audience to such a discourse are moved to react to the expectations, desires, judgment, emotions, and experiences of real life situations described in the discourse. Such experiences are able to influence the audience to change positively or negatively in relation to the actions and reactions of the characters in the discourse.

In this light, Paul describes two covenants using the real life situation of Abraham and his family and invited his audience to identify themselves with Sarah and Isaac who are real persons and key personalities in the matters of faith; this is a good basis for the audience to decide to respond positively to the discourse and mimic the faith and example of the characters in the discourse. Again, Paul talks about the experience of the Galatians themselves of the Spirit that was given to them, the miracles that were worked among them and the redemption they had received from Christ; all these are real life

experiences of the Galatians that will be able to influence them to change and respond to the demands of the discourse.

- Thematic response: this is a discourse whose characters are presented as ideal persons or situations rather than real. Such characters are used to set up standards and representations so that each discourse is presented as a particular situation that is used to teach a universal model. The audience is invited to measure up their own experiences in relation to the model. In this connection, Paul presented the Jewish law as an ideal principle, a standard by which the attitudes and efforts of others are measured. The law is described in such a way that it is almost impossible for one to follow the requirement of the law. In this case, it is almost impossible for the audience to decide to follow the ideals of the law. They may prefer to remain in the faith they had already received than what they were not sure of.
- Synthetic response functions in a discourse whose characters are constructed artificially or hypothetically. In Galatians, Paul presented the teachers as people who are cursed, because they are not able to make all that is written in the law effective and so nobody is made righteous through the law (3:10-11).

It is important to point out that sometimes all three responses are at work in a discourse since the three are related. The more realistic the characters are in the discourse, the less synthetic are the responses of the audience. Paul presented his discourse with historical information that describes real human experience. Hence, the audience hears Paul's

message as a true gospel since it reflects the lives of actual people of faith.

### **The effects of Ricoeur's method**

In the naïve understanding, I became aware of my prejudices and presuppositions, which I noted. This was followed by explanation so that the naïve understanding of the reader is confirmed or dropped. Explanation allowed me to examine the text critically in order to minimize subjectivity. In this way, I was able to approach the text as an object, and I was able to listen to the text, note the tensions, contradictions and ideological distinctions in it and allowed the text to speak for itself.

Moreover, Ricoeur establishes a relationship between discourse and realities in life. For him, every narrative is a rhetorical process and every discourse recounts human experience in the world. This enabled me to follow the various experiences of the characters in the discourse and contextualize them in my own context and in my own experience as a member of the covenant family.

## **Section Two: Appropriation in the Ghanaian Context**

### **Introduction**

Appropriation is the assimilation of the reality about which a discourse is discussed. This is what Ricoeur refers to as the world of the text that invites the reader to inhabit and personalize it. In oral communication, this reality may be presented as ostensive reference, in the sense that it may be part of the context shared by the speaker and the audience, and the speaker may be able to point to the audience the particular object under discussion or give examples. But in a written discourse, the ostensive reference may be



suspended, or may be re-contextualized in the context of the reader. This is because the reader is distanced from the context of the author. In this section I attempt to re-contextualize what comes out of the discussion in my own context as the implication.

In this connection, the following issues were identified in the discourse and may be appropriated in the Ghanaian context.

It is discovered that the theory of Ricoeur may easily be adapted into Ghanaian biblical interpretation since ordinary and scholarly readers could both use the theory. It has proven to be very useful tool for the study when I adapted the naïve reading into a focused group discussions. One thing that came out strongly was the issue of obligatory relationships in covenants. The passage talked about covenants that described two forms of relationships. Covenant is identified in Ghana as follows:

A covenant is about a relationship that is supported by some form of commitment by the two partners. The *Akan* word for covenant is, *apam*, which etymologically consists of two words; *a* is the prefix and *pam* is a verb that literally means to ‘sew’, ‘put together’ or ‘to join to another’ with the intention of achieving a desired result. The word may also mean ‘to send away’ that which is not desired or wanted. The prefix *a* is added to the verb *pam* to form a noun *apam*. The verb that usually goes with the word *apam* is *hyehye* which means ‘to establish’ or ‘to arrange’. When the verb and noun are put together, *hyehye apam* lacks a subject since *apam* is the object of the verb *hyehye*. The regular expression is *yerehyehye apam*. *Yen* is a first person personal pronoun plural form ‘we’. The middle *re* is a sign of present

continuous tense. Whenever *yen* meets *re*, the *n* is dropped to form *yere*, plus the verb *hyehye* to form *yerehyehye*. *Yerehyehye apam*, therefore, means we are in the process of establishing, making arrangement or putting in place, certain things that will help us to achieve some desired result. Usually, the desired result is for the benefit of those making the arrangement or putting things in place. The desired result may be positive or negative. It is positive when what is put in place aims at bringing the partners together; it may be negative in the sense of driving out something that is not desired. The desired result, therefore, depends on the purpose of the covenant. Once the covenant is established and the desire result achieved whether temporary or permanently, certain obligations are established which cannot be easily broken.

A covenant may be established between two people, families or clans in Ghana. There are many types of covenant. The most common form of covenant is marriage. There are three main types of marriage in Ghana namely; traditional marriage, civil, and religious marriages (Osei, 2002). There are generally two types of wedding, court weddings and Christian wedding, both of which are performed after the traditional marriage rites. The court wedding may be performed by any couple, 18 years and above, with sound mind and without any cohesion, in front of a registrar. The Christian wedding involves all elements in civil wedding, and in addition ensures that there are no canonical impediments to the marriage, and this takes place in the

church and before a priest. How do Ghanaians perceive marriage as covenant?

### **Conjugal covenant**

Marriage in Ghana is believed to be an example of parity or mutual covenant, which is sealed with the consent of the two partners and their respective families as well as with the sexual union of the couple. This kind of parity covenant is not relevant to our study. There are other relationships in Ghana that depicts the situation of Sarah and Hagar. It is common for a man to have a relationship outside marriage that may result in children. The second relationship may be the house girl of the wife, the secretary to the man, or any familiar or unfamiliar woman in the neighbourhood or office. When this happens most of the time the peace of the home may be destroyed and there may be litigations over inheritance. The PNDC law 111 provides some of solution to the litigations over inheritance in this kind of situation. Separation in marriage is possible but with many difficulties. However, an interesting development is the practice where a couple solidifies their relationship with another rite called “*mogya pam*” or blood covenant. This kind of covenant can also take places between two friends who are yet to marry. This covenant is sealed with an exchange of blood between the couple, sometimes in front of a deity. In this type of covenant, the deity is only a witness, but sometimes the deity is also an enforcer of the covenant. The Ghanaian community as a whole condemns this type of covenant. Some describe it as an occult practice and others look at it as a barbaric act. This is because once it is established, the oath cannot be broken or it is broken with serious consequences.

Ghana News Agency, for example, reported that Jacob Tardie Adomako, a Catholic Priest at Juaso Catholic Church in the Asante Akyim South District, cautioned Ghanaians against blood covenant (*mogya pam*) as he deemed it an occultic practice. He argued that some of the consequences of this type of covenants could be broken marriages, madness or even death in some cases (GNA: 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2015).

Not long after this caution, Seshie Stanley, a columnist, reflected on an incident in which Paul Aveneme, a Gabonese taxi driver in Ghana, stabbed to death his girlfriend Jennifer Atieku, a student at University of Professional Studies in Accra for attempting to break their relationship after a blood covenant (Ghana Web News Achieve: 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2015). The practice continues privately but people condemn it publicly. Such is the seriousness of the local concept of blood covenant in Ghana. The commitment to be faithful to it cannot be broken since it goes with serious consequences. Ghanaians especially the youth are advised by this study not to indulge in such covenants especially if they do not understand the serious implication involved in the indissoluble of the oath. Again what came out strongly in the pre-understanding on marriage is that marrying more than one destroys the peace of the family home and may bring litigation on the issue of inheritance.

### **Family covenant**

There are other types of covenant in which the deity is both a partner and an enforcer. An interview with Mr. Kwame Assuo at Kumasi Cultural Centre reveals that a family covenant might be necessitated by a peculiar and persistent need of the family. It is established by the family head, who may seek for help and protection from a deity or from the spirit of their ancestors.

A deity may prepare something (concoction) and give it to the family head to plant in the family house. What is prepared depends on the deity, the nature of the problem, and the desired result. Whatever may be planted in the family house may have its obligations to be performed and taboos to be observed. Some of the stipulations may be that a sacrifice should be offered or libation poured annually, or that the family members should observe some prohibitions. The head of the family sees to it that all the members of the family observe this instruction. If the desired result is achieved, appreciation is usually sent to the deity. Again, this depends on what was previously agreed on (Interview with Kwame Assuo, 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2016).

#### **Akor family covenant**

One example of a family covenant is the “*Akor*” in the Central Region of Ghana. “*Akor*” means one, oneness, unity or one mouth, one road, or one stomach where all the family members are supposed to have come from. Since the Akan practices the matrilineal system of inheritance, it is believed that the family members descended from one maternal grandparent. It is a covenant that brings a family together as a formidable force for a purpose. This covenant is established between the family head on behalf of the members of the family and the spirits of their ancestors. The family head buries a small quantity of gold somewhere in the family house; he then cements the spot and puts an earthenware pot on top of the gold. Water is then poured into the pot to overflow. The spirits of the ancestors are communicated to through the pouring of libation and calling of their names in an invocation. It is believed that the spirits of the ancestors are still interested in the wellbeing of the living. Since they are now spirits, they are able to commune with the spirit

world and they become intermediaries between God and the living. Annually, libation is poured on the pot and this is allowed to overflow to the ground and left to seep down into the soil. The names of the family members are mentioned one after the other and they are prayed for. If any member has any difficulty, he or she offers money to the family head to pour libation and invoke the spirits of the ancestors on his or her behalf. Any amount of money that may be gathered is used to buy food and distributed to the members. If any member shows appreciation in any form, it is also shared. There is a belief that one should by all means honour one's pledge and show appreciation for favours received in order to avoid the recurrence of whatever problem there was (Interview with family heads at Akotokyir, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2016). What is interesting is that Akor covenant was very popular in the pre-Christian era. Now many Ghanaians are Christians. Yet, the covenant is still found in the house of the head of the family of both Christians and non-Christians. Akor covenant poses problems for Christians who believe that its practice contradicts their Christian principles. Here there is a dichotomy between culture and Christianity that needs to be resolved whether a Christian member of the family must still participate in Akor covenant. However, once the family head had contracted the covenant for the whole family, and the covenant stipulation is indissoluble, what must he done was the question that was asked. This calls for more dialogue between Christianity and culture to help clarify the consciences of Christians who also belong to a family. Paul is saying that life in Christ has made the old covenant irrelevant. Therefore, Ghanaians Christians have the option to live in the new covenant of Christ and not to live under the obligation of the traditional covenant.

The celebration of this covenant however, does not attract fanfare as do other covenants celebrated by a whole town or a traditional area. In Ghana the celebration of such covenants is embellished and incorporated into traditional festivals that may be celebrated every year or every three months to commemorate a covenant that has been established and also to discuss the wellbeing and development of the traditional area. Apparently, throughout the year, every month one covenant or another is celebrated for a whole town or a traditional area in Ghana. One of such covenants is the “Aboakyir” (deer hunting) festival of the people of Winneba.

### **Tribal covenant**

The “Aboakyir festival is celebrated by the people in the Effutu traditional area of Winneba. It is believed that the people of Winneba migrated from Timbuktu in the Western Sudan to settle in the present location in the Central Region of Ghana, locally known as the people of “Simpa”. A deity called “Pankye Otu” was believed to have helped them during the journey. He also directed them in their various decisions. The deity also protected and supported them in all the battles they had to fight to reach their destination. In gratitude for all the benefits, the people in the olden days used to offer human sacrifices as demanded by the deity. With the passage of time, a negotiation was reached and a leopard was used instead. Yet to get a live leopard was almost as difficult as offering a human sacrifice, since both involved the death of a person anyway. The final negotiation and decision settled on the sacrifice of a live deer. Every year, the people organize themselves to hunt for a live deer for the sacrifice (Impram-Swanzy, 2015; Ewusi Brown, 2005).

Interestingly, one can detect some form of similarity between this covenant and the suzerain treaty and some elements in the suzerain treaty that were found in the Sinai covenant are also present in the Aboakyir festival. The first similarity is that it is a covenant between a superior and inferior since the spirits are not human beings and they are believed to be more powerful as spirits than when they were alive; hence, the covenant cannot be said to be mutual. The following elements are identified:

- Identification of the covenant giver: the covenant giver is identified by name as Pankye Otu, who is a war god. He is the one who protected them during their difficult journey to settle in Winneba and who fought their battles for them.
- Historical prologue: what took place with their ancestor and the deity is usually recounted to the younger generation. Sometimes, this is mimicked or acted in a dramatic way so that it stays in the memory of the oral community.
- Stipulation: there are specific stipulations attached to this covenant, as the people must catch a live deer. Moreover, the members of the community are expected to behave in a socially approved manner, so they could be rewarded or chastised by the spirits of the ancestors or the deity.
- Ratification: this done by the sacrifice of a live deer, by the sharing of meals, by dancing and festivities, by durbars and thanksgiving services.



- Furthermore, there is the annual public remembrance in the ritual of pouring of libation or offering of sacrifices depending on what favours were received and promises that were made for the favour.
- The ancestral spirits or the deities are witnesses, partners and enforcers of the covenant. The ritual celebration may include the sharing of a meal.
- Blessings and curses: there are no written documents delineating blessings and curses, but these form an essential part of the covenant. Any bumper harvest is interpreted as blessings from the gods and gratitude is expressed in the form of sacrifice and libation. On the other hand, it is deemed necessary to investigate a famine, an epidemic or a calamity to determine whether the gods are angry in any way.

It is discovered that this covenant shares element of a suzerain type covenant, and its celebration indicates a covenant renewal moment. The deity demanded complete allegiance before Christianity came to Ghana. Today many Ghanaians are Christians yet many people still celebrate this festival for various reasons.

It is therefore important that those who participate should know the implications of what they do. This is particularly important for Christians who have received the sacraments in their own churches and attend these celebrations. It is important for them to know that the new covenant of Christ has made these old once irrelevant, although they have obligation to contribute to the development of their traditional areas. Hence, what appeared to be the dichotomy between faith and law in Galatia is very relevant in Ghana. Here

the tension is not just between traditional religion and Christianity but even among the different Christian denominations.

### **Professional covenant**

There is yet another covenant which may be initiated by a deity who selects a favoured person for a purpose. Very common in this is what is popularly known as the traditional priesthood. This vocation usually begins with a call. This is a free gift that is given to individuals who may not deserve it, yet that person does not himself or herself decide or choose to be called. It begins with one experiencing a special call or encounter with the deity. It is locally expressed as *akom asi no so* (deity has descended on him/her).

A deity may decide to enter into a relationship with a person and invite the person into his/her confidence and service and sometimes this relationship results in marriage with the deity. This is very common in both traditional and modern Ghana and the most popular one is the *okomfo* (traditional priest or priestess). I, therefore, argue that this particular local type of covenant is closer to the promissory covenant. It is the deity or his representative who selects a candidate.

Identification of the deity: the selected candidate may be possessed, fall sick, become restless and aggressive or may be behaving in an abnormal and bizarre way that may call for special investigation to determine the cause of the imbalance. If it is ascertained that one is possessed, then there is the need to identify the deity. A senior *okomfo* will help the novice and his/her family to do this. Once the deity is identified by name, the nature, the location and his or her desire, the experience is described as *akom asi no so*. In other words, a deity has descended on someone or the deity wants to marry the

candidate (Sarpong, 1974). Sometimes the candidate may resist and pay some compensation to be redeemed, otherwise one will have to go through the training to become the *okomfo* for the deity.

The training may last between six months and three years (Owusu Atuahene, 2010). It involves the neophyte going through ritual baths with different kinds of herbal medicines for different purposes among which are the opportunity to discern and commune with the spirits and the spiritual world, to be strengthened, be purified and be separated. The novice is also taught the taboos of the deity and the importance and use of herbal medicines. Among the taboos is sexual abstinence, which might be for life. The candidate is prohibited to shave and sometimes to take a bath for a specified period. The novice also learns about the community or the territory under the protection of the deity. According to Opoku (1977), one of the most important parts of the training is the graduation ceremony in which various rituals are performed to ensure that the candidate is beginning a new life as a new person. The celebrations that follow include the sharing of a meal. A number of the elements in this covenant come closer to the ancient promissory covenants.

It is the deity that invites a favoured servant into a relationship.

The deity is identified, as regards his location, his name and the purpose of the invitation.

- Although there is no historical background, the neophyte will have to learn about the deity and also know about the communities or the territory under the protection of the deity.

- There may be no parcel of land allocated to the priest or priestess, but he or she is empowered to take a responsible role and rule with other stakeholders in the territory under the protection of the deity.
- The relationship between the deity and the servant is so intimate that sometimes they are said to be married for life. The servant is thus set apart to serve the deity forever and works under the protection of the deity. Annual libation and sacrifices are made to the deity as and when necessary. A number of prohibitions of the deity must be strictly observed by the servant, sometimes for the servant's own good. It is important to note that a servant cannot go against the wishes of the deity, the consequences may be very serious and even fatal.

One can confidently conclude that some of the elements in ancient covenant may be found in some of the covenants in Ghana. A covenant is re-enacted and renewed during the annual celebrations of festivals and other traditional durbars in Ghana. Ghanaian participants are probably not aware that when they participate in the celebration of festivals, they are directly or indirectly participating in the renewal of traditional covenants. It is important that they become aware of these implications.

Lastly, Ghanaian Christians also receive sacraments such as baptism, confirmation, priesthood, marriage and others, which are covenant moments. The celebration of Good Friday and Easter Sunday are covenant renewal moments. In the same way, homilies, sermons, workshops discourses are covenant renewal moments on regular basis for Christians.

Another thing that came out of this discourse was the issue of law. I discovered that traditional, ethnic, as well as doctrinal principles and

regulations are not to be made universally binding on all Christians. People are not to be discriminated against on doctrinal issues.

### **Report from respondents**

A cross-section of Ghanaians were interviewed to seek their views on local names and concepts of covenant. This is to corroborate information gathered from the study group. Eight (8) catechists from the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Coast and six (6) students from the university of Cape Coast making a total of fourteen (14) respondents were purposely selected because they regularly interact with the bible. Both the catechists and students were interviewed together. The interview took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2015. The researcher sought permission from the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Cape Coast on the 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2015 to meet a section of the catechists for a discussion. One of the catechists at *Abura* was asked to organize his colleagues for the study either on the 29<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup> August. The study was fixed on the 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, *Pedu* at 10 O'clock am. In the evening of the 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2015, the researcher visited the Vicar General to make the necessary arrangement for the study the following day.

On the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2015, the researcher went with one research assistant and two teaching assistants for the program. While the research assistant was gathering information on personal data, the two teaching assistants served as the scribes of the day and controlling the recordings. In all, 15 catechists were invited but eight (8) of them actually came consisting of seven (7) men and one (1) woman. Due to the fact that the number was small, ten (10) students at the Catholic chaplaincy at the

University of Cape Coast that have been also arranged to meet that day were invited to join the catechists but only four (4) of them came on time. The Priest in charge joined the group as an observer. The Parish Priest said the opening prayer at 10.30am and introduced the catechists to the researcher and her group. Each catechist introduced himself and where he works. It is discovered that the participants are catechists from different parishes in the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Coast. The priest introduced the researcher to the catechists and asked the researcher to introduce her team members to the group, which was done. The researcher proceeded to introduce the purpose of the meeting. She intimated that she had purposely selected them to solicit their views on festivals because they belonged to the church. This exercise was to find out why Ghanaian Christians attend festivals. The catechists and students are typical model of Ghanaian Christians who use the bible on daily bases, since they are also elderly, they are important members and leaders of their families. Their permission was sought to record the interactions and their personal data to be collected. Their ages ranged from 35-81. Six (6) of the participants are senior catechists, two (2) were junior catechists, one (1) was assistant catechist and one was catechist. They have been in this service for a period between 10-45years. They perform varieties of work to support the priests. They conduct the service of the word in the absence of the priest at the outstations. They prepare or appoint someone to prepare altar boys and girls and lectors for church services. They lead morning and evening prayers and other prayers in preparation for Mass. Sometimes they lead bible study groups and laity week celebrations. They are members of the church council and pastoral team that visit the sick and give them communion. They prepare the

faithful to receive the sacraments. They may perform other functions as the Parish Priest deem fit. Their educational background ranges from Middle school certificate to Diploma in education. Six (6) of them are active teachers and four (4) are on retirement. All of them are married with children ranging from 2-9. 4 of the participants were not familiar with the text. The students on the other hand were all level four hundred students who have been involved in catechetical ministry at the chaplaincy.

a. ***Mention any local name for covenant that you know?***

Three people responded *anohoba* (promise by word of mouth), two responded as *bohye* (promise), four (4) responded *ntam* (oath), five (5) responded *apam* (to put things together to achieve a desire purpose). In *Dagaare* a covenant is *nuor* and in *Wale*, covenant is *nuore* (both means promised by word of mouth).

b. ***Name some of the covenants in Ghana***

They also described covenant in the following ways: i) three (3) people mentioned “*mogya pam*” is usually taking by two (2) people who love themselves and exchange blood before a deity. ii) six (6) people mentioned sacramental marriage before a priest or civil marriage before a registrar. iii) five (5) responded that a family head established a covenant with a deity to protect them from spiritual forces.

c. ***Identify any family covenants that you know***

The different festivals in Ghana were named as sources of covenant celebrations in Ghana such as: *Homowo*, *Aboakyir*, *Odwira*, *Addae*, *Bakatue*, and *kundum*. Covenant is recontextualized in Ghana as festivals or marriage. Interestingly, no one mentions priesthood, whether traditional or modern, as

covenant. They were however unaware that when they attend festivals they were participating in covenant renewal.

d. ***Name any covenant you have participated in***

Eight (8) of them had participated in Akor, two (2) of them are family head but they delegated others to pour libation on their behalf. The catechists were not allowed by the church to pour libation. Five (5) had attended *Fetu afahye* but did not participate in the rituals. Two (2) had attended *aborkyir*, two (2) had participated in *bakatue*, two in *Edina bronya*, one (1) in *akwambo* and had witness *panafest*. This means that some people had attended more than one festival. Those who have participated in Akor had also attended other festivals in their area.

e. ***Why do you attend festivals***

Three (3) people responded that festivals were annual gathering to deliberate on the development of their town. One (1) person out of the three represented his family to make whatever contribution needed to do any communal project. Four (4) respondents stated that annual festival was a time to settle disputes and bring people together. It is also a time to welcome the family members from the diaspora and attempt to unite members of individual families and members of the traditional area. Two (2) participants suggested that festival season is a time to raise the image of the town by displaying culture through music arts and dance, through the dressing of kings, chiefs, queen mothers and traditional leaders. It is a time when traditional leaders pray for protection for our town, pray for bumper harvest, purify the town and the people through rituals in order to be favoured for a successful farming. Two (2) respondents participate in festivals because it is a time for business



when they are able to sell all kinds of things, food, fish, credit cards, water, etc. all kinds of businesses boom during that time and we get a lot of attention from important personalities in Ghana and since there are a lot of tourists we all have to help to make the celebration a success. One (1) respondent always play important role in the Sunday non-denominational thanksgiving service when he is called upon to pray for the town. One (1) student responded that festival is a time of sacrifice that allows people to enter the new year with hope. Another suggested that *Zaare* festival celebrates the main farming tool in the area, which is the hoe, this is very important for all farmers. A third person praised the *homowo* festival as a thanksgiving ceremony for the harvest that makes fun of hunger. It is so important for the people that both Christians and non-Christians participate in it. The last student contributed that the *Adae kese* festival of Kumasi celebrates the ancestral stool and renews the relationship with the dead. He does not attend the ritual but the durbar and the cultural display.

### **Conclusion**

One can conclude that Galatians 4:21-31 is a discourse that is covenantal and Paul is acting as a covenant mediator in his attempt to encourage his new converts who have become new members of the covenant community through faith, baptism and the giving of the Holy Spirit. They are however tempted to observe the law and Paul, by this discourse, is trying to bring them back to the true gospel as a way of renewing their commitment to the covenant. That in the context of such a relationship, the converts must have accepted the message of Paul as the true gospel, and might have responded positively to it. The mode of delivery confirms the discourse

character of the letter and the type of events they re-enact confirms the covenantal character of the discourse. The renewal of covenant is appropriated in the Ghanaian context in the annual celebration of festivals and other ritual celebrations. Oath in covenant is indissoluble Ghanaians are to be aware of the implications of the covenant renewal celebrations they attend. The next chapter summarizes the entire study. It outlines the findings of the study and draws conclusions.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

This final chapter seeks to tie all arguments together and bring the study to an end. The chapter is divided into four sections: the first section gives a summary of all the chapters that have been treated in this research and the conclusion that was drawn in the chapter. The second section discusses the findings of the study. The third section discusses the conclusions of the research and the fourth section makes recommendations from the study.

#### **Section 1: Summary of the Thesis**

Chapter One of this thesis forms the introductory part of the study and sets the tone for the research. It discussed the background and statement of the problem to bring out the tension and the theological uneasiness in the text with regard to law and faith. It also outlined how I intended to ease the tension in the passage by approaching the text as a covenantal discourse. The research questions served as a guide by which the study was carried out to achieve the research objectives. The purpose of the study talked about the scholarly contributions of the research and the significance of the study considered the benefits of the research. Scholarly views of relevant literature on major themes in the topic were reviewed which helped me to demarcate the nature of my own scholarly contribution and sharpen the focus of my area of research. The chapter also highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the research methodology. I chose, above others, Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory that allows the reader to perceive that the arguments of Paul were woven in such a way as

to shape and challenge his audience to take decisions according to the demand of the discourse in their own interest. In this way, the response of the audience is anticipated in order to make the discourse effective.

Chapter Two attempts to establish the relationship between covenantal discourse and Galatians 4:21-31. The chapter dealt with the letter as a discourse between Paul and the churches in Galatia. The discourse contains narratives of past events including the events of the vocation and divine commissioning of Paul, that of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and the new covenant of Christ. The discourse sought to teach and challenge its audience to find their identity in the history of Israel as a covenant community and their own role and commitment to that covenant in Christ. The discourse was, therefore, perceived as a covenantal discourse, aimed at re-enacting existing covenant experience, in order to adapt it to the situation of the converts in Galatia.

Chapter Three is divided into two sections: the first part treated the pre-critical understanding of Galatians 4:21-31. The reader recalled the stories of Abraham and his family. She realized that law and faith were both important and were put to use in the life and relationship between Abraham and God, which was pleasing to God. This story is reworked in the present context of Galatia, an indication that the old story was considered relevant to the crisis situation in the churches in Galatia. The story is presented as if law is not important in the life of a Christian and only faith is important, which appears to contradict the Old Testament story where both faith and law were emphasized. Again, the Jews were rather identified with Hagar and her son and the gentiles with Sarah and her son, which is also strange. Two forms of covenant relationships were presented to the members of the churches in

Galatia. One relationship is based on the observance of the law, and this type of relationship is said to keep people in the flesh and in bondage. The other covenant relationship is based on grace, on faith in Christ and the power of the Spirit, and this type of relationship leads to freedom. The Galatians were encouraged to remain in the latter relationship rather than the former. Subsequently, all Christians who persecute others on doctrinal, cultural or on rules and regulations are said to be born in the flesh; they are in bondage and should be cast out, for they cannot share in inheritance with those born in the spirit.

The second part of the chapter is the explanation stage, which examined Galatians 4:21-31 critically so that some of the issues that were raised at the pre-understanding stage were explained and clarified for a better understanding. In this connection, the law was understood as comprising all the Jewish laws that governed the covenant relationship between God and the covenant community and also among the members of the covenant community. The two metaphorical covenants that were described in the text were explained as the two possible forms of relationship that are open to the members of the churches in Galatia as covenant communities. One relationship was identified as coming from Mount Sinai and this was personified in Hagar and Ishmael. If the people opted for this type of relationship that was based on the law, they would struggle by their own human efforts to keep the relationship and, in the end, their own choice would lead them to slavery. The other option that was open to them was based on the faith and baptism, which they had already received in Christ, and by which they were born by the power of the Holy Spirit. This covenant was personified

in Sarah and Isaac and led to freedom by the grace of God. The text went on to identify the gentile Christians with the latter covenant relationship that was characterized by grace and freedom. The chapter concluded that all those who opted for the former covenant relationship and insisted on others to do the same were retrogressing and risked being forced out of the relationship.

Chapter Four discussed the various biblical events of covenants and looked at how ancient suzerain and promissory covenants influenced biblical covenants. The chapter then argued that the Sinai covenant was a suzerain covenant, while the Abrahamic, Davidic and the New covenants contained some elements of ancient promissory covenants. The chapter also examined the Pauline covenant, which compared and contrasted the Sinai and Abrahamic covenant types that were transformed into the new covenant of Christ. The chapter concluded that the two types of covenant that Paul discussed in various ways were of the type of the suzerain and promissory covenants. Moreover, Paul recommended for his audience the promissory covenant, which they had already entered into, when they received baptism and it was important to remain in that covenant for their own good.

Chapter Five was the comprehension stage in hermeneutic circle of Ricoeur. Here, the issues that came out of the critical readings were used to validate some of the issues raised at pre-understanding stage. What came out of the study was re-contextualized in the context of Ghana, which, in other words, were called the implication for the Ghanaian context. The conclusions drawn in this chapter was that the non-ostensive reference was not suspended but re-contextualized in the context of the reader, as covenant was identified in festivals and conjugal relationships in Ghana. Moreover, elements of the

ancient covenant forms that were identified in biblical covenants were also identified in a modified way in the covenant forms in Ghana. The elements of the Suzerain covenant form such as the identification of the covenant giver, the historical prologue, the stipulations, witnesses, blessings and curses, the ratification ceremonies, and annual public readings and renewals among others were identified, for example, in the Aboakyir festival. Some elements in the promissory covenant such as the oath to protect the covenant receiver, land delineation, blessings and curses, among others, were identified in the covenant of the traditional priesthood. I argued that written documents on these covenant forms were later additions and that information on these celebrations had been transmitted through the years from one generation to the next in the oral state. These elements were present, although they had not been associated with the elements of ancient or biblical covenants. Ghanaian Christians are not obliged to live under the traditional covenant stipulations if they conflict with their Christians principles.

Chapter Six summarized all the essential elements from the various chapters of the study. This made it possible for me to outline the key issues that came out of the study from which I am able to draw conclusions and made recommendations for further research.

## **Section II: The Findings of the Study.**

The study brought to light a number of things that are directly related to my research objectives as follows:

### **The Relationship between Covenantal Discourse and Galatians 4:21-31**

The study confirmed that:

- The letter to the Galatians was a discourse between Paul and the Churches in Galatia. The discourse was necessitated by a crisis situation created for the converts when other teachers taught them another version of the good news, which called for a renewal of their commitment to the covenant.
- The letter recalled certain covenant events, especially the Abrahamic, the Mosaic and the new covenant of Christ, which were adapted to the new situation of the converts in Galatia.
- There is a close relationship between covenantal discourse and Galatians 4:21-31 and this made it possible for the text to be studied as covenantal discourse.
- Ricoeur's Theory that allowed a text to be read as a discourse was considered an essential tool for the research.

### **With Regard to the Pre-critical Understanding**

The study confirmed the following difficult issues in the reading:

- Hagar and Ishmael were identified with a Jewish covenant and the Jewish nation. This is unacceptable since Hagar is known to be an Egyptian slave girl.
- Sarah and Isaac were identified with a gentile church. This is actually turning historical information in Genesis upside down, since Sarah is known to be the mother of the Jewish nation.



- The law was described as enslavement. This finding would be considered a heresy for Jews who regarded the law as something that was given to them by God.
- The Galatians were encouraged to remain faithful to the covenant of faith rather than that of the law so that they would not retrogress into slavery.
- The encounter between Ricoeur and West was very effective as the pre-set questions made the readings at this stage very smooth.

#### **With Regard to the critical Reading Approach**

- The family of Abraham was used as two covenant to teach the Galatian churches. In this light, the structure, knowledge and understanding of the family of Abraham were allegorically used to establish the structure, knowledge, and understanding of the church as a covenant family.
- Two forms of covenant relationships were open to this covenant community:
- One was based on the law, which was described as symbolic of human efforts in the divine human relationship and this leads to slavery.
- The other covenant is based on Faith, baptism and the Holy Spirit. These are symbolic of divine strength needed for the believer to remain in the divine human covenant relations. They lead to freedom.
- The option for the Galatians is to remain in the covenant of faith rather than that of the law.

### **The Perception of the Events of Biblical Covenants**

- The two main forms of covenant that characterized the relationship between God and his people were so much influenced by ancient Suzerain and Promissory covenants in modified forms.
- The two covenants that the study talks about were the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants.
- The Sinai covenant was modeled on the suzerain treaty that established a relationship by which a servant was under obligation to obey all the stipulations of a master or suffered serious consequences in default. This is seen in the place of importance given to the law in the Sinai covenant. Abrahamic covenant was modeled on the promissory oath that established a relationship by which a master obliges himself under oath to protect the interest of a servant. This is seen in the fact that it is God who was obliged to make the Abrahamic covenant work.
- The new covenant of Christ contains element of both the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants in modified and transformed ways. This is seen in the provision of forgiveness of sins which was not previously available.
- Pauline covenant set the Abrahamic covenant as a priority over the Sinai covenant.
- The Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled and transformed in the new covenant of Christ.

### **The Insights gained from Comprehension of Galatians 4:21-31**

- The Galatian converts were already members of the covenant community by accepting the good news, baptism, and their experiences of the Spirit.
- They were tempted to go back to the old covenant of law because of the teachings of the opponents of Paul.
- Paul was acting as a covenant mediator, encouraging his converts to renew their commitment to the new covenant of Christ that resulted in this discourse.
- A deliberate attempt was made by Paul to create ideologies around the two covenants in Christ so that the Sinai covenant becomes a historical prologue for the Abrahamic covenant as it was transformed in the new covenant of Christ.

The mode of delivery of the discourse was argumentative as well as persuasive.

The context of delivery was during worship.

Using Ricoeur to read Paul was very beneficial as both theories complimented each other.

- I found Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics very illuminating. It helped me to make a distinction between understanding, explanation, and comprehension. The difference between sense and reference in the generation of meaning was also clearly distinguished.

### **Appropriation in the Ghanaian Context**

- It was discovered that marriage as a covenant does not strictly describe the kind of covenant under study, blood covenant is found to be indissoluble and so Ghanaians condemned its practice.
- The family, tribal and professional covenants constitute the non-ostensive reference for biblical covenant under study because the deity is both a partner and an enforcer in these covenants.
- Oaths in these covenants are found to be indissoluble and defaulters face serious consequences.
- These traditional covenant forms exhibited some similarity with ancient suzerain and promissory covenants in modified forms. Hence, some of the elements in these covenants were also present in the Ghanaian traditional covenants such as the identification of covenant giver, historical prologue, stipulations, ratification ceremonies, witnesses, blessings and curses and annual public renewal.
- Annual celebrations of traditional festivals were a way of renewing traditional covenants to make it a living reality.
- Ghanaians attend festivals for various reasons other than the renewal of covenant.
- The celebration of sacraments is reference for Christian covenant forms.
- Ghanaian Christians were encouraged not to discriminate against any one on doctrinal issues that are not universal principles for all Christians.

- Christians, Muslims and African traditional adherents should not impose their rules and regulations on others
- Ricoeur's interpretation theory is adaptable and workable in the Ghanaian biblical interpretation.

### **Section III: Conclusions**

This section summarizes all the ideas of the research in order to bring the study to an end. Hence, ideas that were generated for the various study objectives will be summarized below as the conclusion of the work.

#### **With regard to the relationship between Covenantal Discourse and Galatians 4:21-31?**

- Galatians 4:21-31 is a covenant renewal discourse. The discourse re-enacted the covenant experiences of Israel, and contextualized it for the converts in Galatia. The aim of the discourse was to help the Galatians to recognize their own identity and position in the historical events of the covenant in order to renew their personal as well as communal commitment to the ongoing divine human relationship.

#### **With regard to pre-critical understanding**

- Although Hagar was an Egyptian slave girl, she was identified with the Jewish nation and the Jewish covenant together with Ishmael her son. This led to the confirmation that even though Paul himself was a Jew, he was an anti-Jewish Christian preacher.
- It was also confirmed at this stage that Paul was a law-free Christian preacher for describing the law as enslavement.
- Again, it was confirmed that there is a theological difficulty in the text since Sarah was identified with a gentile church.

- There were two other difficulties that made reading the text uneasy: the apparent contradiction between faith and works as requirement of the covenant, and who was the desolate woman; was it Sarah who was without a child or Hagar who had no husband.
- The study confirmed that Ricoeur's point that every reader approaches a text with his/her own initial naïve understanding which is important for the whole process of understanding.

### **Critical understanding**

- The church is represented as two covenants: one is the law, which is temporary and enslavement. The other is faith, baptism and the Spirit which symbolize divine strength needed to remain in the new covenant of Christ and which is free and eternal.
- This means that there is new criteria set to integrate new members into the covenant of Christ which are faith in Christ and the reception of the sacraments.
- The Galatian converts had the option to remain in the covenant of faith and the eschatological kingdom.

### **Perception of the events of Biblical Covenants**

- Biblical covenants have close relationships with ancient covenant forms in a modified way.
- Covenant established lasting relationships. Its oath was indissoluble. It may be renewed or added to it only by covenant giver.
- Covenant renewals were often initiated by covenant mediators to meet the needs of new members or to respond to new needs in different

historical, theological or political situations of the covenant community.

Galatians 4:21-31 is the contextualized form of existing covenant events to meet the needs of the converts in Galatia.

### **Comprehension of the Discourse**

- There is no tension between law and faith in the discourse. What was happening in Galatians 4:21-31 may be considered as a covenant renewal. It was to confirm the Galatian Christians as new kinship members.
- The Mosaic covenant, with its emphasis on the law, became the historical prologue that necessitated the new covenant of Christ, which was based on faith. Christians were therefore, not under the law, but under grace and faith in Christ. This understanding eases the difficulty in reading the text.

### **Appropriation in the Ghanaian Context.**

- Blood covenant between couple or friends are condemned in Ghana because it goes with serious consequences. Opinion leaders encouraged Ghanaians not to indulge in it.
- Participants of the celebration of festivals participate in the renewal of traditional covenants and the renewal of allegiance to traditional deities. Although most Ghanaians are not aware of this.
- The Sacraments made Christians members of the covenant community, hence liturgical sermons, homilies, exhortations and other covenantal discourses were various ways by which Christians were encouraged and challenged to remain faithful to their commitment to the covenant.

- Good Friday and Easter Sunday celebrations are covenant renewal moments for Christians.
- Ghanaians should know the implications of any covenant before they get involved since it is difficult, sometimes impossible to get out of it.
- Discrimination of all kinds based on doctrines is highly discouraged.
- Ghanaians who leave one religion to another breaks a covenant oath in one way or the other. Even within Christianity, one expression of faith is different from another and so leaving one Christian group to another is similar to what Paul condemned in Galatia and should avoided.
- Ghanaian Christians are not obliged to live under the norms of traditional covenants, although they are obliged to contribute to the development of their traditional areas.

#### **Section IV: Recommendations**

- Christians are not under obligation to live the norms of traditional covenant.
- There is a need for more dialogue between Christianity and culture to help ease the tension between faith and culture for Christians who participate in traditional festivals.
- Covenant moments must be clearly demarcated for Christians to know that by baptism and the reception of the other sacraments, they have entered into covenant with Christ with all of its obligations so that they know the ethical dimensions of participating in traditional covenant renewals.



- Education on covenant for both Christians and non-Christians must be intensive, participatory and thorough for people to know the implications of what they do.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The areas that the researcher recommends for further research are as follows:

1. .A dialogue between Christian faith and traditional leaders on covenant and covenant renewals. This was important for everyone to understand the implication of what they do when they attend annual festivals.

The use of metaphors in the study of the letter to the Galatians will lead to the examination of the individual metaphors and their implications.

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*Ghana - Family Structure, Family Formation, And Family Life*

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide for Teachers of Martyrs of Uganda Catholic School, Kumasi

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2015 Time: 10am

Venue: St. Peter's Cathedral Basilica, Kumasi

1. What do you know about the letter to the Galatians?
2. How do you recall the stories of Abraham and his family?
3. How did Paul retell the stories of Hagar and Sarah?
4. What law was the passage talking about that keeps people in bondage?
5. What two covenants is the family of Abraham representing?
6. How was the retelling of the story of Sarah and Hagar helpful?
7. How is the retelling of the Stories problematic?
8. What lessons are learned from the stories of the family of Abraham in Galatians?

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide for Catechists in the Archdiocese of Cape Coast and students  
in University of Cape Coast.

Date: 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 Time: 10 O'clock am

Venue: St. John The Baptist Catholic Church, Pedu.

1. Mention any local name for Covenant that you know
2. Name some of the covenants in Ghana
3. Identify any family covenants that you know
4. Name any covenant you have participated in
5. Why do you attend festivals?

## APPENDIX C

Interview Guide for Family Elders of Akotokyir. Cape Coast

Date: 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 Time: 4pm-6.20pm

Venue: Roman Catholic Church, Akotokyir

1. Identify any family covenants that you know
2. When is Akor covenant established?
3. For what purpose is the Akor covenant ?
4. What are some of the effects of the covenant?
5. What are the problematic issues in the Akor covenant?