

HAGAR: CASE STUDY OF ABUSE OF WOMEN

“Hagar was economically exploited and physically abused, a foreigner, an outsider, a slave, and a handmaid to Sarah who turned her into a sex object” (Trible 1978:15)¹

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Thesis Presented for the Degree of Masters in Theology

In Old Testament

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¹ Was Hagar abused, exploited and turned into a sex object according to the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21? This is the question I will be investigating in thesis.

DECLARATION

I, Mzukisi Welcome Faleni declare that this thesis, **Hagar: Case Study of Abuse of Women:** is my own work and that all sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature

Date



Abstract

According to modern standards, the narratives about Hagar in Genesis 16 and 21 are stories of abuse, as many feminist commentators have pointed out. Some of them, however, argue that the narrator condones what happened to Hagar, seeing it as perfectly normal. This thesis aims to investigate whether and how Hagar was abused according to the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21: 8-21. The question is thus whether or not the narrator saw the actions of Sarai and Abram towards Hagar as abuse. In order to answer this question, use is made of narrative theory, particularly regarding the ways in which the narrator's point of view can be determined.

Chapter 2 examines contemporary views on various forms of abuse and concludes that Hagar was indeed, according to current standards, the victim of physical, sexual and domestic abuse. In as much as this also affected Ishmael, child abuse also occurred.

Chapter 3 places the Hagar narratives in the larger context of Genesis and the Pentateuch. It indicates that the main theme in the second part of Genesis is Yahweh's promise to the patriarchs. This promise concerns both the land and, even more prominently, offspring.

Chapter 4 first outlines narrative theory and then briefly examines the structure of the Israelite family. Afterwards, the Hagar narratives are examined and various scholarly opinions are categorized and evaluated. The conclusion is drawn that the narrator did indeed present a story of physical and emotional abuse and counted on his readers to recognize this. But, given the status of slaves and the customs of the time, he probably did not regard Hagar as sexually abused or raped.

The final chapter issues a challenge to churches to pay more attention to biblical interpretation. The case study of the Hagar narratives indicates that the simplistic interpretation can lead to a situation in which the Bible is used to justify abuse or to project modern problems on ancient texts.

DEDICATION

To the Almighty God

And

The two most important women in my life –

My wife, Cordelia Nothando Faleni and my mother, Singiswa Evelyn Faleni.



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a classical building facade with columns and a pediment, rendered in blue lines.

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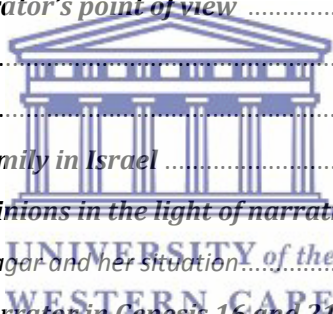
Above all, I am thankful to God for empowering me to believe in myself, especially when I felt that this kind of work was not meant for me. The completion of this thesis has led me to reflect more on my favourite Psalm, which says, "What is man that you are mindful of him" (8:4). God is consistently emphasizing the significance of man, who was created in His image and likeness to exercise dominion over the rest of creation (Gen 1: 26-28).

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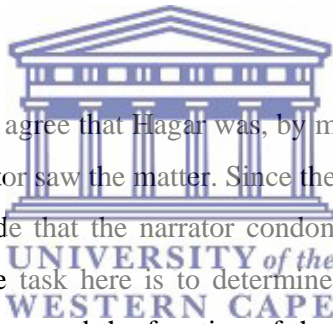


CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis aims to investigate whether Hagar was abused or not according to the narrator² of Genesis 16 and 21:8-21 and if she was, how. Although the emphasis is on Chapter 16 in this study, reference will also be made to the closely related Chapter 21. According to Westermann (1984:36), “Both chapters are very close to each other in the first part, the conflict between the women: both have a different motif sequence in the second. In chapter 16 it is the promise of a son, in chapter 21 it is preservation from dying of thirst”. What does the narrator in Genesis try to convey to the reader in the story? In order to answer this question, the narratives, particularly, the point of view of the narrator will be analysed using the tools of narrative analysis.



Although modern commentators agree that Hagar was, by modern standards, abused, it is not clear that this was how the narrator saw the matter. Since the narrator does not openly express a view, it is possible to conclude that the narrator condoned the events that took place or thought of them as normal. The task here is to determine the narrator’s point of view by analysing both the stories of Hagar and the function of the stories within the larger Genesis narrative. If the narrator suggests that Hagar was indeed abused, how does this concept of abuse relate to modern notions of abuse?

Since the thesis deals with abuse, we shall briefly outline the problem of abuse and define various kinds of abuse, which we can relate to Hagar’s situation (Chapter 2). The story of Hagar, which is going to be the key in this research, forms part of the story about the beginning of the people of Israel and the promise made by God to Abram³ in Genesis 15:5. In Chapter 3, attention will be given to the place and function of the two narrative units about Hagar within the larger whole of Genesis.

² I will refer to the narrator as ‘he’ since I believe that narrators in the time of Genesis were mostly men.

³ Hooke (1962:193) claims that scholars are generally agreed that the form Abram (which will be used in this thesis) is a contraction of the name Abiram, which is found in Assyrian documents as well as in Hebrew. Hooke further observes that the change of name is significant because it implies a change of personality. Both Abraham and Sarah are here given new names by Yahweh, indicating the change in their personal relation with God. The form ‘Sarai’ will also be used in this study. Williamson (2003:8) notes that Abraham is the first character in the Bible to have two names. Williamson says the initial form of the patriarch’s name was *Abram* “exalted father”.

The first part of Chapter 4 briefly outlines the findings of contemporary narrative theory, with specific emphasis on the role and function of the narrator. The second part of the chapter deals with the social setting. Since Hagar is presented as a slave within an Israelite family, it will be necessary to examine the structure of the Israelite family and the status of slaves, particularly female slaves, within such a family. The third part reviews scholarly opinions on the Hagar stories in the light of the previous two parts.

In the passages of Genesis 16 and 21:8-21, Sarai and Abram control Hagar's sexual services without Hagar's consent. According to Phyllis Trible (1984:13), Hagar became the suffering, abused and used servant. She was economically exploited and physically abused; she was a foreigner, an outsider, a slave, and a handmaid to Sarai who turned her into a sex object. For Teubal (1990:40), "Sarah's actions towards Hagar are hostile and cruel; Hagar is harshly punished because she does not conform to her mistress's wishes". Kathleen O'Connor (1997:31) supports the above statement that Hagar's story contains slavery, poverty, abuse, homelessness, and economic exploitation.

Some scholars argue that the narrator is party to the abuse (cf. Teubal 1990). Others, including Von Rad (1972), believe that the narrator is indeed sympathetic to Hagar and that the actions of Abram and Sarai are implicitly condemned. A third group argues that the narrator simply reports customary behaviour of the past and passes no judgment; the focus of the narrator lies elsewhere (cf. Westermann 1987). This thesis classifies and examines these views and evaluates them in the light of the narrative theory. The hypothesis is that the narrator indeed passes judgement on the actions of Abram and Sarai although the narrator's view of abuse may differ from modern ones. The chapter concludes with the findings.

Violence against women has remained a problem in the South African society and sometimes the Bible is used to justify certain types of abusive practices. In the light of this, the conclusion shall be a challenge to the churches to devote more attention to biblical interpretation to avoid simplistic readings of biblical passages to legitimate or condemn forms of abuse.

1.2 Context and Relevance

According to Gnanadason (1997:5), “The abuse of women is a major issue particularly in poorer societies, as poor education and poverty leads to low civil standards”. Violence against women is costly to both the state and to the private sector. Costs arise both directly and indirectly from abuse as medical expenses are incurred due to injuries sustained from the abuse, families are paralysed from domestic violence and HIV is spread through rape. For Kumar-D’Souza (1996:63), violence against women has been seen “as personal violence, as a domestic problem and thus privatized and individualized, [but] these are crimes against half of humanity which are total negations of the right to be human”. Domestic violence is sometimes so deeply embedded in their history that many women fail to address issues related to violence against women for fear of being ostracized. As an ordained minister in a congregation in Nyanga area, this researcher has been challenged by the story of Hagar (Gen. 16; 21:8-21) with reference to the way it has been used to address and rebuke domestic violence. Preachers often cite Hagar as an example of women who are abused by their partners. From his experience as a minister in the congregation, the researcher has observed several instances in which women’s rights were violated, including cases of severe domestic violence. Although deeply concerned about the abuse of women in South Africa, one is not certain whether it is appropriate or not to use Hagar as a symbol of domestic violence and sexually abused women. At least one should not use her story as reference for the many acts of violence on women in our societies without determining the point of view of the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21:8-21.

1.3 The Problem Statement

The story of Hagar has been interpreted in many different ways, and some of these interpretations might not be in line with the point of view of the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21:8-21⁴. Preachers often read their own situations into this story. Bosman (1986:9) remarks that; “Readers are constantly exposed to the danger of reading into the text their own preconceived conviction; this in turn, may lead to the selective reading of the text or reading into the text ideas that are foreign to it”. Discussing the role played by Hagar in Abram’s family without analysing the narratives and considering the narrator’s point of view could be misleading. Drey (2002:179) notes that different scholars have analysed the Hagar narratives

⁴ This researcher has witnessed a literal interpretation of this text in his church, Presbyterian Church of Africa (established in 1898) and thought it did not do justice to the narrator of Genesis.

from social, economic and feminist perspectives but have also used tools of literary criticism. However, these approaches failed to clarify Hagar's role in the Abrahamic stories. The aim of this research is to investigate the problem and get a clearer understanding of the narrator's point of view in Genesis 16 and 21: 8-21 through narrative analysis.

1.4 Research Question

Consequently, it is important to consider certain questions. From the point of view of the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21:8-21, was Hagar abused and mistreated or not? If the answer is yes, how was she abused? The discussion in the chapters that follow will be guided by the following sub-topics:

- The shape and theology of Genesis
- Narrative theory and the analysis of narratives (especially with regard to different kinds of narrators and their operations)
- The Israelite family and the place of slaves (especially female slaves) within the family

Finally, we shall attempt to determine whether the narrator is one of the "enemies" of Hagar (as some scholars have claimed) or not.



1.5 Hypothesis

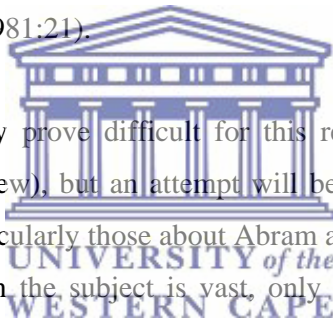
According to the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21:8-21, Hagar was humiliated, exploited, physically abused and turned into a sexual object. We shall investigate this statement in the light of the narrative theory.

1.6 Method and Material

The method of investigation will be primarily a literature survey and the use of some elements of narrative analysis to determine the point of view of the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21:8-21. According to Bratcher⁵, narratives have particular features that can be used to identify them as narratives. The three major features are the settings, which include the historical, cultural, and social contexts; the characters who drive the narrative; and the plot or the flow of the story, which moves from stasis, conflict, and resolution to restoration of stability. Abbott (2002:76) remarks that, "These are elements that help" when it comes to bringing out ideas and judgments in narratives and understanding what is involved in the interpretation of narratives.

⁵ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R. C. Sproul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._C._Sproul). Visited

These narrative features or elements (settings, characters and plot) will be used as vehicles to get to the point of view of the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21:8-21. Therefore, the aim here is “to read this text with a view to establishing the author’s intention” (Bosman 1986:15). It may not be possible to “establish the author’s intention” beyond doubt but narrative analysis offers tools that help us to understand the thrust of the narrative. Abbott (2002:78) admits that, “We may never have a good understanding of the real author, but we do have a chance of understanding the author implied by the narrative”. In this regard, Alter (1981:18) also remarks that, “The perspective of narrative analysis is the only relevant one to the consideration of the Bible as literature; any other discipline, real or imagined runs a danger of inventing groundless hypothesis and losing touch with the literary power of the actual biblical story.” He further explains that in order to understand a narrative art, one should also be constantly aware of two features - the repeated use of narrative analogy and the richly expressive function of syntax (1981:21).



The analysis of the syntax may prove difficult for this researcher because of inadequate language tools (that is, in Hebrew), but an attempt will be made to compare the text with other narratives in Genesis, particularly those about Abram and his family. Moreover, in view of the fact that the literature on the subject is vast, only a representative fraction will be reviewed in this study.

1.7 Key Words

The following are the ten key words used in the thesis:

- Genesis
- Hagar
- Abuse
- Narrative
- Plot
- Character
- Narrator
- Family
- Slave
- Patriarch

1.8 Chapter Outline

1.8.1 Chapter One

This chapter introduces the study and contains an outline of the hypothesis, the methodology for testing the hypothesis, the problem statement and the reason for researching the topic. In addition, it specifies the relevance and the context of the thesis and the key terms used in the thesis.

1.8.2 Chapter Two

Since this research is investigating whether Hagar was abused or not (from the point of view of the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21: 8-21), a working definition of various kinds of abuse will be provided in this chapter. The term abuse will be used to cover physical, emotional, sexual, domestic, and child abuse. Subsequently, the story of Hagar will be considered in the light of these different types of abuse to establish whether Hagar was abused. Furthermore, for a contemporary view of the term abuse, we shall consider several works on family violence. These include Ruth Porter (1984), Michele Bograd (1988), Vernon Wiehe (1988), Michele Harway & Hansen Marsali (1993), Audrey Mullernder (1996), Aruna Gnanadason (1997) and other literatures on domestic violence and abuse. Feminist biblical scholars such as Phyllis Trible (1984), Savina Ferbal (1990), Kathleen O'Connor (1997), Dora Mbuwayesengo (1997) and Tammi Schneider (2004) will be consulted in connection with Hagar's story.

It has been observed that "Hagar's story is the story of our time: she is a homeless woman, an abused woman"⁶. By modern standards, her story covers all the types of abuse listed above. Although the focus is on Hagar, it is clear that Hagar's treatment also has implications for her son, so that child abuse cannot be excluded. According to Overland (2003:376), Sarai instructs Abram to eject Hagar and Ishmael because she is determined that Isaac must not divide the inheritance with Ishmael. Thus, Sarai abuses a child that she initially wanted to claim as her own.

1.8.3 Chapter Three

It is important to discuss some aspects of the book of Genesis since the text under

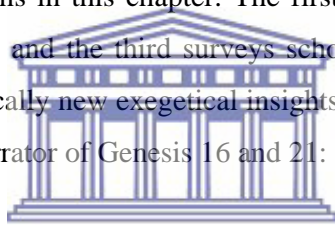
⁶ <http://wgst.Intrasun.tcnj.edu/newsletter/archives/octo2002.html>, visited 2005-09-22

consideration is from Genesis. However, related themes from the book of Genesis are too broad to address comprehensively in this study and especially because most of them have been dealt with exhaustively by many authors. The purpose of mentioning them is to acknowledge the problems they raise and to highlight differences of opinion on these matters. We shall evaluate the different views on the authorship of Genesis, the basic divisions of Genesis, the sources of the Pentateuch and the theology of Genesis and clarify our own position on these matters.

In particular, we shall examine some scholarly works on the Pentateuch, especially on Genesis. These include Von Rad (1972), Noth (1966), Joyce Baldwin (1986), Westermann (1987), Whybray (1997), Alter (1981), Fretheim (1994), Dillard (1995) and Carr (1996).

1.8.4 Chapter Four

There are three major subsections in this chapter. The first deals with narrative theory, the second with the Israelite family and the third surveys scholarly opinions on the topic. The goal is not to come up with radically new exegetical insights on the story of Hagar, but rather to investigate the view of the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21: 8-21 of Hagar's situation.



Sternberg (1985:85) argues that the biblical narrator speaks with the authority of omniscience; what the narrator presents is what the narrative wants the readers to hear. According to Alter (1981:12), narrative analytic tools are intended to uncover the original meaning of the biblical words; the life situation in which specific texts were assembled. Narrators make use of various elements to emphasize what they consider important and to convey values. These include the plot, the handling of time and the portrayal of characters.

Although the study will not represent a full narrative analysis of the Hagar stories, narrative theory will be used as the vehicle to reach certain conclusions about the point of view of the narrator. For instance, Alter (1981:20) shows how narrative theory raises questions such as: “Why does the narrator ascribe motives to designated characters? Why dialogue is introduced at certain junctures and on what principles of selectivity are specific words assigned to characters? Why are particular identifications of characters noted by the narrator at specific points in the story?” Sternberg (1985:58) also suggests that questions such as, “Who is the teller? To whom does he tell? Why does he tell?” should be asked if we wish to understand the point of a narrative. He claims that such questions “will brook no neglect”. In this section,

we shall examine certain works on narrative theory, such as Deist & Vosloo (1982), Bar-Efrat (1989), Abbott (2002), Hawk (2003), Suzanne Keen (2003), and Jonker (2005).

Every narrative has a setting and the stories of Hagar are set within an Israelite family. This subsection will briefly explore the structure and function of the ancient Israelite family. Attention will be paid to the role and status of slaves, particularly female slaves, and the customary laws of the day. To achieve this purpose, we shall consider the following authors: Westermann (1984), Scullion (1992), Blenkinsopp (1997), Carol Meyers (1997), Perdue (1997a & b), Borowski (2003) and Haas (2003).

Teubal (1990: xxv) suggests that in order to understand Hagar's abusive situation, we must ask ourselves in whose interest sanctioning the subordination and enslavement of women was. She believes that men wrote the stories in a patriarchal society and therefore had little sympathy for the women they portrayed. For her, the narrator was one of Hagar's enemies. However, there are other scholarly views, which we shall review, classify and evaluate using standard commentaries. In particular, the focus will be on the work of feminist scholars such as Phyllis Trible (1984), Peggy Day (1989), Savina Teubal (1990), Dora Mbuwayesengo (1997), Kathleen O'Connor (1997), Cheryl Sanders (2002) and Tammi Schneider (2004). Afterwards, we shall attempt to answer the research question by drawing conclusions from the evidence, which clarifies the narrator's point of view.

1.8.5 Concluding Chapter

This chapter will discuss what the church could do to promote the appropriate interpretation of the Bible especially the Old Testament. The discussion will serve as a challenge to the church, particularly the Presbyterian Church of Africa, which has not yet started any project on the interpretation of the Bible. We shall examine the purpose of the church, review three approaches to interpretation namely, the allegorical, the feminist and the historical, and show how they may influence the interpretation of the Hagar narratives. In this way, we shall consider the danger of relying only on some of these methods and ignoring others in interpreting the Bible.

CHAPTER TWO

ABUSE

2.1 Types of Abuse

To investigate whether Hagar was abused or not, it is crucial to define various types of abuse and show how they relate to Hagar's situation. Types of abuse include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, domestic abuse and child abuse. Thus, contemporary understanding of the term will be gleaned from authors such as Ruth Porter (1984, Walker (1988), Vernon Wiehe (1988), Hansen Marsali & Michele Harway (1993), Audrey Mullernder (1996) and Aruna Gnanadason (1997) among others.

2.1.1 What is abuse?

According to modern commentators, Hagar was abused and mistreated by Abram's household. Abuse can be defined as a pattern of behaviour that one person directs against another to intimidate or force him or her to do or suffer what the abuser wants; this is done from the abuser's position of power. For instance, in the case of Hagar, Sarai used her position of power to abuse Hagar. Eugene Walker (1988:7) defines abuse as maltreatment, which includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. It is almost entirely about control, about re-exerting one's identity, and re-establishing predictability. Authors agree that there are three basic forms of abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. Walker further explains that these aspects of abuse are often thought to be the same and are generally covered by the same legal statutes. They are however, different and although they may overlap in some cases, they are separate and distinct.

Moreover, "Abuse is a pattern of behaviour used to establish power and control over another person through fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of violence. Abuse happens when one person believes they are entitled to control another. Assault, battering and domestic violence are crimes".⁷ Abuse of family members can take many forms. Battering may include emotional abuse, economic abuse, sexual abuse, and using children, threats, male privileges, intimidation, isolation, and a variety of other behaviours to maintain an atmosphere of fear, intimidation and power. In all cultures, the perpetrators are mostly the men in the family while women and children are the victims of abuse.

⁷http://www.fultonsheriff.org/misc/dv_problem.asp (visited 2007-04-12).

2.1.2 Emotional or psychological abuse

One would argue that Hagar was affected emotionally or psychologically by the situation in which she found herself in Abram's house. To begin with, drastic decisions were taken without her consent since she had no voice because of her status. Moreover, being called names such as "maidservant" or "slave woman" must have taken away her self-esteem. It can also be noted that the narrator only reports that the Angel of the Lord found her near a spring in the desert but his focus was not on Hagar's personal feelings. From a modern understanding of abuse, all that happened to Hagar could be regarded as emotional or psychological abuse.

According to Wiehe (1998:76), emotional abuse may include the use of ridicule, insults, accusations, infidelity, and ignoring the partner, all of which result in an erosion of the victim's self-esteem and self-worth. These could have been Hagar's feeling when she was left alone and driven out of Abram's house to the wilderness after being abused by Sarai. Abuse can also occur when the perpetrator puts his or her needs before that of the abused and demands compliant behaviour. For instance, Sarai wanted to build herself through Hagar but ignored Hagar's opinion.



Furthermore, Wiehe explains that a perpetrator may deliberately isolate a partner from friends, family and neighbours thereby inflicting another form of emotional abuse. This could have applied to Hagar when Sarai told Abram to "get rid of that slave woman" and thus separated Hagar from the family (Gen. 21:10). It is clear that "emotional abuse can also involve the withholding of economical support" (Wiehe 1998:76). The narrator of Genesis 21:14 states that Abram gave some food and a skin of water to Hagar and sent her off with the boy. There was no further provision for when the food and water would finish. Walker (1988:8) affirms that; "emotional abuse is more difficult to define, but it involves the use of excessive verbal threats, ridicule, personally demeaning comments, derogatory statements [maidservant, slave woman as used to define Hagar] and threats against the person".

2.1.3 Physical abuse

According to Genesis 16:6, Sarai ill-treated Hagar and she ran away from her mistress. Although we are not sure how Sarai did this, most authors agree that it was a physical affliction. Schneider (2004:47, 50) claims that the nature of the abuse was clearly more severe and that Hagar's suffering in Sarai's hand is the loss of her newly gained status.

Teubal (1990: xxii) shares this view; she states that; “although Hagar the Egyptian⁸ is to resolve the problem of Sarai’s barrenness, Sarai seemingly has no feeling for her *Shifhah*, her handmaid. Her only action toward Hagar is hostile and cruel”.

The following description of physical abuse may be similar to the kind of treatment Hagar received from Abram’s household. According to Eugene Walker (1988:8), physical abuse is generally defined as inflicting injuries such as bruises, burns, head injuries, fractures, internal injuries, lacerations, or any other form of physical harm. The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect also defines this category as including excessive corporal punishment and close confinement such as tying or binding the person and locking him or her in a closet. Finkelhor (1988:20) argues that because they are small, children are particularly vulnerable to the physical effects of abuse. To some extent, this may also apply to women.

In addition, Finkelhor notes that there are different reasons for physical abuse and the reasons why fathers abuse their children may be very different from those of mothers. For instance, in the case of Hagar, Sarai wanted to build herself through Hagar - she wanted security. In the case of fathers, a history of violent behaviour may be an important factor for abuse while job loss and job dissatisfaction may also contribute to the behaviour. Finkelhor (1988:45) argues that most researchers in the field of physical abuse recognize a connection between abuse and anger and that in most cases, anger precedes the abuse but the details of the connection are not clear. The belief in some cultures is that nothing wrong in beating a woman when she misbehaves. As a matter of fact, “physical violence against wives was deemed necessary for the ‘well-being’ of women; it was couched in terms of corrective discipline and chastisement of erring wives” (Hart 1993:13).

2.1.4 Sexual abuse

From modern Human Rights’ perspective, sex without mutual consent constitutes rape or abuse. In Genesis (16:2), it is evident that Hagar did not consent to the sexual intercourse

⁸ Tammi Schneider (2004:47) remarks that Egypt is not only foreign but it is the place of Sarai’s previous enslavement, where she learned that a woman can be sold to protect other family members and make them rich, regardless of the impact on the woman. She further explains that the Code of Hammurabi stipulates that if a *naditu* (wife) gives a slave woman to her husband and the slave bears children, the slave woman would acquire equal status with her mistress because of her children. Her mistress will not sell her; she will place upon her the slave-lock and she would reckon her with the slave women. This explains why Sarai went to Abram to report Hagar (who by this time had acquired a new status). Abram reversed the status by assuring Sarai that Hagar was still under her control. Hence, Sarai had power to abuse her.

with Abram. The Bible also does not indicate how many times Abram had sex with Hagar without her consent.

Ruth Porter (1984:119) and Eugene Walker (1988:8) both cite Kempe & Kempe (1976:60) by defining sexual abuse as the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities they do not fully comprehend, are unable to give informed consent to and that violate the social taboos of family roles. This definition includes a wide range of activities such as the exhibition of an adult's genitalia to a child, forcing a child to exhibit the genitals to the adult, fondling of genitals, manual or oral stimulation of genitals, vaginal or anal intercourse, and involving the child in prostitution or in the making or use of pornography⁹. This definition not only applies to a child but to all those who are victims and are overpowered by their perpetrators for whatever reason. In the case of Hagar, she had to submit to Abram because of customary laws and her status.

However, this definition has been faulted by Liz Hall & Siobhan Lloyd (1993:2) on two points. Firstly, it does not take into account the possibility of using force or threats of force by the abuser. Secondly, it suggests that some acts are abusive only because they are not socially acceptable. The definition does not acknowledge that young adults can also be sexually abused even though they may be over the age of informed consent. This may be applicable in the case of Hagar as her age at the time of the incidence remains unknown but it is possible that she was young. Schneider (2004:46) refers to her as "a slave-girl with the potential of fertility". Hall & Lloyd also stresses that this definition ignores the fact that most children are abused by adults known to them. Ruth Porter (1984:3) argues that it is difficult to produce an all-inclusive definition of sexual abuse but Kempe & Kempe's definition has proved a valuable starting point.

The definition by Hall & Lloyd (1989:2) presents fewer of the problems. In it, sexual abuse of a child is a sexual act imposed on a child who lacks emotional, maturational and cognitive development. The ability to lure a child into a sexual relationship is based on the all-powerful and dominant position of the adult or older perpetrator, which is in sharp contrast to the child's age, dependence or subordinate position. Authority and power enable the perpetrator

⁹ Porter (1984:119) further argues that the recognition of sexual abuse of children is necessary step in increasing the awareness of child abuse in the community. The cases that come to professional notice are far fewer than the cases that actually occur. The reasons are mainly connected with the complex and painful issues within the families in which the sexual abuse has taken place. She suggests that sexual abuse be regarded and dealt with as a form of child abuse; therapeutic and statutory measures should be combined to create a climate in which these children, their families and others involved can come forward for help.

to coerce the child into sexual compliance implicitly or directly. It appears that Hall & Lloyd's definition also applies to sexual abuse of an adult in a subordinate position, where power, authority and dominant position is used against him or her. It is observed that a cycle of sexual abuse often operates such that victimization can lead to further victimization. For instance, the assumption is that "girls who were sexually abused as children are more likely to grow up to be battered wives" (Finkelhor 1988:26). To support this view, Finkelhor refers to the observation by McCarthy & DiVasto (1981) that women, who were sexually abused as children, are likely to have daughters who are also abused. Moreover, the transmission of sexual violence is not confined to the family.

2.1.5 Domestic violence

In an attempt to reveal the situation in Abram's household, Kathleen O'Connor (1997) entitled her book, *Abraham's Unholy Family*. In a similar way, Tribble (1984) lists the story of Hagar as one of the Bible's *Texts of Terror*. As the truth about domestic violence is being revealed, it becomes indisputable that women and children are not necessarily safe even in the apparent security of their homes. This was the case of Hagar and Ishmael in Abram's house. For them, Abram's family was far from an atmosphere of shared understanding, respect and love. The culture of patriarchal domination and violent retribution in the house of Abram finds expression in various forms of physical and sexual abuse as Hagar became a victim in the home of Abram.

At this point, it is worthwhile to consider a discussion of a modern understanding of domestic violence from Hagar's perspective. Aruna Gnanadason (1997:7) states that in the past, it was often virtually impossible to know what happened inside the family home but since women have dared to speak out about their pain this information is no longer secret. Nevertheless, the development does not imply that the crisis of domestic violence has stopped (that is, because women talk about it). Quoting Gelles & Strauss, two of the most respected researchers in the field of family violence, Harway & Marsali (1993:1) declare that; "you are more likely to be physically assaulted, beaten, and killed in your own home at hands of a loved one than any place else, or by anyone else in our society".

Michele Bograd (1988:60) argues that violence between spouses, or domestic violence, has recently become an area of social and academic concern. In some cases, domestic violence is extreme enough to result in murder and lethality often occurs when the woman attempts to leave, in cases of wife battering. Furthermore, she claims that domestic violence has been part of everyday life since the beginning of recorded history; men's patriarchal authority over

their families was purchased at the expense of an invisible horde of women who were beaten in their homes (1988:61). Similarly, Harway & Marsali (1993:1) affirm that up to the nineteenth century, the courts ruled that husbands were allowed to “chastise” their wives with a “whip or rattan no bigger than the thumb”.

Additionally, Barbara Hart (1993:13) confirms that violence against their wives was a right that men exercised with impunity for centuries; this prerogative of men has been articulated in the precepts of religion and philosophy. In the case of Hagar, all that happened to her was understood as being justified by the customary laws of the day. Finkelhor (1988:20) remarks that until the last decade, domestic violence (that is, to the extent that it was recognized) was generally considered an unusual problem that occurred mostly under extreme circumstances of family disorganization. Finkelhor defines domestic violence as the use of force to inflict pain intentionally. This includes spanking because inflicting pain is certainly the intention of spanking. In a later section, this issue will be discussed further in relation to Hagar and Sarai.

For Audrey Mullernder (1996:8), the term “domestic abuse” has been challenged and criticized because the term domestic is inaccurate in the context of domestic abuse for three reasons. Firstly, there are other crimes in domestic settings, such as child abuse, that are not covered by the term. She argues that the problem of domestic abuse has been a private trouble for too long; it now needs to become a public issue. The second reason for faulting the accuracy of the term, domestic abuse is that harassment and violence often continue after the woman has attempted to end the abusive relationship and either she or her partner has left. Mullernder notes that ex-partners often commit murders. Thus, when Hagar suffers in the wilderness, outside the household of Abram, the situation is not covered by the term, domestic violence. The third reason is that the term domestic violence is too soft to describe and encompass all the experiences of the victims.

Again, Liss & Stahly (1993:175) remark that although the impact of domestic violence on women's lives has become the focus in most societies these days, domestic violence affects others such as, children (cf. Ishmael, in the case of Hagar). When children are exposed to domestic abuse, their lives are also damaged and disrupted. The decision of their mother to leave an abusive relationship changes and affects the children as well as their relationship with both parents. Harway & Marsali (1993) argue that the man’s need for power and control is an important component of domestic violence. In the case of Hagar, Sarai was threatened

by Ishmael but Abram exercised his powers as a man and issued a verdict to get rid of them. Researchers on family violence are still far from a consensus on how best to explain the different kinds of family violence but there is great consensus on who is at risk. They agree that:

Children appear to be at greater risk to sexual abuse, for example, when their natural father is gone from their home and especially when they are living with stepfather. They are also at high risk when they have a difficult relationship with their mother because mother is sick, incapacitated, or emotionally unavailable (Finkelhor 1988:20).

The observation is that many women who are involved in domestic violence normalize the situation by “justifying their husband’s behaviour on the grounds that he is under stress, mentally ill, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, that husbands have the right to hit their wives, or that the woman deserved the abuse because she was provocative” (Bograd 1988:62). Bograd further claims that on the other hand, men define their violence as deviant behaviour and attempt to rationalize their behaviour through minimization in utterances such as, “I didn’t hurt her that badly”, “I didn’t mean to hurt her”, and “I don’t know what happened”.



2.1.6 Child abuse

We already indicated above the abusive treatment Ishmael received from Abram and Sarai, through his mother and we mentioned how children are affected by abusive relationships. Some authors argue that Hagar was sent to die in the most dangerous area, the wilderness. In this process, Ishmael was deprived of his rights to grow up within his family. To send mother and child to the wilderness without sufficient provision is an abusive action as Ishmael almost died from thirst. It should be stated here that the issue of child abuse is an ancient one. Eugene Walker (1988:3) notes that in ancient times it was a custom to offer children as sacrifices to gods and in those days, political motivations also resulted in a great deal of child abuse. Walker mentions numerous accounts in the Bible of the mass slaughter of children; the best known among these are the order by Pharaoh that all newborn Jewish males be executed (Ex. 1:15-22) and the decree of Herod, who feared the coming of the Messiah, that all boy children in Bethlehem be killed (Mathew 2:16).

Although killing may be an extreme form of child abuse, it is by no means the only form; numerous societies prescribed body mutilation as a standard part of the child rearing process. Many primitive groups practised various forms of tattooing and exaggeration of parts of the

body, as well as piercing parts of the body with sharp objects. Furthermore, the genitals were mutilated in ceremonies in various societies. According to Walker (1988:4), parents, priests, and schoolmasters from ancient times regarded it a sacred duty to chastise children severely, literally to “beat the devil out of them” so that they would grow up to be responsible adults. Walker refers to Bremmer (1970), which claims that in the 1600s Massachusetts adopted the “stubborn child act”, which permitted parents to put a child to death if the child was rebellious and disobedient. Children were also commonly treated as slaves by adults in their family; they were sold into slavery or hired out as workers in factories to exploit them for their labour potential.

Likewise, sexual exploitation of children has a long history. Many religious ceremonies and initiation rights in ancient civilizations involved sexual activities between adults and children and children have been bought and sold as prostitutes since time began. Eugene Walker (1988:4) observes that one of the astonishing features of child abuse is that it has only been recognized as a problem in very recent times. Children have always been regarded as the property of their parents and parents were given wide latitude as to how they treated their children, just as other personal possessions. Sarai might have regarded Ishmael as the property of Hagar; that is why she (Sarai) instructed Abram to get rid of Hagar and her son. The threat was Ishmael, not Hagar. Aristotle, who was a champion of rather enlightened views of democracy and political control, stated that before a slave or a child reached a certain age and acquired an independent status, he or she is in a manner of speaking, a part of oneself. Since no one deliberately injures himself, the parent cannot be guilty of injustice towards him or her. In other words, nothing in their relations can be considered politically just or unjust. (Poetics 57, IV, 1).

2.2. Why modern women stay in abusive relationships?

One question, which has not been fully addressed by this research concerns the battered woman who returns again and again to her abusers. One could argue that in the case of Hagar, the Angel of the Lord drove her back but why does the modern woman find it difficult to go out of an abusive situation with confidence? Why do women remain in violent relationships? A number of reasons have been adduced to this problem. Often female victims of abuse are accused of ‘enjoying’ such treatment; otherwise, they would have left. Others might be told that they are one of many “women who love too much” or who have “low self-esteem.” However, “the truth is that no one enjoys being beaten, no matter what their

emotional state or self image”.¹⁰ Additionally, Gnanadason (1997:9) asserts that; “in no context do women ask to be beaten or abused”. In the case of Hagar, Sarai wanted to fulfil her personal interests by using Hagar as the vehicle to her safety. It is also argued that a woman’s reasons for staying are more complex than just the statement about her strength of character. In many cases, it is dangerous for a woman to leave her abuser. If the abuser has all the economic and social power, leaving can cause additional problems for the woman.

Hagar left the abusive circumstances; she decided to save her life and her unborn child and did not think about the economic comfort of Abram’s house. It is of no use to stay in an abusive relationship because of material things¹¹, while the person is being damaged emotionally. Some people argue that leaving could mean living in fear and losing child custody, losing financial support, and experiencing harassment at work. Although there is no profile on women who will be battered, there is a well-documented syndrome of what happens once the battering starts. Abused women experience shame, embarrassment and isolation. A woman may not leave battering immediately because she realistically fears that the abuse will become more violent and perhaps even fatal if she attempts to leave. Her friends and family may not support her leaving and she knows the difficulties of single parenting in reduced financial circumstances. There is a mix of good times, love and hope with the manipulation, intimidation and fear and she may not know about or have access to safety and support.

In many areas, because of customary laws, abuse is turned into a private affair and this makes it difficult for the public to get involved without the permission of those who are affected. For instance, in the case of Hagar, one could ask about the role the neighbours played whether they were aware of the situation. The narrator mentions nothing about them because apparently, this was a private matter. In any case, women would not be allowed by customary laws to take such domestic affairs to the public, as that would be to humiliate the entire family.

¹⁰ http://www.fultonsheriff.org/misc/dv_problem.asp (visited 2007-04-02).

¹¹ This is not to suggest that women should stay in abusive relationship because of material/ economic benefits as there is nothing more important than the life of a person. We do not suppose that staying in a life threatening and abusive relationship will save life. People should do more to save their lives from abuse before it is too late.

2.2.1 Effects of abuse¹²

According to Porter (1984:2), “adults who have been sexually abused in childhood have a poor sense of their own worth; they are often depressed; they describe a sense of pollution, contamination and dirtiness. Sexually abused parents often abuse, physically and sexually, their own children”. The narrator of Genesis 16 writes, “Then Sara mistreated her; so she fled” (Gen. 16:6). The narrator does not tell us of the effects of this mistreatment on Hagar but we do reckon that all kinds of abuse have negative effects on the victims. Abuse may have serious effects and in extreme cases, may result in the death of the victims or in disfigurement and permanent disability.

David Finkelhor (1988:36) states that the causes of this kind of abuse are fairly well understood and include the social and physical isolation of parents, poverty, social stress, single-parenthood and emotional immaturity. In addition, he notes that the victims suffer from the long-term effects of physical abuse, which are characterized by low self-esteem, instability in intimate relationships, anxiety, depression, suicide attempts, substance abuse, psychosomatic complaints and poor functioning in school or at the workplace. In the case of Ishmael, when Sara saw him as a potential threat to Isaac’s inheritance and instructed Abram to drive him and his mother out to the wilderness, Ishmael nearly died. His mother lamented, “I cannot watch the boy die” (Gen. 21:16). Obviously, abuse can have serious and detrimental impact on the physical and emotional development of the child by interfering with socialization, education and all aspects of normal child development.

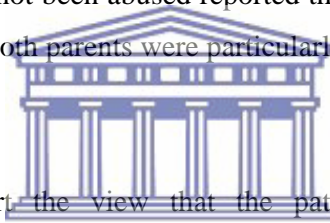
In line with this observation, Walker (1988:33) states that these effects can continue to have an impact in adulthood in terms of disturbed interpersonal relationships, predisposition to emotional disturbance and increased potential for abusing their own children. This, according to Williams, could be the result of brain damage or learning disabilities. It is unfortunate that in the case of Ishmael the narrator did not follow his developmental stages. We are only told that “God was with the boy as he grew up, he lived in the desert and became an archer” (Gen.

¹² Porter (1984:16) argues that children subjected to abuse not only become confused about their sexual orientation but also themselves become sexually abusive and feel that their adult status gives them the right to sexual dominion over younger children. Porter argues further that girls who have been sexually abused may become sexually inhibited and in marriage abhor and try to avoid sexual activity, but more commonly they embark on sexual activities early and with many partners. She claims that, “It is surprising that the child victims of sexual abuse show a great deal of anxiety. Adolescent girls may sexualize all their relationships because they feel this is the only way to obtain love.” They also have difficulty in expressing anger because of the intensity of their angry feelings towards their mother or (and) father for failing to protect them.

21:20). Therefore, we are not able to detect the effects of abuse on his development. We can only assume that he must have lost the privileges of staying with his father. The effects of abuse on boys have not been studied as thoroughly as the effects on girls. Finkelhor (1988:44) refers to Judith Martin (1983) who states that of 76 studies in 1980 only two had focused exclusively on men, compared to 31 that focused on women.

2.2.2. History of abuse

Sharon Herzberger (1988:22) states that for many years, it was assumed that one of the most important factors contributing to the tendency to engage in abusive interactions was whether the parent had been exposed to such interaction as a child, but recent writings have questioned specific aspects of the cyclical hypothesis. Herzberger (1988:23) suggests that a childhood history of abuse contributes to violence toward children. She discovers that 17% of parents who had been abused as children were abusive toward their own children, whereas only 12.5% of parents who had not been abused reported the use of such disciplinary tactics. She further notes that abuse by both parents were particularly likely to relate to abuse of one's own children.



Many feminists would support the view that the patriarchal system dominates and undermines women. In ancient Israel, this system definitely worked against women and children. We shall not discuss the possibility that the patriarchal system sets a pattern of abuse because that has little to do with the purpose of this thesis. However, it may be noted that certain aspects of the patriarchal system can contribute to perpetuating a history of abuse.

2.3. Hagar in the light of emotional, sexual, domestic and child abuse

As the above discussion shows, there are clear similarities between the treatment of Hagar and today's definition of abuse. The story of Hagar can be aligned with the modern interpretation of the word, abuse. Citing Phyllis Trible, Fretheim (1994:490) affirms that Hagar became many things to many people; all sorts of rejected women find their stories in Hagar. She is the faithful maid, exploited, the black woman used by the male and abused by the female of the ruling class, the surrogate mother, the runaway youth, the pregnant young woman alone, and the expelled wife. She is the divorced mother with child, the homeless woman, the indigent relying upon handouts from the power structures, the welfare mother and self-effacing female, whose own identity shrinks in service to others.

The narrator does not indicate how Sarai ill-treated Hagar but he does confirm that; "Sarai ill-

treated her and she ran away from her mistress” (Gen. 16:6). The Hebrew word for “ill-treat” could be associated with physical abuse. According to O'Connor (1997:47), the truth of this word “ill-treat” is that the Hebraic text speaks of “*oppressing*”, “*beating*”, “*flogging*” and “*whipping*”. Based on O'Connor's interpretation and the definition of the abuse stated above, we can presume that Hagar was physically abused. Since Hagar’s abuse happened within the family bounds, it could also constitute domestic abuse.

Sarai gave permission to her husband Abram to engage in sexual intercourse with her maid, Hagar. Presumably, this was done without the consent of Hagar, who had a low status in the society. Hagar had no say in the matter. Peggy Day (1989:12) also stresses that Hagar was given to Abram without anyone paying attention to her opinion on the matter. Others made the decision to use her body and carried it out. Her body belonged to Abram and Sarai and they could do anything they wanted with it.

According to Tribble (1984:24), in despair in the wilderness, Hagar contemplated the imminent death of the child; it was more than she could manage. It was the only time in the entire scene she spoke, “let me not see the death of the child.” These words suggest the suffering and isolation in the wilderness, in exile and her deep emotional distress. This woman must have been going through enormous emotional abuse. To confirm this, the narrator reports that; “she sat there nearby, she began to sob” (21:16). Westermann (1981:242) explains that Hagar's flight into the desert from the “legal” oppression by Sarah exposed her to all the dangers involved. The concern of Sarah was to be built through having a child, as she saw it as the only way she could belong to the family; without this, her life had no meaning. The oppression made Hagar to risk her life and the life of her son for the sake of freedom. In this process, Abram was used to promote Sarai’s ambitions. According to Joseph Blenkinsopp (1997:65), Abram did this because it seemed that only the husband could initiate divorce in ancient Israel. This view is supported by Perdue (1997a:185); that in the Hebrew Bible, the husband had the right to initiate divorce, though there is no specific law of divorce. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 indicates that the husband is to give his wife a written document and then send her from his household. The divorced¹³ woman becomes the dismissed one. We do

¹³ According to Millar Burrows (1962:135), the husband’s rights of divorce is recognized but limited; nothing is said of the wife being able to divorce her husband. It assumes that a man who divorced his wife had found some indecency in her and he gave her a bill of divorce. Divorce was denied to a man who falsely accused his wife of unchastity and a man was compelled to marry a girl he has violated (Dt. 22:19, 29).

not hear of any documentation concerning Hagar's case but the way Abram initiated this process appears similar.

Hagar was among the earliest biblical women to experience use, abuse and rejection. She fled from Sarai's harsh treatment into the desert, where an angel of the Lord intervened and commanded her to return to her mistress and submit to her (16:9). A similar scenario developed after the birth of Isaac, many years later. Sarai, apparently afraid that Hagar and Ishmael would contrive to rob Isaac of his primogeniture, ordered that they be banished. Liss (1993:175) confirms that this unfortunate and sad situation in which a mother and her son were driven to the wilderness without any proper provision is typical of the impact of domestic violence and abuse on women's lives, which affect others such as the children. Ishmael was deeply affected by the abuse meted to his mother. Von Rad (1972:228) shows that "by priestly computation... Ishmael must have been sixteen or seventeen years old at this time".

Moreover, "In chapter 21, Abraham's two children, peacefully portrayed as they play with each other, are disrupted by Sarah's demand and the execution of the demand means misery and distress for Hagar and her child" (Westermann 1981:336). These words remind us that the child also suffers and that elements of child abuse are equally present. When children are exposed to domestic abuse, their lives are also damaged and disrupted; they are taken from their family environments and thereafter are made to face the consequences of abuse, as in Ishmael's case.

Mbuwayesengo (1997:32) states that Hagar was once more back in the wilderness, but now with no water and with her son about to starve to death (Gen. 21:14). The victims of abuse and domestic violence in our societies could easily identify with Hagar's situation. In our own time, similar situations have produced street children. This should be seen as one of the worst kinds of abuse against women and children. Janzen (1993:43) urges that, "Anyone who can sympathize with the Hebrews later flight from Egypt into the wilderness of Sinai is invited to sympathize with Hagar in her flight from this domestic oppression". Von Rad (1972:228) paints the picture of "the mother wandering in the wilderness, the child parched with thirst, the sight of whom is too much for the mother but whom she cannot bear to leave."

Commentators have criticized the behaviour of Abram, the apparent cruelty and Hagar's consequent suffering as deeply serious matters. However, many have not deemed it fit to find fault with God who could be seen as promoting the abusive treatment by Sarai when He commanded Hagar to go back to her mistress and submit. According to Mbuwayesengo (1997:34), the role played by God in the Genesis narrative is disturbing. In the first narrative, God is presented as endorsing patriarchy; God told Hagar to go back to Sarai where she was neither happy nor comfortable. She also remarks that in the second narrative God endorses the banishment of Hagar and her son. Teubal (1990:20) agrees with Mbuwayesengo¹⁴ that Hagar had three enemies, Sarai, Abram and God. Hagar's tragic tale of servitude and surrogacy, flight and exile constitutes abuse. It is true that the details and culture are different from ours, yet the description of human nature is like our own.

This fact makes this story powerful and compelling. It shows that when a human being is found in this kind of situation, the reaction is likely to be similar. In our impatience, when our expectations are not realized on schedule, we tend to force matters and abuse others in the process, as Sarai did with Hagar. No doubt, the story of Hagar is the story of abuse. For some commentators, the narrator presents oppression and abuse as normal in this story - so normal that one could read the story and not even notice it. However, if we consider that Hagar and her son were driven to the wilderness by Abram without any proper arrangements, we shall realize that there are thousands of South African women, who are without shelter, land, water and bread because they are victims of domestic abuse.

The ill-treatment Hagar received from Abram's household indeed is tantamount to abuse. For Westermann (1987:339), "Sarah's reaction to the sight of her own son playing with the son of the maidservant resulted in the harsh demand that Abraham expel the maid and her son". Furthermore, Abram's act of laying the child in the arms of the woman whom he must distressfully dismiss speaks everything that he could not speak as he expelled her. He sends his secondary wife and his child out into the desert of Beersheba¹⁵ (1987:341). In the same way, some women in this country are homeless and resort to prostitution to feed their children because of abusive situations, which are similar to Hagar's situation. When one considers Hagar's situation as she wandered in the desert, a woman alone with a small child, a

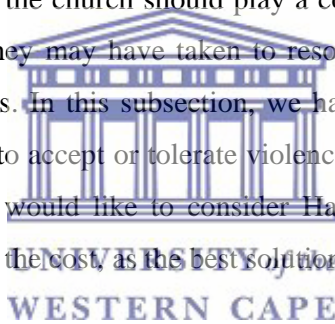
¹⁴ We will deal the views of authors on the narrator's response to Hagar later: under the sub-topic: Does the narrator sympathize with Hagar?

¹⁵ This refers to the rather flat, southern part of the Negev (J Simon quoted by Westermann 1987:341).

pitiless consequence could not be averted; the water runs out and the threat of death by thirst hung over them but first over the child. Now faced with death, Hagar laid down the child and sat a bowshot's distance away to wait for the end. Finally, she raised her voice and cried from emotional abuse. It is evident that many women who are today exposed to family and domestic abuse have similar experiences.

2.4 Summary of Chapter Two

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that in terms of modern definitions of various kinds of abuse, Sarai and Abram abused Hagar the maidservant and Egyptian. We may need to be able to identify the families in which abuse occurs and consider their cases from the perspective of Hagar's story. In this way, can we among learn, other things, why people abuse, what makes them stop and determine whether our broad constitutional and justice policies are making any headway in reducing the prevalence of abuse. Abuse of any kind is a serious crime against humanity; the church should play a counselling role by asking parents about various kinds of action they may have taken to resolve conflicts with their children, including a range of violent acts. In this subsection, we have also shown that women who grow up in violent homes learn to accept or tolerate violence and expect it in their own adult relationships. Nevertheless, we would like to consider Hagar's option of going out of an abusive situation, irrespective of the cost, as the best solution.



Moreover, we suggest that the involvement of the church is vital in combating abuse because the church meets with the victims who are members often on a weekly basis and has strong influence on them. The church should be able to draw together all relevant stakeholders. It is noteworthy that abuse causes unnecessary social welfare expenditure, apart from the costs of related problems such as mental illness, crime, educational failure, employment difficulties and many more, which are mentioned in the discussion above. The government should also collect and publish reliable abuse statistics to enable the public to recognize and understand the problem and be able to evaluate the effectiveness of the policies against abuse. Additionally, men could be organized to canvass against abuse.

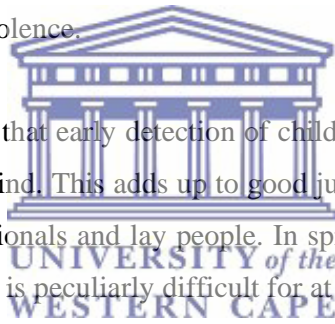
The literature analysis confirms that abuse is widespread and has the potential of becoming aggravated. From the available information, women are more commonly abused and the abuse has negative impact on their lives, as in the case of Hagar who ended up wandering in the wilderness with no one to help. It is also evident that culture has a potential of hiding

abuse as the abuse experienced by Hagar happened under the laws and customs of their day. We need to stress that abuse is a serious matter, which cannot be ignored or left to women alone to handle; the public should present a strong front against abuse. In this regard, professionals and the church have a responsibility to assist in the detection of all kinds of abuse. It is crucial to introduce mechanisms for detecting early signs of abuse.

Furthermore, victims of abuse should be encouraged to vacate the situation. Abuse is a dangerous act, which cannot be left unattended. Therefore, securing a place of safety and providing shelter for children who have been severely attacked by their parents or ill-treated in some other way, would be an important first step. In these cases, the first step will be to rescue the child physically to safety and then ensure that the medical treatment is provided. However, to rescue children from their wicked parents and wives from their wicked husband can also do much damage and this may be the reason why it is sometimes difficult for women to leave the cycle of domestic violence.

It is also important to recognize that early detection of child abuse requires keen observance, level headedness and an open mind. This adds up to good judgment, knowledge and capacity to co-operate with other professionals and lay people. In spite of the public concern that has been aroused, action in this field is peculiarly difficult for at least three reasons. First, it is not at all easy to detect and judge accurately the significance of what goes on in the home as the public might be accused of violating the privacy of a family. Second, often we are reluctant to believe that parents could intentionally injure their own children; and third, formal intervention in relations between parents and children is a most delicate matter, sometimes because of cultural attitudes and value judgments.

Finally, the narrative shows that God heard the cry of the child who was dying of thirst. He was only the son of a maidservant but God gave ear to his cry. The old story demonstrates that there is no doing away with the harshness and cruelty of mankind, whereas the merciful God does not abandon the outcasts but lets them experience God's miraculous deliverance (cf. Westermann 1987:344). The story of Hagar and her child in the desert is as vivid today as it was in its days.



CHAPTER THREE

GENESIS IN THE PENTATEUCH

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the shape of the book of Genesis. Hence, the discussion will entail a brief overview of the authorship of Genesis, the basic division of Genesis (1-11 and 12-50) and the sources and authorship of the Pentateuch, with particular reference to the book of Genesis. We shall conclude with a discussion of the theme and the theology of Genesis.

3.1.1 Authorship of Genesis

It should be noted that not all questions concerning the authorship of Genesis can be addressed in detail in this thesis. The aim of this subsection is to investigate briefly various scholarly views on the authorship of Genesis. For Alexander (2003:61), “The quest to identify the author of the Pentateuch¹⁶ has become one of the most complex and provocative issues in biblical studies; for some, to doubt the longstanding tradition of Mosaic authorship is the greatest heresy”. On the contrary, very few modern authors still claim that Moses wrote the whole of the Pentateuch. Nowhere do these books explicitly or implicitly claim that Moses is their exclusive author. Some of those who still ascribe authorship of Genesis to Moses do so on the understanding that Moses wrote the whole of the Pentateuch, also known as the “five books of Moses” or the Jewish Torah. Others argue that Moses wrote at least the basic text. The majority, however, deny that Moses is in any sense the author of the Pentateuch, although some suggest that he may have made a minor contribution. We can therefore identify two positions on this matter, though there are variants of each: (a) Mosaic authorship (b) Non-Mosaic authorship.

Most scholars who regard Moses as the author of the Pentateuch argue that the education that Moses received in Egypt would have enabled him to read and write (Ex. 24:4; Dt. 31:9). Furthermore, Moses obviously would have been anxious to preserve the records that came down. Another point of argument is that some portions of the Pentateuch are directly

¹⁶ According to Lloyd Bailey (1981:13), the use of the term “Pentateuch” to describe the first five books of the Bible goes back at least to the Church Father Tertullian in the second century CE.

attributed to Moses. For instance, Raymond Dillard (1995:39) claims that, although a connection is never specifically made between Moses and the present Torah, there are a number of references to his writing activities. For instance, God commanded him to record certain events (Ex. 17:14). Dillard explains further that while Moses is not identified as the author of much of the Torah, the text does witness to the fact that he was the recipient of revelation and a witness to redemptive acts. On the other hand, Duane Garrett (1991:52) states that it is not rational to conclude that Moses is the person primarily responsible for the writing of the Pentateuch based on this observation.

Garret (1991:84) is typical of those who want to speak of Mosaic authorship without insisting the Pentateuch as we have it now came directly from the hand of Moses. For him, to speak of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch does not mean that Moses wrote every word of the present text. On the contrary, one may confidently assume that the work has undergone post-Mosaic redaction.

One thing is clear; Moses could not have written Genesis as an eyewitness to the events narrated in the book. Garret (1991:84) rightly notes that Moses was not yet born during the period of the history of Genesis and theological conservatives generally have not tried to explain where he obtained his material. Considering that even the latest portions of the Genesis narrative are believed to have taken place some four hundred years before Moses, this is a significant complication. For instance, in Genesis we read more than once that; “at that time, the Canaanites were dwelling in the land” (cf. Gen. 12:6). Since Moses died before the crossing of the Jordan, the Canaanites were still living in the land in this time. The verses must have come from a time when the Canaanites were no longer living in the land. Again, the eastern bank of Jordan is often called “across the Jordan”, indicating that the author wrote from the perspective of someone living to the west of the river; Moses never did.

Secondly, there are doublets - the best-known example is the two stories of creation (Gen. 1; 2). These two stories contain minor but clear differences. There are also two accounts of the naming of Beersheba (Gen. 21; Gen. 26) and no fewer than three stories of patriarchs in foreign countries trying to pass off their wives as their sisters (Gen. 12; 20; 26). In some cases, a single story seems to be the result of the combination of two separate accounts as in Gen. 37, in which Joseph's life is saved by Reuben or by Judah and he is sold to the Ishmaelite or the Midianites.

Hence, many who consider Moses as the father of the Pentateuch insist that he made use of older records. Salem¹⁷ argues that the actual authors of Genesis were Adam, Noah, the sons of Noah, Shem Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph; that these authors, except Joseph probably wrote in cuneiform on clay tablets and that Moses utilized these records, with the “wisdom of Egyptians” to compile the Pentateuch. As Salem notes, this means that Moses was the redactor or editor of Genesis rather than its author. In the same vein, “the New Testament, in attributing the Pentateuch as a whole to Moses, seems to imply for Genesis a similar relation between substance and final shape as it implies for the rest of the books; that is, that the material is from Moses or whoever was his biographer and editor” (Kidner 1967:16).

Thirdly, when Christian scholars after the Renaissance became acquainted with Biblical Hebrew as a language, they noticed that certain words and grammatical forms seemed typical of later Hebrew and others typical of earlier Hebrew. The book of Genesis (Pentateuch) appears to contain a mixture of both earlier and later elements. This makes it impossible to hold the view that Moses wrote the whole book of Genesis as we have it presently. Those who maintain the essence of the old tradition argue that later scribes or editors updated the original Mosaic work. For instance, some of these scholars believe that Moses *wrote* the Pentateuch, but that what we have is a final edition compiled by Ezra or someone else long after the time of Moses. This view is still defended by some highly conservative scholars.

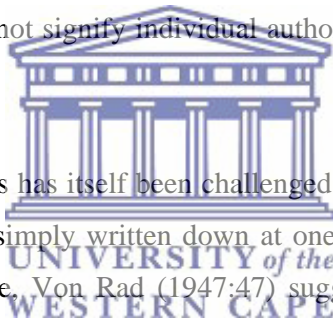
Stuart & Fee (1982:412) argue that family records must have been handed down, either orally or in written form, and that Moses brought these together, translating them where necessary. However, the creation story in Genesis 1 may have been received as a direct revelation from God, since Moses certainly had the experience of immediate contact with God (1982:413).

At any rate, the view that Moses wrote the book of Genesis is no longer popular; most modern authors do not regard Moses as the author, nor do they believe that the book was written by any single person. Jean Astruc (1684-1766), who first attempted to uncover the sources of Pentateuch by using the divine names *Yahweh* and *Elohim*, at first defended Mosaic authorship but later proposed the idea of multiple authorship for the Pentateuch. This

¹⁷ www.britishgenesis.com (visited 2007-03-22). Peter Salem is Old Testament lecturer in the Trinity University in Britain.

idea is affirmed by Robert Lowth¹⁸, who claims that the book of Genesis and the other four books of the Pentateuch were written by a number of authors who assembled material from different traditions.

The claims led to the formulation of the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis (see below), which argues that the Pentateuch is composed of four main documents, namely; the Yahwistic (J), the Elohist (E), the Deuteronomistic (D) and the Priestly (P) sources. Since D is found mainly in Deuteronomy, it is often assumed that Genesis contains mainly material from J, E and P. For instance, Russell (1980:439) argues that the book of Genesis is the result of the conflation of two originally separate documents, the Yahwist and the Elohist, which form a narrative, JE and was itself conflated with a third document, the Priestly source some centuries later. Marks (2005:3) argues that, in addition there are other traditions such as those in chapter 14 which do not seem to belong to any of these sources. Marks further explains that the symbols J, E, and P do not signify individual authors but rather, clusters of tradition material.



The idea of documentary sources has itself been challenged. Many scholars have argued that the various traditions were not simply written down at one time, but grew and were edited over a long period. For instance, Von Rad (1947:47) suggests that Genesis 1 is from the priestly source and contains the essence of priestly knowledge in its most concentrated form. Nevertheless, it was not written down at one time but rather, it is a doctrine that has been carefully but slowly enriched over centuries.

Our concern here is how the proponents of documentary sources view the two narratives about Hagar. The common view is that Genesis 16 belongs to J. Hooke (1962: xxii) shows that in Genesis 16:1-14, we have the J-story of Abraham's taking of Hagar at Sarah's suggestion and Hagar's flight into the desert of Beer-lahai-roi. The same view is held by Von Rad (1972:191) and Westermann (1987:235). In the case of Genesis 21, there are differences of opinion. According to Aalders (1981:32), the most common theory is that verses 1a, 2a, 6b and 7 must be ascribed to J, 6b to E, and 2b-5 to P. However, the name Yahweh appears in 1b, which is unusual for P. This shows how difficult it is to deal with sources.

¹⁸ <file:///book%20of%20Genesis.htm> (visited 2007-04-22).

From the various views noted above, one can conclude that the exact authorship of the book of Genesis remains a mystery. The book is anonymous, as are the other books of the Pentateuch. Although scholars are deeply divided on how the Pentateuch was composed, there is widespread agreement that the Pentateuch, as it now stands, is an edited work and not a piece of literature from one individual. This statement implies that Moses is not the author or, at least, not the only author of the book of Genesis, although portions of the legal material are attributed directly to Moses.

The fact that we cannot identify the author of a narrative does not mean that we can say nothing about the voice that addresses us in the narrative. Narrative theory has made us aware that every narrative has a narrator and that the narrative itself shows us at least something of this narrator. Since there is agreement that Genesis was written before the time of Moses and Moses himself lived long after the time of Abram, we must conclude that the narrator is speaking about events in the distant past. This implies that the narrator may be describing customs that were no longer in force at the time of writing (cf. Ruth 4:7).

3.2 The Sources of the Pentateuch

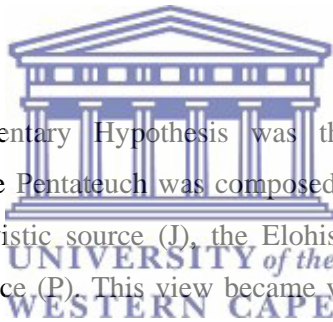
According to Dillard (1995:38), the issue of Genesis is inescapably intertwined with the composition and origin of the entire Pentateuch. Von Rad also confirms that the book of Genesis is not an independent book that can be interpreted on its own (1972:13). Therefore, we shall briefly discuss some of the relevant theories on the source of Pentateuch as the background to the discussion on Genesis. To do this, we shall rely on the contributions of Campbell & O'Brien (1993), Noth (1981) and the unpublished notes of Douglas Lawrie (History of the Critical Study of the Pentateuch).

According to Campbell & O'Brien (1993:1), an early proponent of the Documentary Hypothesis was Richard Simon (1638-1712), who argued that the Pentateuch was compiled from a number of documents. Some of these documents derived from Moses, but it was Ezra, who produced the Pentateuch in its final form in the post-exilic period. In other words, Simon's proposal is that the duplication and diversity in the text were due to the different documents and traditions, which stemmed from different periods of Israel's history.

Subsequently, Astruc (1684-1766)¹⁹ recognized two sources in the first chapters of Genesis, one that used Elohim (God) and the other, YHWH (Lord). Astruc argued, against the Simon's position that Moses had compiled the Pentateuch from these two sources and ten additional fragments. For him, the Pentateuch could have originated with Moses if one envisaged him functioning partly as the compiler. Two aspects of Astruc's analysis were significant for subsequent Pentateuchal criticism. First is his appeal to variation in the divine names as a sign of different sources; and the other is his employment of a combination of approaches, which were later developed into the source and fragment hypotheses.

These two ideas were foremost in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A number of authors defended the early source hypothesis or the Documentary Hypothesis, among who are Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827)²⁰ and Karl-David Ilgen (1763-1834)²¹. Eichhorn distinguished two sources, the Elohist and the Yahwist, whereas Ilgen identified the Elohist sources and the Yahwist.

A later form of the Documentary Hypothesis was the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis (mentioned above), in which the Pentateuch was composed of four main documents, which are, in order of age, the Yahwistic source (J), the Elohist source (E), Deuteronomistic source (D) and the Priestly source (P). This view became very popular and versions of this



¹⁹ <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/moses.ht> (visited 2007-11-02) Jean Astruc (Sauves, Auvergne, March 19, 1684 - Paris, May 5, 1766) was a famous Professor of Medicine at Montpellier and Paris, who wrote the first great treatise on syphilis and venereal diseases, and also, with a small anonymously published book, played a fundamental part in the origins of critical textual analysis of works of scripture. Astruc was the first to conclusively demonstrate—using the techniques of textual analysis that were commonplace in studying the secular classics— that Genesis was composed based on several sources or manuscript traditions, an approach that was still cautiously being called the *Documentary Hypothesis* in the late 19th century.

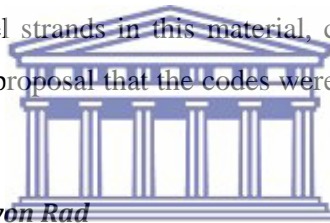
²⁰ <http://www.nndb.com/people/477/000097186/> (visited 2007-11-02) Johann Gottfried Eichhorn 1752-1827 German theologian, born at Dörrenzimmern, in the principality of Hohenlohe-Oehringen, on the 16th of October 1752. He was educated at the state school in Weikersheim, where his father was superintendent, at the gymnasium at Heilbronn and at the university of Göttingen (1770-74), studying under J. P. Michaelis. In 1774 he received the rectorship of the gymnasium at Ohrdruf, in the duchy of Gotha, and in the following year was made professor of Oriental languages at Jena. On the death of Michaelis in 1788 he was elected professor ordinarius at Göttingen, where he lectured not only on Oriental languages and on the exegesis of the Old and New Testaments, but also on political history.

²¹ <http://lists.ibiblio.org/pipermail/b-hebrew/2000-January/006244.html> (visited 2007-11-02). Ilgen's a German Scholar views make sense, especially to those who a priori reject real prophecy, but then I don't suppose he completed the circle to argue that Assyria is not mentioned in the Pentateuch. But did Alexander come by ship from Kittim/Cyprus? I thought he came overland. But the Sea Peoples did arrive by sea from that general direction and at a time not so distant from that of Balaam soon after the Exodus. Maybe Balaam was just seeing the trends of current events: these Sea Peoples who are already arriving are going to prove disastrous for Assyria and "Eber".

JEDP theory still dominate higher criticism today, although few modern authors agree with it completely.

As for the Fragment Hypothesis, Campbell & O'Brien (1993:6) argue that the diversity of the material and the difficulty of tracing the continuity of the documents led to the notion of originally independent fragments and traditions. The English scholar Alexander Geddes (1737-1802) and the German scholars, Johann Severin Vater (1771-1826) and Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780-1849)²² were supporters of the Fragment Hypothesis. De Wette played a prominent role in the development of Pentateuchal criticism because of his widely accepted proposal that Deuteronomy was the law book for the reform of Josiah (2 Kings 22-23).

The point of departure for the Fragment Hypothesis was the legal codes of the Pentateuch. The difficulty of finding parallel strands in this material, coupled with its apparent lack of internal organization, led to the proposal that the codes were compiled from small collections or fragments of laws.



3.2.1 Martin Noth and Gerhard von Rad

To conclude this section, it is important to mention the views of Martin Noth²³ who pioneered a new way of understanding the composition and development of the Pentateuch referred to as tradition history. Instead of viewing the Pentateuch as composed of four written sources, Noth argued that blocks of material developed around the early Israelites patriarchs (1981: xvii).

According to Whybray (1987:40), Gerhard von Rad (1938) and Martin Noth (1948) were the true successors of Gunkel. While continuing to adhere to the Documentary Hypothesis, these two scholars unwittingly opened the way to see the importance of the role of oral tradition. He states that:

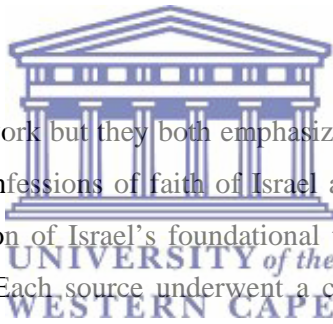
Von Rad postulated on the basis of Deut. 26.5-10 and other texts, the existence of a 'little creed' in which the Israelite peasant recited the events of his ancestral history at the annual offering of the first fruits of his labours to God; the creed brought together a series of elements which formed the nucleus of later Pentateuch (Whybray 1940:41).

²² See Hayes & Prussner (1985) who wrote about Leberecht de Wette (see bibliography).

²³ For detailed information on Martin Noth's innovation, see Anthony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien (1993: 7-9).

In 1948, a major reconstruction of the Pentateuch was developed by Noth, who built on Von Rad's sketch in an attempt to show precisely how these distinct themes or items of tradition, each of which had originally been preserved by one of the groups, which combined to form the people of Israel, were joined in a series of steps.

Noth revised and supplemented the Documentary Hypothesis with a study of tradition-history. According to Noth, the history of the Pentateuch starts with the oral traditions that lie behind small textual units. He traced how these units were combined into more comprehensive tradition blocks. Noth identified a small number of core Israelite beliefs about God's direction of Israelite history. The earliest beliefs concern guidance out of Egypt and guidance into the Promised Land, the themes of the promises to the ancestors, guidance through wilderness and the divine revelation at Sinai. All these, according to Noth, became the foundational narrative of Israel's past. From this narrative, the Yahwist, Elohist and Priestly written sources derived.



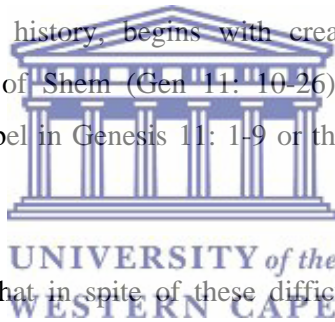
Noth elaborated on von Rad's work but they both emphasized that the sources of Pentateuch were theological statements, confessions of faith of Israel at particular stages in its history. Noth insisted that the elaboration of Israel's foundational traditions did not cease with the production of written sources. Each source underwent a certain amount of reworking and expansion as the tradition from which it emerged continued to develop. Within this process, which may be likened to one of supplementation, the particular source exercised a controlling influence and its essential shape was retained. This indicates that a source can be recovered from the present text. For Noth, a source is a distillation of the tradition at a particular stage of its development; it then accompanies and guides the further development of that tradition.

Campbell & O'Brien (1993:8) claim that Noth's attempt was not a completely new independent study of sources; what he did was to bring to the insight of the study of sources, the process of compilation. Noth concluded that the compilers at each stage had used one source as a base, retaining it practically in its entirety, while enriching it from other sources. In his view, the Priestly source (P) was used as the base for the compilation of the Pentateuch and was enriched from the already combined Yahwist and Elohist sources. He argues that, "Moreover, at numerous points it can be shown that the J source was selected as the literary framework for combining the sources and that the elements of Elohist source were secondarily inserted into this framework" (1981:25).

The work of Martin Noth dealt with the history of the text of the Pentateuch; he did not devote much attention to the final form. However, he did show that the various parts were not simply thrown together. They were carefully edited to make specific points. One can therefore inquire about what the Pentateuchal narrative as we currently have it intends to tell us. In this study, our concern is with the final form of the text without denying that it grew over a long period. The Hagar narratives may have a number of different authors but as narratives, they have one narrator.

3.3 Basic divisions of Genesis

According to Turner (2003:350), it is generally agreed that Genesis is composed of two distinct blocks of unequal size, though opinions differ as to where exactly the dividing line should be drawn. The majority position of Westermann (1984) and Wenham (1979) is that the first section, the primeval history, begins with creation in (Genesis 1:1-2:4a) and concludes with the genealogy of Shem (Gen 11: 10-26). Others have suggested that it terminates with the story of Babel in Genesis 11: 1-9 or the genealogy of Terah in Genesis 11: 27-32.

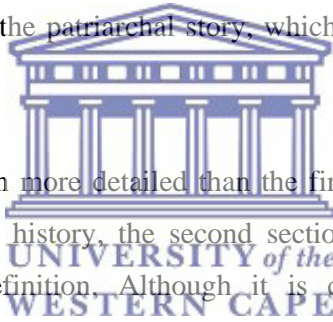


Hargreaves (1998:1) suggests that in spite of these difficulties, the helpful way to begin working on Genesis is to notice that it has two distinct parts, Genesis 1-11 and Genesis 12-50. Dillard notes that the flood narrative is the longest episode in the first section of Genesis and the Tower of Babel story is the last episode. Genesis 11:27-32 provides the link between the primeval history and the patriarchal narrative in that it narrates Abram's move from Ur to Haran with his father (1995:53). Earlier, he claims that the second section of Genesis is characterized by the slowing down of the plot and the focus on one man, Abram and his family for four generations (1995:48).

Dillard further explains that these chapters, (12:1-50:26) are often called the patriarchal narratives and they relate the movement of the people of the promise from Abram's call in Genesis 12:1 to the death of Joseph at the end of the book (1995:48). According to Dillard (1995:49), another subdivision can be made within the second section of Genesis between the patriarchal narratives and the Joseph story. He notes that Joseph story (Gen. 37; 39-50) is a connected plot, which recounts how Abram's family came to Egypt initially. This idea is also

found in Westermann (1981:123), which claims that the three parts of Genesis each had its own independent tradition history before being joined into continuous story (1981:123).

The differences between the two main sections can be clearly seen. Walton & Matthews (1997:12) point out that the background material most helpful for understanding the first section is the mythological literature of the Ancient Near East (both Mesopotamian and Egyptian). For the second section of Genesis, the background information for understanding these narratives comes from a different set of materials. In Genesis 1-11 we are reading about all humanity (the name Adam stands for all humans), but in Genesis 12-50 the writers mainly tell us about Abram and his Israelite descendants, the special 'covenant' or agreement which God had with the Israelites, His purpose for them and how He saved and provided for them (cf. Hargreaves 1998:2; Turner 2003:350). Similarly, Westermann (1985:23) differentiates between the first eleven chapters as a primeval story, which speaks about the basic elements of the world and humanity and the patriarchal story, which speaks of the basic elements of human community.

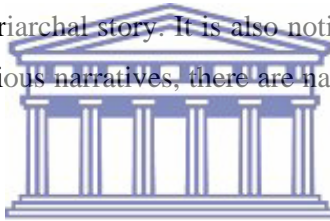


The second section is also much more detailed than the first. Turner (2003:350) points out that, compared to the primeval history, the second section of Genesis 12-50 has greater geographical and historical definition. Although it is concerned mainly with Israel's ancestors, the storyline traverses the Ancient Near East. Hamilton (1989:18) notes that the second part deals in detail with individual figures than the first. Only two chapters are devoted to the subject of creation and one to the entrance of sin into the world, but thirteen chapters are given to Abraham, ten chapters to Jacob and twelve chapters to Joseph.

Although the main divisions are clear enough, many questions about the composition remain. Westermann argues that chapters 12-25 are not a continuous narrative, but have been put together from a variety of parts, each of which may have had its own individual life before the synthesis. Individual narratives are obviously distinguishable in Genesis. Westermann further shows that the genealogies and itineraries in this section of Genesis belong to the enumerative (non-narrative) texts; the genealogies are in sharper relief than the itineraries and are concerned with the continuation of generations (1981:125). Garrett makes a similar point that, "as a starting point, we should observe that much of the material of Genesis is divided into discrete stories that are analogous to the pericope of the synoptics" (1991:100).

Nevertheless, the individual narratives cannot be read in isolation. They often refer to one another or presuppose previous events. Von Rad has argued that although the biblical patriarchal history is made up of many original independent individual narratives, it is a deliberate composition (1972:65). At least in the final edition, the whole can be read as a narrative.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that most authors agree that Genesis is divided into two sections, but not necessarily, on where exactly the dividing line should be drawn. In addition, the idea that a further division can be made within the second section of Genesis between the patriarchal narratives and the story of Joseph is widely accepted. It can be noticed also that Genesis, especially the story of Abram, even though it reflects names, customs, and institutions of the exilic period of Israel's history and deals with the specific origins of Israel; it also deals with the basic elements of human community. These become the object of narrative in the patriarchal story. It is also noticeable that, although the book of Genesis is put together from various narratives, there are narrative lines and narrative themes in the patriarchal history.



3.3.1 Genesis 1-11

According to Allen Ross (1988:70), the structure of the book of Genesis is marked by an initial section and then ten further sections with headings. These headings are often translated as “generations”, “histories”, or simply “descendants”. However, scholars have long recognized that the first eleven chapters of Genesis form an integrated unit. This is confirmed by Westermann in his argument that Genesis “falls into two parts, chapter 1-11; the ‘Primeval History’ which speaks of the beginning of the world and humankind; and 12 -50 the ‘Patriarchal History’ which is about the beginning of the human community and human history” (1987: xi).

We may describe the origin stories of Genesis 1-11 as the primeval story, referring to the earliest ages of cultural development; the account of the earliest events from the creation of the world to the spread of the humanity over the face of the earth. Hargreaves (1998:2) argues that in Genesis 1 we read about humanity and in Genesis 12-50 the writers mainly tell us about Abraham and his Israelite descendants. He maintains that we need both parts of Genesis in order for the whole book to make sense, because God is more than a Creator. Similarly, Joyce Baldwin states that the first eleven chapters of Genesis, the ‘primeval

history', describe the outstanding episodes that account for our human condition and are therefore part of the background of everyman (1982:22). As Turner (2003:350) also shows, the first section of the book of Genesis deals with issues that concern the world and humanity in general, transcending national particularism and inhabiting a world beyond the experience of a reader. According to Turner (2003:353), the main issues that dominate the plot of the primeval history are summarized in Genesis 1:28, with the divine blessings or commands concerning human multiplication, subjugation of the earth and dominion over the animals.

Brueggemann (1982:22) argues that Genesis 1:1- 2:4 is shaped as a poetic narrative that was probably formed for liturgical usage and was addressed to a community of exiles. Nevertheless, it is true that it now stands as an introduction to the book in its present shape. Westermann (1984:6) explains that Genesis 1 has run its course with the creation of humans. It comes to an end, Genesis 2-3 takes up the story, and then a succession of generations begins with Genesis 4 and progresses from the first created pair to Abraham.

After the blessing of humanity in Genesis 1:26, there follows a history of human sin and divine punishment. Westermann (1980:45) argues that Genesis 2-3 is the perfect model of the crime/punishment narrative because the events leading from the one to the other determine the structure of the narrative. This view is also shared by Baldwin (1987:29), which summarizes the events of the first eleven chapters as the banishment from the garden of God (3:23-24), destruction by the flood (6-9) and division by diverse languages (11:1-9). After these punishments, God makes a fresh start with the call of Abram.

3.3.2 Genesis 12-50 (Abram and the promise)

For Hargreaves (1998:81), "When we reach Genesis 12 we find that stories are of a different kind. They tell us about people who, as far as we tell, were individual persons, living at various times and in countries that we can see on a map. Abraham is the first of these people". Hargreaves believes that these latter chapters of Genesis tell us more about what actually took place than we can discover from Genesis 1-11.

On a different note, Walton (1997:14) observes that chapters 12-15 concern the lives of the patriarchs and their families as they move from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt in the process of the formation of covenant. This part of Genesis is made up of patriarchal stories, which have been prefaced to the history of the people of Israel (cf. Westermann 1987:28).

Again, “the significant part played by the patriarchs in redemptive history is made most prominent in Genesis by the constant emphasis on divine promise; everything starts with Abram, Isaac and Jacob, but nothing ends with them” (Hamilton 1982:91). In the second sections of Genesis, God’s blessing to all humanity is no longer the focus. Instead, the focus becomes God’s promise to the patriarchs.

According to Dillard (1995:53), “Abraham is the key in these patriarchal stories; he was promised by God that he would have numerous descendants who would form a mighty nation, thus implying that he was to receive a gift of land from the Lord, he would be blessed and also serve as the channel of God’s blessing to others”. Many Christian would share this view referring to this second section of Genesis as the “the making of nations” through two divine gifts by God to Abram - he will become a great nation and he will be a channel of blessings.

According to Westermann (1987:28), the section of Genesis, which is dominated by Abram begins with the genealogy of Abram’s ancestors and ends with the sons of Jacob. Although Abram dominates this second section of Genesis and is the channel of blessings to others, Dillard (1995:53) notes instances where he disappointed God. The first one is when he does not trust God to care for him and forces Sarah to lie about her relationship with him in order to save his life. The second is when Abram betrays his growing lack of confidence in God’s ability to fulfil His promise of offspring by using means common in the Ancient Near East for having a family in spite of barrenness (Dillard 1995:54). In this sense, the “new beginning” has not put an end to human sinfulness.

On the other hand, in many instances he obeyed God without objections. Von Rad (1972:159) states that:

The divine address begins with a command to abandon radically all natural roots, the most general tie, which with the ‘land’ is named first, then follow, narrowing step by step the bonds of clan. Abraham is simply to leave everything behind and entrust himself to God’s guidance.

Von Rad further argues that, “Abraham obeys blindly and without objection” (1972:161). He left home and broke his ancestral bonds to follow the call of God. In his view, the patriarchal

history as a continuous “surcharged narrative” is the product of long work of collection, but even more of a superior art in theological composition. God’s promise to Abram extends through the patriarchal stories and points to the future.

Hamilton categorizes the life of Abram according to the following events: Abram travels to Egypt with Sarah because of famine 12:10-20; Abram and Lot must parcel the land between themselves, 13:1-18; Abram rescues Lot from captors and confronts Melchizedek 14:18-20; God makes the covenant with Abram 15; Ishmael is born 16 (1989:90). Hamilton shows that, “Through all the experiences Abraham emerges as an individual of great obedience and trust. His pilgrimage begins (chapter 12, ‘go’) and climaxes (chapter 22, ‘offer Isaac’) at the point of being tested by God” (1989:96). However, in Von Rad’s opinion, the content of the second section of Genesis deals more with God than with men. Men are not important in themselves but only as objects of divine plan and action. In his view, such narratives are meant to encourage imitation and discipleship (1972:36).

Likewise, Westermann (1981: 125) affirms that this second section of Genesis is about narratives and promises to Abraham; narratives must be distinguished from the promises. He notes that the individual narratives in the second section of Genesis can belong to different contexts. Sometimes, as in 15:2-4, it is only one motif, which belongs to the main line. Westermann concludes that this part of Genesis (12-25) is about the promise of the son, which is the essential part of the sequence of the motif, which leads from Sarah’s barrenness to the fulfilment in birth and marriage. He maintains that it occurs only in the Abraham cycle, which is the crucial to the whole story (15: 2-4; 17: 15-19; 18:1-16a) and notes that the promise of the son is the starting point and the centre of the promise motif in the patriarchal stories (1981:126).

3.3 The theme and theology of Genesis

Those who believe that Genesis has a theme generally say that it is clearer in the patriarchal narrative (second part of Genesis). In the following sub-sections, we shall examine the theme of Genesis and the theology of Genesis before drawing a conclusion.

3.3.1 The promise

Fewell & Gunn (1993:40) argue that the theme of Genesis is the promise of land and

offspring. God offers a promise of reward and protection to motivate Abram, “I will make of you a great nation and I will bless those who bless you; and make your name great” (Gen. 12:2). Moreover, Abram desperately wants this promise to confirm his belief. Similarly, Dillard (1995:53) states that God told him (Abram) that he would be blessed and he would serve as a channel of God’s blessings to others. Based on these promises, Abram left Haran and travelled to Palestine. Dillard notes that the stories that follow have the consistent theme of the fulfilment of these promises and the patriarchal reaction to them. Abram’s life in particular focuses on his wavering faith toward God’s ability to fulfil his promises. In the same way, MacArthur (2005:5) asserts that in Genesis the primary focus is on God’s promise to Abram. God promised land, descendants and blessing; this three-fold promise became, in turn, the basis of the covenant with Abram (Gen. 15:1-20). For MacArthur, the rest of the book of Genesis concerns the fulfilment of these promises.

According to Westermann (1981:126), the promise of the son is the starting point and centre of the promise motif in the patriarchal stories; it links the patriarchal stories with the story of the people. Additionally, the theme of promise in Genesis is directed towards the people and is pointedly shaped into narratives. He notes that: “the promise directed to the people could be appended to the promise of a son which belongs to the old narrative; the emphasis in the book of Genesis is on the promise” (1981:127). In a significant way, the promise of blessings is made to Abram, but goes beyond Abram to those with whom he comes in contact; it affects the whole of mankind.

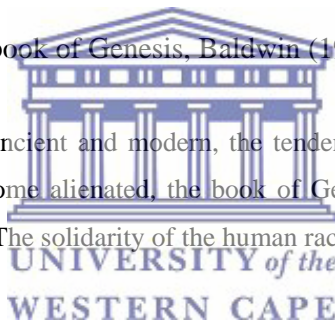
Von Rad (1972:197) shares the same view that chapter 17:15-17 contains the key to the divine promise. It consists succinctly in the prophecy of the birth of a son, specifically, from Sarai. The promise is the key issue and the theme of the book of Genesis. Likewise, Hargreaves (1998:86) affirms that God’s promise is the theme of the book Genesis. Because of the promise, Abram leaves Haran and travels south until he reaches the hilly district of Shechem. There Abram receives the promise from God that God will lead him and his descendants, so that they will have that land as their own. Later, God’s angels come to Abram and Sarai to tell them they will have a son (Gen. 18:1-15). Hargreaves makes another important point. God indeed makes promises and keeps them, but he makes these promises because people fail so badly that God Himself must rescue them. God will do this by means of a chosen people; Sarai will have a son from whom God will raise up a chosen people.

However, for Brueggemann (1982:110), the central text of the promise is 18:1-15, in which the promise of a son is shown to be scandalous and impossible, for it is made to a barren and hopeless couple. Brueggemann argues that the promise in the book of Genesis consists of three important elements; that a land will be given, the belief that an heir will be born and the belief that God can provide beyond testing. The trust (or lack of trust) of Abram in this promise is the driving force of the Abram narrative in the book of Genesis. According to Brueggemann (1982:116), the history of the promise does not emerge in a vacuum; rather the new history emerging from God's call in 12:1-3 "is wrought by the power of God from the stuff of 11:30-32". Brueggemann concludes that the promise in the book of Genesis ends with what seems to be a commissioning, as the well-being of Israel carried the potential for the well-being of other nations. Israel is never permitted to live in a vacuum; it must always live with, for, and among the others.

3.3.2 The theology of Genesis

Concerning the theology of the book of Genesis, Baldwin (1996:10) remarks that:

Whereas in society, both ancient and modern, the tendency is for communities to fragment and for individuals to become alienated, the book of Genesis shows that people need each other and belong together. The solidarity of the human race is a biblical concept.



Hargreaves (1998:1) confirms that God created everyone to care for His creation and for one another - all belong together. For Westermann (1981:23), the primeval story speaks about the basic elements of the world and humanity, the patriarchal story of the basic elements of human community. In Genesis, humans are created for community.

Baldwin argues that the way of looking at humanity as community does not detract in any way from the value of the individual. Indeed, it is a remarkable feature of the book of Genesis that ordinary people such as the patriarchs, with all their failings and their faith, are singled out to be the recipients of God's special care. In her opinion, another important assumption made in the book of Genesis is concerned with the whole question of right and wrong. Whereas popular thought associates morality with law keeping, Genesis depicts the first human pair enjoying conversation with God. They are meant to find happiness in fulfilling the role planned for them by their creator. The essence of wrongdoing was rebellion against this living, personal God, who had made everything, including humanity, very well. For Baldwin, this means that, although the law was to play a major part at a later stage after the

exodus from Egypt, even the law was an expression of the mind of Israel's loving and powerful deliverer (1986:13).

Hargreaves (1998:5) agrees with Baldwin on the issue of God's love; God loves his creation and His great human family and He works actively in it and in us for our good. Further, Hargreaves claims that the message of Genesis is that we continually behave as if we have no other authority except ourselves but in truth, our welfare and happiness depend on our accepting God's supreme authority. Baldwin surmises that, "God communicates with ordinary men and women, and they make their response to him. Fellowship between God and humans he created is part of God's original intention in the book of Genesis" (1996:19).

3.3.3 Summary of chapter

The study of the place of Genesis in the Pentateuch is an attempt to explore and understand the composition, sources and themes of the patriarchal narrative in Genesis. Since, the book of Genesis is not an independent book, we considered the setting of the patriarchal narratives within the Pentateuch but did not delve into the issues of source criticism or tradition history. This discussion has made it clear to me that there is need for scholars to reach a consensus on issues such as authorship (which appears to be a conundrum), the different sources and fragments, and the process of combination and editing.

However, there appears to be a greater consensus on the theme and theology of Genesis as most scholars agree that the theme of Genesis is the promise, which was made to Abram and that the togetherness of the human community is an important aspect of the theology of Genesis. In the patriarchal narratives, the emphasis is on the promise made to the patriarchs; in the primeval history, the emphasis is on the basic unity of humanity and the relationship between humanity and God. Nevertheless, elements of both themes occur in both parts of Genesis, so that the focus on Israel's origins in the second part does not completely exclude the rest of humanity.

CHAPTER FOUR

NARRATIVE THEORY AND ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to ask whether the narrator's point of view can be determined by

analysing the stories of Hagar against the backdrop of the larger Genesis narrative. The investigation is not an attempt to find new exegetical insights into the story of Hagar, but rather to determine whether Hagar was abused and how, from the viewpoint of the narrator of Genesis 16. First, we shall examine a selection of scholarly opinions on narrative theory and consider the role of the narrator and the narrator's point of view. Since the story of Hagar took place within the family of Israel, the shape of Israel's family and the condition of slaves and female slaves in Israel will be discussed. We shall then consider the story of Hagar from the narrator's point of view. The hypothesis that Hagar was humiliated, and physically abused will be tested on our observations of the narrator's point of view. Since scholars have different views on whether the narrator of Genesis writes against or in favour of Hagar, we shall evaluate and classify the contributions of various authors and commentators in on the role of the narrator of Genesis 16:21:1-8.

4.2 Narrative theory and analysis of narratives

4.2.1 Narrative theory

According to Phelan & Adena (1989: x), theorists such as Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller have argued that texts always contain their own deconstruction. Furthermore, they states that others such as James Kincaid have claimed that texts are fundamentally incoherent and therefore frustrate readers' inherent drive to find coherence, while scholars such as Stanley Fish have maintained that texts are actually created by the interpretive strategies we bring to them. Without doubt, it is difficult to find definitions of literary forms that are fully adequate. The same text can function in different ways in different contexts and may have features of different genres. Nevertheless, a working definition on which there is some consensus is useful. Suzanne Keen (2003:7) refers to Ferdinand de Saussure who called for objective methods for the analysis of literary forms and suggested that an agreement on the definitions of key terms in narratives would permit communication and collaboration across disciplines.

According to Brian Richardson²⁴, there are three basic approaches to the definition of narrative, among others; these approaches are designated as temporal, casual, and minimal. The first posits the representation of events in a time sequence as the defining feature of narrative. The second insists that some casual connection (even though oblique) between the events is essential. The third implies a way of reading a text rather than a feature or essence found in the text. Although different theorists work with different assumption as to what is or

²⁴ <http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~wlabov/sfs.html> visited 2006/08/25

is not narrative, many authors agree that the highest degree of narrativity is defined by the presence of human agents involved in deliberate and unintentional action, articulated in a well-defined temporal and casual connection.

Modern narrative theory provides an extremely detailed vocabulary and description of the component parts and various functions of narratives. Suzanne Keen (2003:2) cites Gerald Prince's *Dictionary of Narratology* in which a narrative is defined as the recounting of one or more real or fictitious events communicated by one, two or several narrators to one, two or several narratees. Keen notes that for most people, narratives are defined by examples such as novels, short stories, films, histories and private conversations that tell stories, which are true or made-up. Similarly, Jose Landa's²⁵ defines narratives as semiotic representation of a series of events connected in a temporal and casual way; films, plays, comic strips, novels, newsreels, chronicles and treatises of geological history are all narratives in the widest sense. Moreover, narratives can be constructed using a wide variety of semiotic media, which include written or spoken images, gestures and acting.

However, some theorists propose a definition that would comprise a bare minimum: a narrative tells a story; so it has a teller called a narrator; it relates events in time; it features characters or agents, though not necessary in human form. Keen (2003:7) concludes that a narrative should be seen as a semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way. She further notes that Plato and Aristotle already knew of some of the key concepts concerning narratives, which includes mimesis (imitation), diegesis (telling), plot structures, unity, causation and the proper place of the feigning fiction-maker in the world.

In addition, Hawk (2003:539) asserts that narratives present a view of "what life is like", infused with the perspectives, values, aspirations and self-identity of those who construct them. However, one should first recognize that narratives are imaginative, written works of art that convey particular notions about the nature of reality. With regard to Hawk's issue of "life" in narrative, Gunn & Fewell affirm that, "The power of narrative lies in its ability to imitate life, to evoke a world that is like ours, to reproduce life-like events and situations, to recreate people that we understand and to whom we relate" (1993:47). According to Landa²⁶,

²⁵ Landa is a lecturer at the University of Zaragoza: for more information about the author go to: www.AngelGarciaLanda.com (2005 edition on line (Visited on 2006/08/25).

²⁶ For more information, go to:

http://www.unizar.es/departamentos/filologia_inglesa/garciala/publicaciones/narrativetheory/0.Introduction.htm#0.Introduction.to. Edition on line 2005. (Visited on 2006/08/25).

a narrative is not a series of events but the representation of series of events. In other words, the narrative is not that which it seems to be; it is only a sign. What we get in a narrative text are not events as such, but representations of events.

As noted above, the narrative is a semiotic representation of events; we shall therefore use one of level of analysis to examine the events represented. Theorists have different opinions in defining the levels of narrative analysis. We shall not dwell on these levels, but it is worth mentioning that Bal (1987:46) recognizes three basic levels of analysis of narratives. The first, *fabula*, is a bare scheme of the narrative, which does not into account any specific traits, which individualize actors or actions into characters and happenings; it is arranged into a specific cognitive structure of information. *Fabula* is presented in a certain manner and has been given a shape; a specific point of view and temporal schemes have been introduced, and we deal with individualized characters. Bal (1987: 67) suggests that in the description of *fabula* or action, we should also neglect any temporal or perspectival distortions; there are no variations or flashbacks in the point of view at this level of analysis. According to Bal, it is obvious that her conception of the *fabula* is actually an action-scheme; it is an abstraction, not the concrete, fully covered action that we construct when reading or watching a narrative.

The story is the second level, which is the precise way in which that action is conveyed. Bal (1987:50) claims that a story is a *fabula* as it is presented in a text, but the text is not a story. The story then can be regarded as a *fabula*, which has undergone a further structuration and can be defined as the result of a series of modifications to which the *fabula* is subjected. These modifications can be relative to time or to informational selection and distribution. She differentiates the two by indicating that a story is still an abstraction we effect on the text; and a text is a piece of language while a story is a cognitive structure of happenings. The same story can give rise to a number of texts; the story remains the same and the text became a different one. The same story could be told in different texts; therefore, the text is the third level.

4.2.2 Main features of narratives

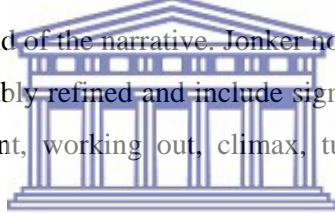
According to Jonathan Culler (2000:109), the analysis of narratives is an important branch of semiotics. Analysis of narratives depends on the distinction between story and discourse (in general) and this distinction always involves a relation of dependency; the type of discourse called narrative is seen as a representation of events. Abbott (2002:12) defines narrative as the representation of an event or series of events, arguing that the word “event” is the key word here, though he also acknowledges that other authors prefer the word “action”. He adds

that without an event or an action, you may have a “description”, an “exposition”, an “argument”, a “lyric”, some combination of these or something else altogether, but you will not have a narrative.

When analysing narratives, time, plot and character cannot be left out, because they are the important component for the understanding of the narrative and serve as important components in the formation of the narrative. All these components (plot, time and character) should be considered when dealing with narratives and they shall be mentioned here to understand their role in a narrative.

4.2.2.1 Plot

According to Jonker (2005:96), for a text to be a narrative, it must have a story line or a plot; without this, it would not be considered a narrative. He cites Aristotle²⁷ who defines narrative as the ordered succession of events. In narratives, by definition, one can identify certain moments that together form an ordered unit. Aristotle already distinguished between the beginning, the middle and the end of the narrative. Jonker notes that in modern theories, these distinctions have been considerably refined and include significant moments of the plot such as introduction, inciting moment, working out, climax, turning point, descending action, denouement and conclusion:



The analysis of the plot helps the interpreter in two ways, first to enable the interpreter of narrative to get a grip of the line of tension in the narrative. Secondly, it provides a way of identifying the changes the narrative wishes to bring about, whether these are changes in knowledge, changes in values or changes in situation (Jonker 2005:96). Moreover;

If the characters are the soul of the narrative, the plot is the body; it consists of an organized and orderly system of events, arranged in temporal sequence. The plot serves to organize events in such a way as to arouse the reader's interest and emotional involvement, while at the same time imbuing the events with meaning (Bar-Efrat 1989:93).

For Bar-Efrat, the plot in its entirety has a clear beginning and an end. Incidents which are deemed appropriate as starting and finishing points are chosen from the unlimited reservoir of events. Examples include birth and death or the imposing of a task and the reward for its

²⁷ Aristotle is concerned mostly with the structure, the organization of the literary text, not so much with the reactions of audience to the text or with the creative inspiration of the author. According to him (Aristotle), a narrative (every tragedy) is a compound formed of certain elements; these elements determine its quality and they are character, diction, thought, spectacle and plot. A tragedy is not all plots; we might as well say that it is all spectacles or all character; therefore, Aristotle argues that considering the plot of tragedy is considering only one possible aspect of the tragedy (Poetics 56, XV, 2).

fulfilment. According to Aristotle, the plot is a part of the tragedy but he does not claim that action is part of the plot. He defines the plot as the structure of incidents and as the main part of the tragedy. The incident and the plot are the end (the purpose) of a tragedy and the end, for him, is the chief thing of all. Aristotle does not disregard the role of a character in a tragedy but argues that the essence of tragedy does not consist in the portrayal of character:

The plot emerges precisely when characters are described in their relationships to themselves, to other characters and to events. Biblical narratives are no exception. One has to be forewarned, however, that biblical narratives show far less interest in the psychological aspects of characters than modern narratives do (Jonker 2005:97).

Aristotle sees the plot as appropriate in the making of good tragedies. He argues that; “the plot then is the first principle and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy; character holds the second place” (Poetics 52, VI.14). For him, the relationship of the action and the plot is not one of part to whole, but one of imitation; the plot is the imitation of an action. He speaks of a plot as giving an ordered combination of incidents. The arrangement of incidents should follow three rules, which ought to be considered when analysing a narrative; they are the unity of action, of place and of time. He further suggests that a plot ought to be proportionate, not too long and not too short. Jonker (2005:96) emphasizes the consideration of plot as it enables the interpreter of narratives to get a grip on the line of tension in the narrative and it also provides a way of identifying the changes the narratives wishes to bring about (see above). On this point, Bar-Efrat (1989:121) claims that the plot develops from an initial situation through a chain of events to a central occurrence, which is the prime factor of change, and thence by means of varying incidents to a final situation.

4.2.2.2 Time in narrative

Narrated time is the actual duration of events recounted in a narrative. Narrative time on the other hand, is the quality of ‘telling time’ expended on the particular events. Narrated time is measured in years, months, hours and minutes, whereas narrative time is measured rather in terms of number of words or sentences that an event takes up in narrative” (Jonker 2005:100).

Jonker argues that the aspect of narrative time is crucial for the understanding of narratives. It shows where the narrator places the emphasis. He further states that the story does not tell only of events that take place in time (whether historical events or not), but also arranges the

events in the story in a specific temporal order.

Keen (2003:92) employs a different terminology by claiming that the analysis of time in narrative depends upon a conventional distinction between story time and discourse time; both kinds of time are unreal compared to the real time in which we live and read. The story time is the time that transpires within the imaginary world projected by the text; the discourse time is the time it takes for the story to be assimilated (in listening or reading). Keen (2003:93) points out that despite the commonsense connections of time and narrative, it should be noted that the “time” discussed by narrative theory has little to do with “time” of history. When most theorists refer to “time” in narrative they mean some combination of the temporal unfolding of narrative in the act of reading, the duration of time depicted in the plot, and the order or the disorder of the events of story time. She notes that theorists rely on the conceptual division of story time and discourse time because we do not have all the time in the world to give to the imaginary related time of a narrative.

This view is also shared by Bar-Efrat (1989:141). He affirms that a narrative cannot exist without time, to which it has a twofold relationship: it unfolds with time and time passes within it. Furthermore, all narratives need the time, which is outside the reader in order to unravel itself by stages before the reader. The narrative also requires internal time, because the characters and incidents exist within time, everything that changes during the course of the narrative and everything that remains static exist in time. Again, Bar-Efrat states that reader should note that the author could also make use of internal time in both the qualitative and the quantitative aspects. It should be noted that time within the narrative is completely different from the objective physical time. (1989:142).

He explains that:

Objective time is continuous and flows evenly, without interruptions, delays or accelerations (provided the speed of the measuring mechanism remains constant), advancing in a straight line and an orderly fashion from the past via the present to the future. It is also irreversible and is also irreversible. This does not apply to narrated time, which is subjective and expands or contracts according to the circumstances; and is never continuous, and also being subject to gaps, delays and jumps, nor does it display the meticulous division into past, present and future (1989:142).

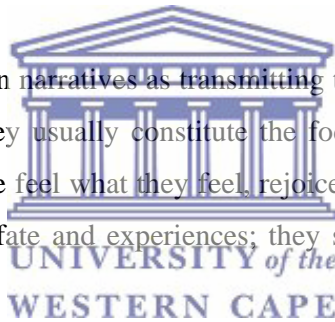
Additionally, Keen (2003:90) states that it should be noted that the sequential events of plot

imply the passing of imaginary time, narrative takes time to tell and we take time to receive even part of what we believe we know from narrative. Because human beings perceive events with a consciousness of their location in time, Hawk (2003:540) argues that the narrative utilizes time as a means of organizing, explaining and evaluating experience; telling a story requires decision about how to situate it within time. Where and how will the story begin? How and when will it end?

4.2.2.3 Character

The character is the soul of the narrative; many of the views embodied in the narrative are expressed through the characters and more specifically, through their speech and fate. Not only characters serve as the narrator's mouthpiece, but also what is not related about them, which of their conversations and actions in the past are recorded and which are not, all reveal the values and norms within the narrative (Bar-Efrat 1989:47).

Bar-Efrat regards the character in narratives as transmitting the significance and values of the narrative to the reader since they usually constitute the focal point of interest. Essentially, characters attract the readers; we feel what they feel, rejoice in their gladness, grieve at their sorrow and participate in their fate and experiences; they sometimes arouse our sympathy, sometimes our revulsion.

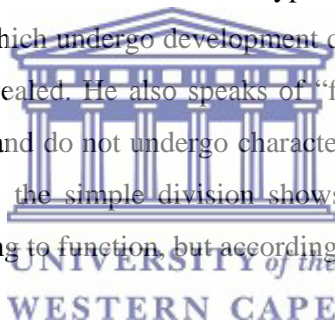


According to Alter (1981:116), characters can be revealed through the report of actions, through appearance, gestures, posture, and costume and through one character's comments on another. Additionally, they can be revealed through direct speech by the character, through inward speech, either summarized or quoted as interior monologue, or through statement by the narrator about the attitudes and intentions of personages (which may come as either flat assertions or motivated explanations). Aristotle (51, VI, 6) refers to the subject of the action not as character but as “agent” or “actor” and this term makes it subservient to the action. He suggests that certain qualities be ascribed to the agent and that the word “character” should not be taken in the sense of a human being. Aristotle (Poetics 56, XV, 1) states that certain things can be noticed in agents or characters and these are characteristics. For instance, moral goodness could be seen as the fulfilment of possibilities in the character. There should also be a place for bad characters and for those who are not so good. Moreover, the character must not be too bad because his/her downfall would not bring about terror or pity and not too good because then the reaction would be disgust, and not pity. It appears that the aim of Aristotle

here is to suggest that well-balanced characters are more realistic.

For Aristotle therefore, the character must be true to life, aim at prosperity and be consistent. On this point, Gunn & Fewell (1993:47) support Aristotle's view that we may not be dealing with real people when we encounter biblical characters, but we are using our experiences of real people to help us understand these linguistic constructions. We listen to what they say and how they say it, we watch what they do, note other people's response to them and what others say about them and put together pieces of personality, whether real or fictive. We use psychological insights acquired through our dealings with the real world.

Jonker (2005:97) writes that not all characters necessarily function in the same way in a narrative and therefore a distinction between different types of characters is commonly made. There are "round" characters; which undergo development during the narratives and in them, more than one dimension is revealed. He also speaks of "flat" characters that act in purely functional way in the narrative and do not undergo character development. Although he also deals with other classifications, the simple division shows what one must look for when assessing characters not according to function, but according to narrative technique.



4.3 The narrator and the narrator's point of view

4.3.1 The narrator

The narrator is more than simply someone who tells a story to a particular audience; it is rather a speaker who appeals to an ideal audience to react to certain aspects of the narrative in certain ways (Jonker 2005:99).

Jonker considers the narrator not as someone of flesh and blood; rather, he is the voice that controls the narrative. The narrator is the eye of a camera that determines what information will be passed on to the audience. Abbott (2002:63) describes the narrator variously as an instrument, a construction, or a device wielded by the author. Likewise, Bar-Efrat (1989:15) explains that the narrator is like a photographer who decides what will and will not be included in a picture, at what distance and angle, with what degree of sharpness and in what light. Further, the narrator may be present in two places simultaneously and recount what happened at both. Such a narrator has the freedom to present different scenes in different

places in close succession and is in this sense omnipresent.

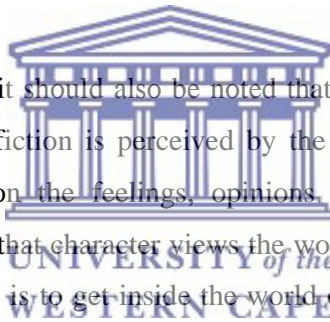
Jonker affirms that, “A narrator also has access to all characters and their thought processes, thus the narrator is ‘omniscient’ as well. The narrator can present the information selectively to the audience in accordance with the story line and the intended effect of the narrative” (2005:100). He also suggests that readers should be sensitive to the role of a narrator by discovering the “presence” of the narrator in narratives and by learning to spot the techniques the narrator uses. In this way, the reader is able to appreciate the response a particular narrative is intended to evoke.

According to Hawk (2003:542), a narrative tells a story from a particular point of view and encodes values, assumptions, ideologies and convictions within it; this point of view is conveyed via the narrator. Hawk states that the narrator can be thought of simply as the one through whom the story is told, as distinguished from the author who produced the text. The narrator is thus an abstract entity who renders the story into the whole, suggests connections and invests characters with significance. The narrator’s presentation is often not neutral; it assumes and defends cultural and other values. Hawk also stresses that there is general agreement that the biblical narrator is “omniscient” and possesses knowledge often not available to characters within the story; the narrator sometimes displays knowledge of God’s disposition and decisions but in some cases, the narrator seems to withhold insight into divine motives. The narrator will sometimes build suspense by supplying the reader with information that is unavailable to one or more characters in the story (2003:543). When a narrator is omniscient, what the narrator chooses to reveal or conceal gives clues to the values and interests embedded in the narrative.

In another sense, Gunn & Fewell (1993:52) argue that in some biblical literature, the narrator may not be easily distinguished from the author. In this regard, the book of Nehemiah, narrated in the first person by Nehemiah himself, represents a good example. Nevertheless, they urge the reader of biblical narrative to observe that the narrator is not the author but a fictional construct. Further, Gunn & Fewell (1993:52) maintain that to define the narrator as fictional construct is to put the narrator into a category similar to the characters. Indeed, it might be helpful sometimes to think of a narrator as a character, distinct from other

characters. The narrator is the character who tells the story while the other characters enact it. It should be noted that the narrator controls the story's presentation; it is the narrator's views that predominate others. In fact, it is the narrator, who determines how other points of view emerge and how we evaluate those points of view (1993:52).

In discussing the reliability of the narrator, Gunn & Fewell (1993:54) cite Sternberg and assert that the reliable narrator always gives us accurate information; does not give false or unintentionally misleading information or deliberately deceive us. They conclude by suggesting that the narrator will sometimes establish for us something of the appearance, profession, or social situation of the character under scrutiny. The narrator will also step aside and allow the characters to speak for themselves and what the characters say and how they say it, may tell us much about the kind of people they are.



According to Labov (1981:30), it should also be noted that the writer's choice of narrator is crucial for the way a work of fiction is perceived by the reader. Generally, a first-person narrator brings greater focus on the feelings, opinions and perceptions of a particular character in a story and on how that character views the world and views other characters. In addition, if the writer's intention is to get inside the world of a character, then a first-person narrator is a good choice, although a third-person limited narrator is an alternative that does not require the writer to reveal all that a first-person character would know. By contrast, a third-person omniscient narrator gives a panoramic view of the world of the story, looking into many characters and into the broader background of a story. Labov suggests that for stories in which the context and views of many characters are important, a third-person narrator is a better choice.

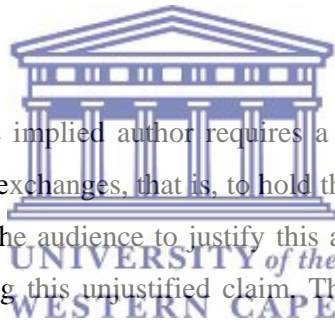
4.3.1.1 The implied author

Larsson²⁸ describes the implied author as a second self of the historical person who wrote the

²⁸ <http://english2.mnsu.edu/larsson/agency3.html> (visited 2007-06-20). The implied author, unlike the narrator, can tell us nothing, it has no voice, no direct means of communicating; the implied author becomes a kind of demiurge responsible for the actual creation of the narrative. Donald Larsson quotes Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan who also endorses the notion of the implied author, defining it as a construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all components of the text. Rimmon-Kenan is quoted as saying that a text could function without a narrator but must have an implied author. It has no voice but it empowers others to speak and is the silent source

work in question. It is not a flesh and blood being, but a hypothetical entity that includes not only the extractable meanings of the text but also the moral and emotional content of each bit of action and suffering of all the characters. The implied author is responsible for the norms and values that seem to be expressed in the work but cannot necessarily be attributed to a narrator and should not be attributed to the historical author. The implied author is not the narrator but is reconstructed by the reader from a narrative; he is the principle that invented the narrator along with everything else in the narrative.

In the same vein, Abbott (2002:77) explains that an implied author is that sensibility, that combination of feeling, intelligence, knowledge and opinion that accounts for the narrative. It accounts for the narrative in the sense that the implied authorial views that we find emerging in the narrative are consistent with all the elements of the narrative discourse of which we are aware.



For Labov (1981:41), when the implied author requires a narrative to occupy more social space than other conversational exchanges, that is, to hold the floor longer, then the narrative must carry enough interest for the audience to justify this action otherwise, the speaker has violated social norms by making this unjustified claim. The implied author must therefore supply the reason for giving attention to what is narrated and show why it is important to listen.

Of course, when the real living and breathing author constructs the narrative, much of that real author goes into the implied author. Furthermore, in third-person narratives the narrator's choices will best reveal the implied author. For this reason, Jonker (2005:99) claims that in biblical narratives, the distinction between the real author, the implied author and the narrator is often not clear. We do not know who the real author is and we draw conclusions about the implied author mainly by looking at the role of the narrator.

of information. Abbott (2002:78) states that the implied author is also like the narrative itself, among other things; he is a kind of construct that serves to anchor the narrative. We in turn, as we read, develop our own idea of this implied sensibility behind the narrative. Abbott Porter and Larsson agree that the term, implied author comes from Wayne Booth and that we can easily talk of the "inferred author". Abbott adds that the key point is that, insofar as we debate the intended meaning of a narrative, we root our position in the version of the implied author that we infer from the text.

4.3.2 Narrator's point of view

An important decision a writer makes concerns the narrative point of view to use. The point of view is the story's perspective. There are many 'positions', 'perspectives' or 'points of view' from which a story can be told. According to Stanzel (1984:9), the term, point of view in narrative terminology is used in two contexts, which are distinct in narrative theory. The first relates to the relation of the narrator to the action of the story, that is, whether the narrator is, for instance, a character in the story, or a voice outside of the story. Through whose eyes will the reader see the story? The second concerns the view the narrator applies to the narrated events. By what standards are the characters and events judged? When does the narrator show pleasure or displeasure? In this sense, the point of view relates to the values advocated by the narrative.

Bar-Efrat notes that the point of view (in the first context) is one of the factors, which accords unity to a work of literature. Naturally, it involves diffuseness and variety as regards characters, events, places and time. The point of view dictates what will be narrated and how, what will be related from afar and from near. Just as the nature of a film is dependent on the position of the camera and the way it is operated, the nature of the narrative depends on the point of view from which the events are presented. Bar-Efrat (1989:16) remarks that the appropriate point of view can make a crucial contribution to enhancing the interest or suspense of the narrative. The point of view as the perspective from which a narrative is presented, is analogous to the point from which the camera sees the action in cinema. There are two main points of view; that of the third-person (omniscient) narrator, who stands outside of the story and that of the first-person narrator, who participates in the story. The point of view of a first-person narrator is related to the experience of the narrator (as character) and not to that of the author.

Jonker (2005:102) cautions that, when dealing with the point of view of the narrator, one must remember that a narrator has certain choices. The narrator may elect to recount events from his or her own perspective; this is a most common form and unless the contrary is indicated by means of literary techniques, one must assume that the narrator's perspective is given. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that the narrator is telling the story from the point of view of one of the characters or even from the point of view of the reader. In such cases,

various techniques of focalization may be employed to indicate a shift from the narrator's point of view to another.

Alternatively, the point of view concerns values and attitudes. Deist (1982:6) uses Genesis 1: 11 as an example of how a narrator can impose certain values or attitudes on the reader. In this verse, the narrator mentions the moon and stars as ordinary objects to dispute with those who worship these celestial bodies as gods. In this way, then, he depicts God as the sovereign Creator and the All-powerful Ruler. The narrator wants Israel to see God as the One who governs the whole world and the course of all history. This view of God was intended to place both the people of Israel and the world they lived in perspective. The narrator here chooses to guide the reader's understanding of a character (God) and the significance of the story.

4.3.2.1 The third-person's point of view

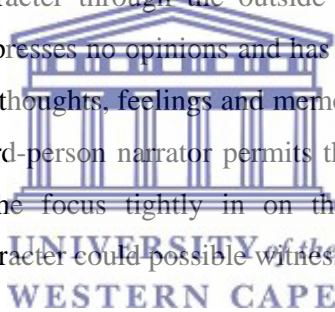
The viewpoint of the third-person point is disembodied; the narrator takes no action and has no physical form in or out of the story but being omniscient, it witnesses all events, even some that no characters witness. Deist declares that, "Third-person narrators, the type of narrators speaking in Old Testament stories most of the time, are narrators, who tell us about people with whom they are not themselves involved" (1986:76). Although the narrator does not participate in the action of the story as one of the characters, he or she may let us know exactly how the characters feel.

According to Philip Shelley²⁹, this type of narrator may be intrusive (commenting and evaluating) or unintrusive (describing without much comment). The intrusive third-person narrator may offer judgments and express opinions on the behaviour of the characters. He is not a character in the story and stands outside the world of the story but is aware that he/she is telling a story and may comment on the story being told. Such a narrator is prominent, especially when narration itself is problematized, that is, when the third-person starts pointing out that it is only a story, which he is making it up, that it could be told in another way with a quite different meaning or outcome and so forth. The unintrusive narrator does not make blatant judgments, though some subjective observations can seep in. Such a narrator usually does not enter a single mind but instead, records what can be seen and heard; he is like a camera or a fly on the wall. The third-person may simply be the voice for telling the story;

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Implied_author (visited 2007-06-22)

hence, we do not view him or her in any way as having any particular characteristics or interests. This is usually the most reliable narrator, but if the reader ever doubts or disagrees with the judgment of the narrator, he or she will dismiss the work as whole.

Philip Shelley argues that a third-person omniscient narrator can operate in the past, present and future, and covers the thoughts of all characters. He can present details encountered, but not noticed by the characters. It can make observations that the characters would never make about themselves, such as concerning the colour of their eyes and their personal feelings. The third-person limited narrator picks one character and follows him/her around for the duration of the book; in this case, the narrator may be more observant than the character, but remains limited to what that one character could theoretically observe. Such a narrator may also choose to guide the reader's understanding of the character and the significance of his/her story. We learn about the character through the outside voice. This narrator often does nothing, casts no judgments, expresses no opinions and has no physical form in or out of the story and should be privy to the thoughts, feelings and memories of the protagonist, but of no other character. The limited third-person narrator permits the author to be omniscient when necessary but also to bring the focus tightly in on the central character by limiting observation to only what the character could possibly witness or recall.



When we seem to be present to the thoughts, experiences and feelings of a character in the story, as the third-person narrator tells the story, that character is known as a Reflector Character. We are “inside” the Reflector Character's mind, but through the agency of the third-person narrator. The Reflector Character is not aware that she or he is the subject of narration and is not telling the story but merely having her or his experiences reported.

4.3.2.2 The first-person's point of view

The first-person narration is used somewhat less frequently and its point of view sacrifices omniscience and omnipresence for a greater intimacy with one character. It allows the reader to see what the focus character is thinking and allows the character to be further developed through his or her own style in telling the story. The first-person narration may be told as a story within a story, with the narrator appearing as a character in the frame story. This is a limited character within a story and therefore, is limited in understanding; he/she is like an

observer who happens to see the events of the story. This internal narrator may be a protagonist, that is, one of the main characters, or a less central character.

The character takes actions, makes judgments and has opinions and biases. In this case, the narrators give and withhold information based on their own (limited) view of events. It is an important task for the reader to determine as much as possible the character of the narrator in order to decide what really happens. This type of narrator is usually noticeable for its ubiquitous use of the first-person pronoun "I". He/she is a character in the work who, must follow all of the rules of being a character, even during his/her duties as narrator. Even if he/she is the character of the author, the narrator is still distinct from the author and must behave like any other character and any other first-person narrator. He may directly address the reader, though this is considered a bad form of narration unless there is a valid reason and explanation. It is easy to identify the first-person narrator; when the narrator is a character in the story and is aware that he or she is telling a story, the story is being told from a first-person point of view. There may be more than one internal narrator; in this case, the story will have more than one point of view. The internal narrator has a potential of telling the story retrospectively after having lived through it; the retrospective element makes the narrator know more than a reader because the story is told by one, who has lived through the experience and usually, who has been changed by it.

4.3.2.3 Assignment of blame and praise

The point of view, in the second sense can be seen most clearly in how the narrator assigns praise and blame.

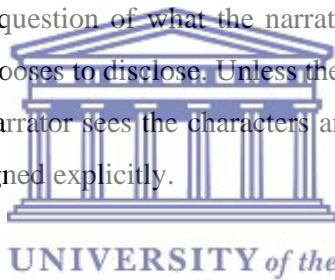
The assignment of blame or praise certainly reflects the point of view of a narrator. But it is not usually a conscious part of the information conveyed by the narrator to the audience; it is rather the ideological framework within which events are viewed (Labov 1981:31).

Labov (1981:39) observes that the third-person narrator would mostly assign blame and praise through devices of mood, factivity and causativity, evaluative lexicon, the inserting of pseudo-events and the wholesale omission of events. Narratives may be polarizing, where the antagonist is viewed as maximally violating social norms, and the protagonist maximally conforming to them. In addition, narratives may also be integrating, where blame is set aside

or passed over by a variety of devices. He remarks that the narrator can transfer experience³⁰ to the audience through dramatic mechanisms; this transfer of experience from a narrator to the audience is certainly coloured by the moral stance taken by the narrator. Through this, the narrator induces the audience to see the world through his own eyes. He concludes that a study of how narrators assign praise and blame is a major aspect of narrative analysis.

4.3.3 Summary of section

From the foregoing, it is clear that questions may arise concerning the points of view of both external and internal narrators. Expectedly, limited knowledge can be observed in internal narrators, but it is also possible for an author to write a story in which it becomes clear that the external narrator does not understand the implications of what she/he is narrating; that is, the event can be misrepresented. At this point, it becomes clear that the author and the narrator are not the same. The question of what the narrator knows or thinks is a separate matter from what the narrator chooses to disclose. Unless the narrator is very intrusive, it may be difficult to decide how the narrator sees the characters and their actions. As Labov notes, praise or blame is often not assigned explicitly.



When dealing with the kinds of narrators mentioned above, James Joyce³¹ advises readers of narratives to take note of the certain crucial issues about narratives. If the narrator is not a character in the story, one should try to decide what relationship the narrator might have with the characters. For instance, does the narrator make judgments about the characters and their actions? Are there any indications to whom the narrator might be addressing the story? If the narrator is a character in the story, one should decide whether the character is relating events as they happen, or from some other point. Again, one should decide if the reportage is given as a story told to a third party.

³⁰ Labov (1981:32) shows that the transfer of experience of an event to listeners occurs to the extent that they become aware of it as if it were their own experience. This means that the listeners achieve awareness of the event in the same way that the narrator became aware of it. Labov further highlights that the transfer of experience is limited since the verbal account gives only a small fraction of the information that the narrator received through sight, sound and other senses. To the extent that narrators add subjective reports of their emotions to the description of an objective event, listeners become aware of that event as if it were the narrators' experience.

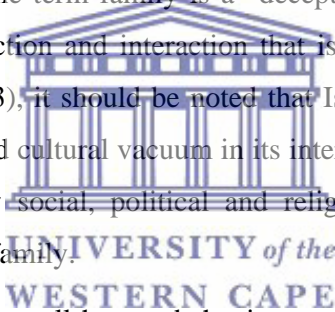
³¹ From wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia: Department of English, University of Victoria: website updated 13 May 1995: <http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/pages/LTPointOfView.html> (visited 2006/08/01).

4.4 The Israelite family

Since the story of Hagar is set within the family of Abram, it is necessary to investigate briefly the nature of the Israelite family. How were families formed and who were regarded as family members? What roles and functions were assigned to the different members of the family? Who exercises authority? We shall attempt to answer these questions in the following subsections.

4.4.1 Family

According to Perdue (1997a:165), the concept of ‘family’ is complex and diverse even within the same culture, and it is significantly influenced by the changes occurring within its larger socio-political and religious world. He adds that no social institution, even one as basic as the family, is static and thus insulated against change. In support of this argument, Perdue quotes Carol Meyers, who notes that the term family is a “deceptively simple English word” that “masks” a unit of social connection and interaction that is incredibly complex and varied. According to Perdue (1997a:163), it should be noted that Israelite and early Jewish life did not take place within a social and cultural vacuum in its interaction with other cultures; Israel was influenced to a degree by social, political and religious characteristics of different institutions, which included the family.



Carol Meyers (1997:1) argues that all human behaviours operate under the assumption that there is such a thing as a family in every society. She claims that the shape, functions and dynamics of a family group have distinctive features in each of the countless cultural forms that constitute the synchronic and diachronic history of humankind. Despite the great differences among families viewed cross-culturally, the very ubiquity of this social unit and the fact that it is a fundamental human institution make the study of the family an important aspect of understanding a particular society. This is also true for ancient Israel.

4.4.2 A description of the family in Israel

Blenkinsopp (1997:66) explains that; “the *raison d’etre* of the family in Israel, as elsewhere, was the procreation and nurture of children”. For Perdue (1997b:171), it is clear that children were valued beyond their economic worth to their families. The announcement of pregnancy was a time of great rejoicing and the day of birth was an occasion for celebration among family members. The nuclear family was categorized by blood as “blood kinship played an

important role in the determination of personal identity and the distribution of power in the villages of early Israel; no blood was taken for granted” (Matthews 2003:292).

In particular, in village societies, since the economy demanded large human resources, the nuclear family joined with others in a larger extended family unit, which sometimes included up to three generations. The extended family included the grandfather, grandmother, their unmarried daughters, their sons (married and unmarried) and their sons’ wives and children. According to this practice, the family consisted of those who are united by common blood and common dwelling-place. De Vaux (1961:18) observes that the family included the servants, the resident aliens and the stateless persons, widows and orphans, who lived under the protection of the head of the family. He also notes that apart from working together, family members in the Israelite family were obligated to protect one another.

4.4.3 Patriarchy

The basic social unit of Hebrews was the patriarchal family, which included not only a man with his wife³² and unmarried children but also his married sons and their wives and children, including the slaves with their wives and children (Burrows 1962:134).

Families in Israel were controlled by a father, who was the master of the family. Burrows (1962: 135) confirms that the father’s authority was supreme; he might sell his daughter or son into slavery but this does not imply that he had a power of life and death over his children. This is shown in the practice of sacrificing the first-born son, which eventually was superseded in Genesis 22. In later times, child-sacrifice by fathers was abhorred as a pagan rite. De Vaux (1961:20) asserts that there is no doubt that from the time of our oldest documents, the Israelite family was patriarchal. The genealogies were always recorded from the father’s line and women were rarely mentioned; the nearest relation in the collateral line was the paternal uncle (cf. Lev 25:49). In the typical Israelite marriage, the husband was the “master” of his wife. Von Rad (1972:187) affirms that the maintenance of justice in the house

³² According to Burrows (1962:134), the wife became a member of her husband’s family but she was not the property of her husband or his family. It should be noted that in general, the position of women in Hebrew society was not as high as modern standards would require or even as high as it was among some other ancient people. An unmarried woman’s vows could be annulled by her father, those of a married woman by her husband (Num 30:3-16). The normal marriage was the contract between two families, the husband’s family and the wife’s family. Burrows clarifies further that; “the idea of compensation was involved to the extent that the giving up of a daughter to another family was a real loss” (Burrows 1962:135). This was done because the purpose of marriage is the continuation of the family; to give her husband a son is a wife’s greatest pride and barrenness was regarded as a grievous curse. Various devices for obtaining a son when the wife was barren are attested. Strangely enough, adoption was not one of them but a concubine or a slave-girl could provide a son as in the case of Hagar (Gen 16).

was men's affair. The father had absolute authority over his children, even over his married sons if they lived with him, and over their wives.

Matthews (2003:298) claims that the patriarchal³³ system was primarily concerned with family relations, over matters of proper behaviour and avoidance of shame for their household. In ancient Israel, a patrilineal segmentary lineage system, in which each household belonged to the lineage, existed (2003:301). These lineages, in which membership and inheritance were based on the father, made up a clan. The clan formed several *phratries*, and the *phratries* made up the tribe. The weight of evidence indicates male dominance was the rule in this system; patriarchal lineage and inheritance systems were the norm in the Ancient Near East. In this system, a woman would worship the personal or household god of her male partner. The father was the master of the family; he had complete charge of the household's property, represented the household in court, and was responsible for maintaining its prosperity and credibility within the community. According to Westermann (1987:240), Genesis 16:5 shows that in this form of community, the father was also the judge in the family circle. Perdue clarifies that, "Within the household, the male head of the household was responsible for maintaining order and adjudicating disputes, arranging marriages, assigning household tasks" (1997:174a). This explains the reason Sarai went to Abram when dispute arose between her and Hagar.

It is also argued that monogamy was the preferred marriage arrangement in ancient Israel. However, polygamy, which included concubinage, allowed a household to increase its labour force and its chances to provide a living male heir to inherit the estate. Perdue claims that there is no explicit evidence for how the management of the household would have been carried out by two or more wives but it is possible that the favourite wife enjoyed a special status (Perdue 1997a:185).

³³ Patriarchy seems to have been the dominant system, but it should be acknowledged that matriarchy was also an existing system (De Vaux 1961:19). Under this system, a woman was entitled to an inheritance only under special circumstances – when there were no male heirs. The primary purpose of marriage, aside from the possible monetary gain involved in marrying into a rich and influential family, was to produce an heir. De Vaux shows that the characteristic of a matrilineal type of society is not that the mother exercises authority, but that a child's lineage is traced through the mother. The child belongs to the mother's family and social group; he is not considered related to its father and even the rights of inheritance are fixed by maternal descent. De Vaux cites Robertson Smith that the matriarchal regime was the original form of the family among the Semites and influenced certain Old Testament customs and stories. This view is, however, no longer popular.

The father determined which children would inherit the household's property. De Vaux (1961:19) notes in addition that, in this kind of family, the oldest brother becomes the head of the family and his authority is handed on, along with the property from brother to brother (patrilineal inheritance). For Blenkinsopp also, “the firstborn son would generally inherit the bulk of the estate, including title to the patrimonial plot of land, with the remainder distributed among younger siblings” (1997:67). This type of society has been attested among the Hittites and Hurrites and in Assyria and Elam.

4.4.5 Household and family labour

Perdue (1997b:166) argues that the major feature of the Israelite family was the form of the household, which operated within the larger social structures of the clan and tribe. In ancient Israel, the household was multigenerational and consisted of two or three nuclear families, related by kinship and marriage. Matthews (2003:298) cites Meyers' (1988:127) claim that Israelite families were not just households with the same biological parents but households with the same sociological experience and shared legal commitment to one another. However, for Borowski (2003:22), the nuclear family was the cornerstone of Israelite society in general. All family members, including children, lived in one four-roomed house or in a complex made of several attached houses. Burrows observes that, “These family members or a clan naturally pitched their tents or built their houses together: In settled life the population of a town might consist of a single family, though the fiction of kinship might be maintained for some time” (1962:134). In addition, the compound housed unrelated people who were considered part of the extended family, including slaves and hired hands.

In the same fashion, Meyers (1997:14) indicates that the family³⁴ household also included

³⁴ Burrows (1962:134) explains that membership in the family did not necessarily mean actual blood relationship. In fact, by drinking blood together or mingling their own blood, as well as by other forms of covenant, men became brothers. An outsider could be taken into the family also as ‘sojourner’ or a resident alien. Furthermore, Israel families were religious as well as social units. The father acted as priest in the celebration of festivals and in offering sacrifices and all sacrifices and festivals were originally family affairs. Burrows notes that with the disintegration of the old clan organization, the tendency to form separate small families surfaced. Each son married and left his parents to establish a home of his own. The religious functions of the family were sometimes taken over by the small family, as was done in the celebration of the Passover; yet the annual sacrifice of the larger family or clan at the hometown was not at once abandoned. To support this argument, Burrows refers to 1Samuel 20:6, 29.

household members who were not kinsmen, such as sojourners, war captives, and servants. Materially, it included the residential buildings, outbuildings, tools, equipment, fields, livestock, and orchards. She explains that; “the density and intensity of shared family labor in ancient Israel as in all agrarian societies, involved role specializations according to the gender, unmarried offspring and age” (1997:23). A woman's labour involved an organic progression of operations; fire building and tending, bread making, weaving of cloth – all required an integrated sequence of activities. In their daily activities, older females instructed younger ones in all the technical aspects of gardening, food processing, meal preparation, textile production and other tasks within their specialized economic domain (1997:26). Further, Blenkinsopp (1997:58) shows that in this family structure, the economic interests and property rights have always been an important aspect of the institution of marriage whereby two persons of different sexes agree to co-habit for the purpose of procreation.

The family structures included concubinage as a social institution, which had long been known in ancient Babylon. This system was restricted to cases in which the wife proved to be childless. She must then provide her husband with a slave woman, as in the case of Hagar in Gen 16 (cf. Sarna 1966:128). Perdue (1997b:189) also remarks that in cases of barrenness, God could be blamed as the cause of the disgrace and childlessness was seen as a test or punishment. The household's concern for children was based not only on the fact that they were future contributors to its labour force, but that they would preserve the lineage patrimony and perpetuate the ancestral name. According to John Scullion (1992:167), this is the reason the childless couple in Genesis 16 used the normal method in their culture to have an heir.

4.5 Slavery and female slaves in Israel

According to Genesis 16:1, Hagar was a slave from Egypt. Perdue (1997b:171) indicates that, beyond the kinship structure, the household also could include debt servants, slaves, and concubines. These marginal members contributed to the tasks of the household in return for socially defined support for both themselves and their families. Perdue claims that it was possible for these individuals to merge into the household kinship structure. In this subsection, our discussion will centre on the meaning of the word, slave and the position of

female slaves in ancient Israel.

In the Pentateuch, slavery is a condition in which a person is deprived of freedom, at least for a period, by being in subjection to a master so that the master may benefit from the labour of the slave. The slave is generally considered the property of the owner, and as such may be bought or sold (Haas 2003:778). Moreover, in Pentateuchal legislation, involuntarily permanent slavery applied only to non-Israelites. Permanent slavery was permitted only for Gentiles in subjection to a Hebrew. On the other hand, "Hebrew slaves enjoyed other limited rights protected by laws. They were, at least until later in the second temple period, regarded as the property of the household (see Ex. 21:32), and they could be bought and sold" (Perdue 1997b:197).

Perdue further observes that slaves were beaten, treated harshly, and owners were punished only if the slave died soon after the ill-treatment (Ex 21:20). If a beaten slave survived a day or two, his master was not to be punished, for the slave is the property of the owner. Burrows (1962:138) affirms that a slave was his master's property; nevertheless, the master's power over slaves was limited. In this regard, the Sabbath was an opportunity for slaves to rest. Burrows concludes that slaves were probably well treated, among the Hebrew as anywhere else; they were incorporated into the community of the holy people by circumcision. A slave might become his master's heir and a priest's slave could partake of the holy food.

The main characteristic of slavery was that the slave had no rights of a free person; he or she was the owner's property (Ex. 21:21). If a male slave gained his freedom but had married a female slave while serving his master, he could not take his wife and children with him into freedom; the woman and her children remained the master's property (cf. Haas 2003:780).

Hagar is presented as a slave woman in Genesis. Some believe that in the Israelite system, female slaves usually formed a special category; they attended to the personal needs of the mistress of the house, as in the case of Hagar, or nursed the children. On the other hand, female slaves could also belong to the master. Teubal (1990:52) cites a law from the code of Ur-Nammu, which states that if a man married a priestess who did not bear children and decided to marry a priestess who can provide him with children, that man may marry that priestess and bring her into his house. However, the two are not going to be of the same rank;

the surrogate will always be of inferior rank. Slaves in particular, were often “used” in this way.

Moreover, Teubal claims that most of the ancient Israelite laws dealt with female slaves of masters, not with those of mistresses (as in the case of Hagar who was affiliated with Sarai, not Abram). Teubal admits that it is not easy to establish in what measure these regulations apply to them. Hagar was dependent on her mistress, Sarai, whose decision controlled her life. Sarai’s childlessness was a determinant in the life of the servant. Hagar “was leased for work, given as a pledge, or handed over as a part of a dowry, in addition to her routine as maidservant, she was subjected also to the burdens peculiar to her sex” (Teubal 1990:52).

The slave woman was valued if she produced sons (Gen. 35:25-26) and one of her sons could become an heir, especially if the wife had no children, as in the case of Hagar and Sarai. Hagar was going to assume the role of a surrogate mother for Sarai and this would entitle her to some privileges, but because Hagar underestimated her mistress, she forfeited any royal treatment and got the reverse (Perdue 1997b:189).



According to Genesis 16: 2, Hagar was used so that her mistress “may be edified through her,” that is, so that she could “found a family through her”. As a slave woman, Hagar was used as reproducer for her mistress; she was there to satisfy the needs of her mistress. Alter (1996:68) argues that Hagar belonged to Sarai as property, and their complex relationship was built on that fundamental fact. Teubal (1990:53) maintains that ownership of a female slave meant not only the right to employ her physical strength, but also in many cases, to allow the male members of the master's household exploit her charms. Thus, the highest position a female slave could achieve was to become a childbearing concubine to her master. De Vaux (1961:86) adds that the master might take a slave-woman as his concubine, but she would keep her status as a slave unless her master freed her (Lev. 19: 20). For instance, in Abram’s case, he took Hagar as concubine but as the master of the house, confirmed the decisions to oppress her.

4.6 A selection of scholarly opinions in the light of narrative theory

Here we shall evaluate the views of selected scholars on the Hagar narratives, particularly on the narrator and the narrator's view. In the light of these views, we shall analyse the position of Hagar to determine whether she was abused or not according to the narrator. Thus, the scholarly opinions about the narrator and the narrator's point of view, discussed in the previous chapters, will be used as tools to analyse Genesis 16 and 21:8-21. We shall critically analyse the narrator's point of view concerning Hagar's situation.

4.6.1 The narrator's view of Hagar and her situation

It should be noted that this story is told from a third-person point of view but the narrator chooses to guide the reader's understanding of characters and the significance of the story. The narrator does not participate in the action of the story as one of the characters but is sometimes intrusive. He shows exactly how the characters feel and we learn about the characters through this outside voice (cf. Teubal 1990:12).

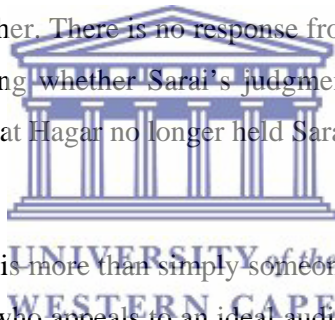
The narrator reveals two details about Sarai that will drive the story forward; she was barren and she had an Egyptian maid. Hagar's story is central to two chapters in Genesis (16 and 21). Genesis 16 focuses on Sarai and her servant Hagar. The narrator devotes the first half of the chapter to Sarai's point of view and sympathizes with her. However, in the second half of the chapter, from verse 7, Sarai disappears and the spotlight is on Hagar and her soon to be born son, Ishmael. In chapter 21, the narrator reports the birth of Sarai's son Isaac and the expulsion of Hagar and her son. Here also, the emphasis is first on Abram and Sarai, and then shifts to Hagar and her son.

Since Sarai is mentioned first in Genesis 16, the emphasis seems to be on her. Hagar is mentioned next and is called a maidservant. In chapter 16:4, the narrator seems to be preparing the reader to dislike Hagar, not only because of what Sarai said about her, but also because the narrator³⁵ seems to agree with her. According to Sternberg (1985:85), the point of view of the narrator in a biblical story is understood to be an accurate interpretation of what is going on. The focus of the camera of the narrator makes the reader to sympathize with Sarai

³⁵ The narrator writes from the context of the custom and laws of the times and Sarai manipulated the same laws to get what she wanted. The narrator might appear to dislike Hagar and disapprove of her behaviour as in 16:4. When it comes to the issue of surrogate motherhood, the problem is not with the narrator but the customs of the times, which are interpreted by the modern society as being unfair to Hagar.

and to judge Hagar to be an insolent servant who thought she was better than her mistress was. The narrator is not compelled to turn Hagar into a specifically good person. Instead, he presents a realistic scene in which there is a twist of irony; the pregnant servant despised the barren wife. Sarai wanted to be built through Hagar, but instead, she became lightly esteemed.

According to Teubal (1990:52), the narrator and Sarai already agree against Hagar. The narrator does not disclose how Sarai became aware of Hagar's thoughts towards her. Since the narrator is omniscient, he is privy to all things past, present and future, as well as to the thoughts of all characters. According to Lye,³⁶ the third-person narrator is usually the most reliable narrator and may offer judgments and express opinions on the behaviour of the characters. Of course, Sarai did not know what Hagar was thinking. From the narrator's stance, Sarai's judgment was not based on what Hagar thought of her but on what she assumed Hagar was thinking of her. There is no response from Hagar in this part of the story; the reader has no way of judging whether Sarai's judgment of her thoughts was accurate, except that the narrator agrees that Hagar no longer held Sarai in high esteem.



Jonker states that, "The narrator is more than simply someone who tells a story to a particular audience. **It is** rather a speaker who appeals to an ideal audience to react to certain aspects of the narrative in certain way" (2005:99). In this narrative, the narrator does not address the question of why Hagar's attitude to Sarai changed except that it was connected to her ability to conceive. As the narrator notes in verse 4, "She saw that she conceived and her mistress was lightly esteemed in her eyes". The narrator does not give the reader an external view of the narrated events; he represents them, as it were, from within. He conditions the reader to look at Hagar as being disrespectful to her mistress. Jonker (2005:99) also notes that the narrator is the voice that controls the narrative by determining what information will be passed on to the audience. The reader is made to understand that Hagar was Sarai's slave, a female servant, who was given to Abram to bear a child, which would belong to Sarai. She had to give the child that she conceived and bore to another woman, not by her choice, but because according the narrator, she was a servant who had no control over the use of her womb. Bar-Efrat (1989:16) defines the point of view as one of the means by which the

³⁶ John Lye is an Associate Professor and the Department Chair at Brock University.
See: <http://www.brocku.ca/english/facstaff.html#JL> Visited 2007-05-05.

narrative influences the reader, leading to the absorption of its implicit values and attitudes. This is what the narrator attempts to do in this story. At this stage in Genesis 16, the narrator seems to be supporting the mistress against her maidservant.

The most common cause of death in women in pre-modern times has been identified as childbearing. Thus, Hagar's life was being placed on the line for a child that would not be hers. Nevertheless, the narrator would not record the danger Hagar faced in this situation because "the nature of the film is dependent on the position of the camera and the way it is operated. The nature of the narrative depends on the point of view from which the events are presented" (Bar-Efrat 1989:16). The narrator of this story belonged to a pre-modern world and in that world, the dangers that attended childbearing were taken for granted and the narrator would not deem it necessary to point them out.

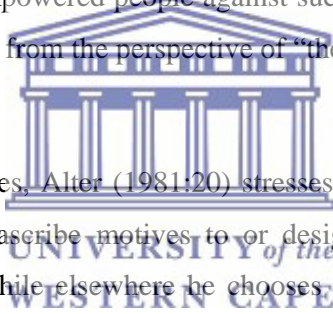


The narrator introduces Sarai to the reader as one who knows the ways of the Lord in Gen. 16:2: "The Lord has kept me from having children". Nonetheless, as a spiritual person, Sarai failed to wait patiently for the promised son from God. She was probably troubled by many questions. Does the promise still hold true? Time is running out; what shall we do; pray and wait, or take action? On his part, "the narrator here is doing two things: he/she is directly conveying the information to the reader and further filters it through the consciousness of one of the characters" (Stanzel 1984: xi). Abram and Sarai are not portrayed as perfect characters. In Genesis 12 and Genesis 20 Abram is shown as lacking faith in God. In Genesis 18, Sarai lightly esteemed the promise made by God.

Earlier, God promised Abram that his own son would be his heir, but the years had gone by and Sarai's patience was near breaking point. In this case, the narrator tells the story from the point of view of one of the characters and selects what he wants the reader to see (cf. Jonker 2005:102). The selection, which determines through whose eyes the selected events will be viewed, creates sympathy for Sarai. The narrator in 16:3 reports that ten years have passed since Abram's arrival in Canaan; another thirteen years went by before the promise of a son is renewed. Here, the narrator conditions the mind of the reader to justify the actions of Sarai. The narrator seems to implore the reader: "Before you rush to condemn Sarai's action, consider the issue of time; consider Sarai's pain of barrenness and empathize with her pain."

Many people can identify with the pain of barrenness, but this was an especially severe condition in the ancient world. It was a serious matter for a man to be childless in the ancient world, for it left him with no heir. However, it was worse for a woman; it was an ignominious failure.

Consequently, wives who could afford it adopted the practice of surrogate motherhood. Sarai settled for what most women in her days would do, namely, to adopt the normal cultural practice. According to Mbuwayesengo (1997:31), this problem of barrenness is also a serious situation in some African cultures; if a sexual union does not result in pregnancy at the expected time, arrangements are made for the woman to have sexual intercourse with one of her husband's brothers. If she does not conceive after this, then she is to blame for her condition. One cannot claim the prevalence of this practice today in Africa as modern laws and rights have liberated and empowered people against such practice. The narrator enjoined the reader to see Sarai's situation from the perspective of "the pain of barrenness".

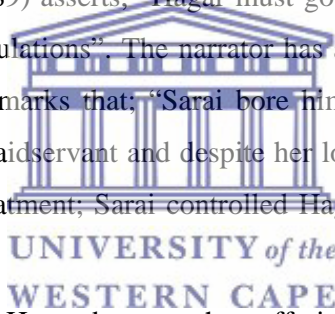


In dealing with biblical narratives, Alter (1981:20) stresses that certain questions should be asked. Why does the narrator ascribe motives to or designate state of feeling to his/her characters in some instances, while elsewhere he chooses to remain silent? Why are some actions minimally indicated, and others elaborated through synonyms and details? The narrator reveals Sarai's feelings about her barren condition thus, "The Lord has kept me from having children" (Gen 16:2). It should be noted that "the narrator wants us to understand that Sarai is marked by her inability to bear a child and is humiliated and defeated by her barrenness" (O'Connor 1997:34). In spite of all the bad things that happened to Hagar, the narrator does not reveal her feelings; Hagar did not utter a word about her situation. Even when Sarai, according to the narrator, decided to ill-treat her, only her actions are reported: "Then Sarai ill-treated Hagar, so she fled from her" (16:6). In this regard, Teubal (1990:3) argues that in all probability, the Genesis narratives interweave history and legend since the biblical intent was to focus on males, the narrators chose to emphasize certain events and to forget others, according to the needs of the times in which they wrote.

At this stage, the narrator would not take the risk of revealing Hagar's feelings about her situation in case the reader sympathizes with her. He chooses to be silent and only highlight

things which make the reader judge her, as in verse 4; “when she knew that she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress” (16:4). Even the Angel of the Lord confirmed that Hagar was the servant of Sarai by calling her “Hagar, servant of Sarai” (16:7). It could be inferred that the narrator wants the reader to assume that Sarai’s treatment of Hagar was confirmed by the Angel of the Lord and was according to God’s will. Hence, the Angel of the Lord told Hagar to go back and submit to her mistress (16:9). In Hebrew, the word “submit” comes from the same root as “humiliate” and “oppress”. Hagar was told to submit not just to her mistress’ authority but also to the suffering from her hand. The reason for this surprising command begins to emerge in the subsequent promises.

The narrator explicitly mentions the title “Angel of the Lord” four times. This repetition gives this messenger a commanding presence in the text, and makes the reader to become attentive to his words. Von Rad (1972:189) asserts, “Hagar must go back to Sarah; Yahweh will not condone the breach of legal regulations”. The narrator has already conditioned the reader to sympathize with Sarai as he remarks that: “Sarai bore him no children” (16:1 REB). The narrator describes Hagar as a maidservant and despite her loyal sacrifice to her mistress, she was subjected to terrible mistreatment; Sarai controlled Hagar’s sexual services without the latter’s consent.



According to Tribble (1984:13), Hagar became the suffering, abused and used servant and Sarai turned her into a sex object. However, Westermann (1987:240) maintains that the narrator is not describing a gross violation of law or custom by Sarai or Hagar³⁷, but a conflict, which was almost unavoidable and was the natural outcome of the situation. In this conflict, Hagar suffered and it is unlikely that the narrator expected this suffering to go unnoticed.

On the other hand, we should understand that only the narrator is sensitively aware of the situation and relays the scene as he experiences it (cf. Stanzel 1984:11). The experience of the narrator enables him to use Hagar as a vehicle to expose the kind of characters Abram and Sarai were. For instance, Abram as the leader of the family failed to lead his family

³⁷ Hagar ran away to free herself from the pressure that was exerted on her by Sarai. She cannot be seen as running away from obeying the law; what Sarai did to her could not be justified in relation to the law of the day. Sarai did not represent the law, Abram did. That is why she went to Abram to report Hagar and with his consent, she “treated her harshly” (Gen. 16:6), misusing the power she got from Abram.

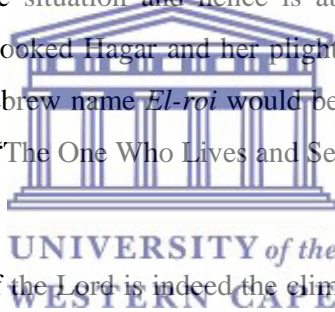
spiritually. This has been well presented because “the narrator’s world exists on different level of being from that of the characters. That is why the narrator gives several clues to indicate that Sarai and Abram demonstrated a glaring absence of faith as spiritual people” (1984:12). Stanzel argues that as people of faith, they should have trusted in the word of God and asked God for further explanation instead of finding their own ways to fulfil the promises of God. When Sarai appealed to Abram and called on the Lord to judge between them (16:5), the reader is also put in the position of making a judgment.

According to Peggy Day (1989:14), Abram responded with no sensitivity whatsoever to Hagar's plight; he told Sarai that Hagar was in her power and she could do whatever she wanted with her. Consequently, “Abraham... severs his relationship with Hagar and thereby restores the old legal situation; that is the meaning of v.6a” (Von Rad 1972:187). The narrator here shows that Hagar was alone and nobody could sympathize with her in this situation. Even the little hope, which boosted her self-esteem was now gone; she lost her higher status and was again reduced to the status of a slave. However, Von Rad’s view is that “the narrator seems to be most sympathetic toward Hagar” (1972:191). At the same time, the narrator wants the reader to understand that a child so conceived in defiance or in little faith could not be the heir of the promise. Von Rad argues that the child became what he had to be, free and rebellious, going forth to a battle of all against all. Later on, the narrator emphasizes Ishmael’s inferior status; “Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian bore to Abraham” (Gen. 21:9).

In a typical narrative plot, the “trigger event” is followed by a series of complications that build the tension. The climax and denouement come later and often cast new light on previous events. In the first six verses of Genesis 16, Sarai’s barrenness set off the action. She made a plan, but found that the success of the plan threatened her own status even more. The reader may wonder about Hagar’s position and future; the narrator says nothing and offers no judgments. The reader is implicitly asked to judge. The first part ends on the note that Sarai mistreated Hagar and Hagar ran away, leaving the reader to wonder about the future of Hagar and the future of the promise. Sarai remained barren and it appeared Hagar would not bear a son for her. In Genesis 21:8-15, the emphasis is also on Sarai and Abram. Sarai initiated the action and Abram unwillingly gave in. Hagar was again left without a voice and the promise

made to her was endangered when she found herself and her son close to death.

In the second parts of both chapters, the emphasis changes completely. In Genesis 16, the Angel of the Lord addressed Hagar; this is the only time that God intervened in this chapter. The actions of Sarai and Abram lacked divine sanction and their trust and obedience can be questioned. Hagar, presumably because she believed the promise, obeyed what seemed to be a harsh command. In Genesis 21, in the wilderness the narrator lets Hagar speak and express her feelings; he lets her and her child cry, thereby gripping and moving the reader. According to Gerhard von Rad, the narrator concludes this human tragedy by stating that “God heard the voice of lad” (Gen. 21:17). Furthermore, the narrator stresses the name Ishmael (“God has heard”), suggesting that God’s seeing and hearing remain crucial because it shows that God’s speaking will address the human need in a precise way. God’s word can bring a future and hope because God has seen the situation and hence is able to address actual needs in a specific way. God has not overlooked Hagar and her plight. Alter (1996:71) claims that the most evident meaning of the Hebrew name *El-roi* would be the “God Who sees me”. Hagar ascribes this new name to God, “The One Who Lives and Sees Me” (Gen. 16:13).

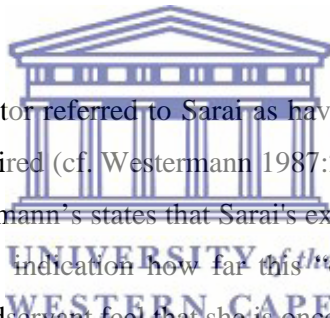


The intervention of the Angel of the Lord is indeed the climax of the narrative in Genesis 16 and it starts with the command to Hagar to return to Sarai and submit to her. Then come both a promise (16:10) and an assurance (16:11). At this point, Hagar showed that her faith is superior to that of Sarai. She “calls on the Name of the Lord” (Genesis 16:13), suggesting that she did not regard God as her enemy but her supporter. Only a casual reading of the scene can lead to the conclusion that Sarai’s actions are justified. On the contrary, Hagar becomes a model of the faith that Sarai lacked. Those who point out that Abram endangered the lives of Hagar and her son when he sent them into the wilderness in Genesis 21 must remember that when Hagar ran away earlier, she faced similar difficulties. This only highlights her desperation. When she was given the promise, she was prepared to return and not to throw her life away.

At this point, we can recall our hypothesis that, *according to the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21:8-21 Hagar was humiliated, exploited, physically abused and turned into a sexual object.* So far, the hypothesis has been proved except for the point that Hagar was turned into sexual

object.

From the analysis, it can be inferred that the point of view of the narrator of Genesis 16: 21:8-21 is that Hagar the Egyptian, the maidservant of Sarai, was abused. The narrator confirms Hagar's ill treatment by Sarai thus, "Then Sarai ill-treated³⁸ Hagar; so she fled from her" (16:6). Sarai punished her. Some traditions use the word "humiliate," which in a certain sense, is a civilized, elegant term. According to O'Connor (1997:45), the truth is that the Hebraic text speaks of "oppressing", "beating" and "flogging", and from this whipping, Hagar became a fugitive; she headed for Egypt, her native land. Peggy Day (1989:14) also supports the view, claiming that in this episode Sarai proceeded to oppress Hagar. According to Day, the Hebrew verb used here generally carries the connotation of physical harm; it can mean to oppress as a slave or humiliate. This is the result of what is reported by the narrator in verse 4, "When she knew she was pregnant she began to despise her mistress".



It should be noted that the narrator referred to Sarai as having lost her status because of the new standing, which Hagar acquired (cf. Westermann 1987:240). Hagar cannot be blamed for this situation. Moreover, Westermann's states that Sarai's exercises her freedom of action and "oppresses" Hagar. There is no indication how far this "oppression" goes; however, it is certain that Sarai makes her maidservant feel that she is once more the mistress (1987:241).

Moreover, "It should be noted that the narrator doesn't tell the reader how Hagar expressed her contempt for Sarai" (Teubal 1990:76). Tribble (1984:10) also draws the attention of the reader to the fact that, unlike the narrator, Sarai spoke of building up herself through Hagar, rather than of bearing a child to Abram. Moreover, unlike the narrator, Sarai attributed her plight of barrenness to Yahweh and sought to counter divine action with human initiative. Westermann (1987:238) remarks that Sarai shared the common belief that God was responsible for opening or closing a woman's womb (Gen. 29:31; 30:22). The narrator and Sarai are operating on two parallel lines and the camera of the narrator captured the fact that Sarai afflicted her maid (16:6b). Tribble describes the scenario:

The two women meet unequally again as object and subject, vanquisher and victim, and this time Hagar has lost her name: this term "afflicted" is a strong one, connoting harsh treatment,

³⁸ Abram said to Sarah, "Your maidservant is in your hand". The word, "hand", according to Westermann (1987:24), is equivalent of power. Abram assured Sarai of her original status as mistress.

it characterizes, for example the suffering of the entire Hebrew population in Egypt. Here, the word depicts the torture of an Egyptian woman in Canaan (1984:13).

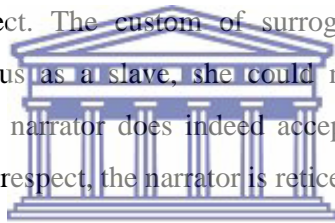
The narrator attempts to communicate this scene to the reader in the statement, “Sarai afflicted her”. This also proves that the narrator was aware that Sarai was abusing and mistreating Hagar. Furthermore, for Tribble, the use of the phrase, “from the face of Sarai my mistress” in verse 8, indicates the continuing power of the social structure. Mbuwayesengo (1997:32) argues that Hagar’s response to Sarai’s attempts to frustrate her was to flee and she describes this fleeing as the sign of hopelessness and helplessness. Hagar did not know to whom she could turn so she took refuge in the wilderness. This was the only way she could take her life into her own hands. In chapter 16, Sarai is portrayed as uncommitted to justice and in chapter 21, it goes a step further, she was plainly unjust.

According to the narrator’s report in 21:10, Sarai turned an everyday affair into an excuse to free herself of a competitive heir and expressed this underlying motive as the basis of the rejection of the slave woman and her son. She declared that, “The son of the slave woman shall not be an heir with Isaac, my son.” For Sarai, the inheritance was at stake and this provoked the expulsion of Hagar. Schwantes³⁹ affirms that, “the exclusion of Hagar and her son amount to the death penalty in the world of that time, there was no way to survive alone”. He notes further that in the semi-nomadic life, the solitary or wandering person is a condemned one, as can be seen in the case of Cain in Genesis. When Abram sent mother and son into the desert, he doomed them to death. Teubal (1990: xxii) stresses that although Hagar resolved the problem of Sarai’s barrenness, seemingly, Sarai had no feeling for her *Shifhah* (maidservant). Teubal argues that Sarai’s only action toward her maid was hostile and cruel. She treated Hagar harshly and banished mother and child after she had her own son. The narrator portrays Abram as reluctant to do what Sarai ordered him to do - to expel Hagar and her son. Mbuwayesango (1997:33) notes that the expulsion of Hagar and her son seemed to be very unfair of Abram, because Hagar was in a desperate situation and had fulfilled the most important requirement of patriarchy for a woman, childbearing. Nonetheless, she was rejected and abused by patriarchy, together with Ishmael, who did not qualify as Abram’s heir. In a similar way today, “children are hurt or killed because they are no longer under the father’s authority” (Delaney 1990:237).

³⁹ <http://www.miltonschwantes.com> (visited 2007-06-12).

It is beyond doubt that Hagar was physically abused. The narrator (not Hagar or Sarai) uses a harsh word to indicate what she suffered at the hands of Sarai. The Hebrew word also indicates that she was humiliated. Having improved her status by becoming a concubine, she became a slave once again. When she was given to Abram as concubine in order to “edify” Sarai, she was definitely exploited, because no one asked for her opinion. When the narrator lets the ‘Angel of the Lord’ speak of her “suffering” without further explaining it, one must assume that the narrator expected the readers to discern what it entailed. The narrator expects readers (even from the point of view of his time), to feel that Hagar had been oppressed and that God does not tolerate oppression.

On the other hand, it is not that straightforward to conclude that in the narrator’s eyes Hagar was turned into a sexual object. The custom of surrogate motherhood is not directly challenged. Given Hagar’s status as a slave, she could not necessarily have expected a different treatment. Perhaps the narrator does indeed accept the custom, although it is not explicitly justified either. In this respect, the narrator is reticent.



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4.7 Views on the role of the narrator in Genesis 16 and 21: 8 –21

The role played by the narrator in the story of Hagar is viewed differently by different authors. Some authors argue that the narrator of Genesis 16 and 21: 8 –21 reports in favour of Sarai and against Hagar. Others are of the opinion that the narrator sympathizes with Hagar. Some others are in favour of the view that Hagar was oppressed by the customary laws of their time and not by the narrator. In the following subsection, we shall investigate the narrator’s disposition to Hagar from the views of different authors.

4.7.1 Views on the narrator’s response to Hagar

In what follows, we shall examine various positions on the narrator’s response to Hagar.

4.7.1.1 Does the narrator sympathize with Hagar?

Position 1

For Von Rad (1972:190), the narrator seems to be most sympathetic toward Hagar, although she may be seen as offending against rights and custom. Fretheim (1994:453) also supports the position that the narrator sympathizes with Hagar because he notices her suffering. The narrator further portrays Hagar as the person of faith, who was ready to wait for a future that would contain a new form of freedom. She knew that God sees and hears the afflicted; hence, she could rest in the knowledge that God keeps promises. Additionally, Von Rad argues that the narrator could not openly favour Hagar, because the child (Ishmael) so conceived in defiance or in little faith could not be the heir of the promise. As Baldwin (1986:58) observes, the narrator pictures doubt in the mind of Sarai as to whether such a child would be the son of the promise (v.2). The narrator writes from within the custom and social culture of the day and he was bound to comply with the custom and laws of that culture (cf. Von Rad 1961:191).

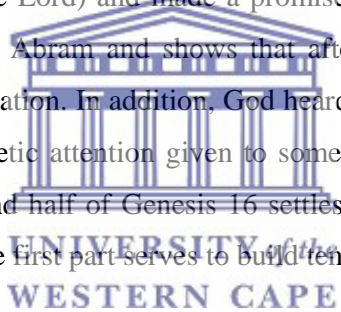
Likewise, Brueggemann (1982:151) affirms that the narrator rendered a moral judgement against the alternative device for securing a son, though it is attested as a proper legal practice elsewhere in the biblical period. He regards the narrator as being judgmental to Sarai and Abram for failing to believe the promise but instead they took the promise into their own hands, being unwilling to wait for God to work his inscrutable purpose. It can be assumed that Brueggemann also supports the view that the narrator sympathizes with Hagar from a moral and ethical point of view. At this point, it can be added that the narrator may also have been writing about the customs of a distant past to which he does not necessarily feel bound. In the narrative setting itself, the narrator has to make use of the customs, but this does not mean that he accepts them as being good.

According to Carr (1986:59), by virtue of his retrospective view, the narrator picks up the most important events, traces the casual and motivational connections among them and gives us an organized, coherent account. In the unfolding of events of the story, Hagar was voiceless up to the point where she met with God.⁴⁰ Carr is of the opinion that a narrator only focuses on the most important events, those that contribute to the unfolding of the events, and he eliminates all other information. If this is what happened in the story of Hagar, then it may not be that the narrator was against Hagar. The narrator's voice is the voice of authority since he knows the real as well as the intended consequences of the character's action. He unfolds

⁴⁰ Teubal (1990: xxii) argues that keeping Hagar silent is abusive. How could she not comment when her sexual services are to be used by the patriarch? Teubal says this is because Hagar is depicted as having no authority over her destiny; when she ran away from her mistress Sarai, the angel commanded her to return.

the events of the story with or without attention to the feelings of the reader. For instance, in Genesis 21:13-21, the reader might wish for the freer future for Hagar at this point, but Hagar moved with only what was possible in that situation, to trust in the word of God that the future would bring a new hope.

The narrator may be criticized for being silent in extreme cases, in which he is expected to comment. This appears to be the case in many verses in chapter 16, where the narrator decides not to comment on the feelings of Hagar. However, sometimes a narrator makes room for many thoughts and reflections, and is in no hurry to prescribe one idea or the other to the reader. It is also remarkable that God is not introduced as a character in the first part of Genesis 16. Sarai and Abram acted without God's intervention, making it impossible to suggest that God approved of their actions. In the second part of the narrative, God spoke to Hagar (through the Angel of the Lord) and made a promise to her (16:10). This promise is similar to the promise made to Abram and shows that after all, Hagar did receive a new status, as the mother of a great nation. In addition, God heard Hagar's affliction (16:11). This phrase is used only of sympathetic attention given to someone unjustly oppressed. Thus, it can be concluded that the second half of Genesis 16 settles some doubts raised by the first part. The narrator's silence in the first part serves to build tension.



Position 2

In the last section, we have shown that for Von Rad, although the narrator sympathizes with Hagar, his great reticence in this respect may show that he does not want the reader to judge or condemn, but rather simply to see and hear. Teubal disagrees that the narrator sympathizes with Hagar. She comments on Hagar's voiceless situation arguing that the most striking fact about Hagar is that (when she was given to Abram) she never uttered a word (1990: xxi). Nadar Sarojini (2006:78) agrees with Mercy Amba Oduyoye that it is the patriarchal Bible, which silences the voices of women, whether as victims of rape or as agents in their own right; everything about women is filtered through the voice of the narrator, who is a male. On this point, Fretheim (1994:454) states that, "With this status⁴¹, she [Hagar] possesses no choice and no voice in becoming a surrogate mother; she is simply taken and given to Abram". Moreover, Fretheim claims that, however much Hagar may have accepted the

⁴¹ Hagar is Sarai's trusted servant; she no doubt came out of Egypt with Abram and his family. She is Sarai's property (See Gen. 12:16).

customs of the time, she had no powers or rights if she was mistreated by those in authority over her.

4.7.1.2 Is God an enemy?

Teubal states that Hagar had three enemies,⁴² Sarah, God, and the narrator. Fretheim (1994:453) agrees that, according to the narrator, Hagar had enemies, but for him, they were only Abram and Sarai. Abram became an enemy by giving authority to Sarai to do as she willed with Hagar. Apparently, he had no regard for the effect the decision might have on Hagar, and Sarai inflicted pain on Hagar. He concludes that Abram did not handle this conflict very well.

Similarly, Mbuwayesango (1997:34) regards God as one of Hagar's enemies. In her opinion, the role played by God in the Genesis narrative is disturbing. In the first narrative, God is presented as endorsing patriarchy; God told Hagar to go back to Sarai where she was neither happy nor comfortable. In the second narrative, God endorsed the banishment of Hagar and her son. For Teubal, the biblical intent was to focus on males therefore; the male narrators chose to emphasize certain events and forget others, according to the needs of the times in which they wrote. Teubal's submission is that the narrator oppressed Hagar in favour of the patriarchal custom. From a feminist point of view, she argues that what is customary or legal is not necessary right. Patriarchal customs were legal and the accepted norm of the times, but looking at it through modern eyes, it was an unfair system. Teubal (1990:2) insists that the narrator in the Genesis 16 narrative focuses on the male role to the detriment of Hagar and this bias has deprived Hagar of her female spiritual experience. Thus, Teubal's emphasis is the bias of the narrator, who writes from a patriarchal point of view.

Fretheim (1994:454) differs with Teubal that the narrator is Hagar's enemy. Instead, he argues that, "The narrator never calls her a slave, but a maidservant". He also does not regard God as an enemy of Hagar. He states that, "The narrator pictures God as remaining focused on Hagar, Sarai and Abram sent Hagar away, not God". Sanders share the same opinion that

⁴² Teubal (1990: xxii) notes that God ordered her to go back to her oppressor, although Sarai abused and used Hagar for her benefits. The narrator treated her unfairly to favour the patriarchal system of the day. Teubal (1990:20) claims that this is because the Genesis story is a patriarchal narrative and the intent is to draw the attention of the reader to the activities of the male.

“God is not willing to abandon Hagar”.⁴³ (Sanders 2002:11). God appeared on the scene on behalf of this oppressed woman as one day, God would for oppressed Israel. Fretheim comments that, “When God directs Hagar to return to Sarai and to submit to her and Hagar obeys, the narrator pictures Hagar as someone who was obedient to God and willing to wait for the promise of a son” (1994:454). The salvation of Hagar also focuses on the promise of a son. According to the narrator, Hagar would not find salvation in being freed from Sarai and Abram yet but God responded to her affliction and made promises. The report of the narrator states that unlike Sarai and Abram, God addressed her by name and drew her into conversation rather than reduce her to silence (vv. 8, 13). For the first time she spoke. Sanders remarks that, “She is also profoundly empowered by the promise that God will make of her offspring Ishmael a great nation” (2002:10).

That the narrator operated from within the customary laws is strongly highlighted by Teubal. She agrees with Von Rad that the narrator was influenced by the custom and the social culture of the day but she does not agree that the narrator sympathizes with Hagar.

4.7.1.3 Hagar oppressed by customs of the day and not by the narrator

Westermann⁴⁴ (1987:237) views are not clear on the issue of whether the narrator sympathizes with Hagar or is against her. However, he mentions that the narrative in its written form is part of J’s patriarchal story. This could mean that the narrator, whom we assume was a male, could not be against the patriarchal custom of the day, which is today seen as unfair to women. On this point, perhaps a line should be drawn between the patriarchal system of the day and the position of the narrator at the time. It would seem unfair that the narrator should take the blame for the patriarchal system and the custom of the day, which oppressed Hagar and the status of maidservants (cf. Teubal 1990). Walton (1997:42) states that slave women or bondswomen were considered as both property and legal extensions of their mistress. As a result, it would be possible for Sarai to have Hagar perform a variety of household tasks as well as using her as a surrogate for her own barren womb.

In addition, Alter (1996:67) confirms that Hagar belonged to Sarai as property, and the ensuing complications of their relationship build on that fundamental fact. Therefore, the narrator treated Hagar in accordance with her slave status. Hagar had very little to say in this

⁴³ The angel of the Lord found her, and gave her a task. God promised that she would be the mother of a great multitude and she would bear a son, whom she would call Ishmael, because God has heard her affliction. She returned as a woman treated as a human being by God and equipped with inner strength.

⁴⁴ Westermann (1987:240) does not believe that the narrator blames Hagar for breaking the law; the narrator only plays a reporting role, reporting the incidents that happened in the story. Hamilton (1990:447) argues that if anyone deserves to be blamed in this situation, all the characters in the story are faulty; Hagar showed some pride, Sarai showed false blame, and Abram demonstrated false neutrality. Hamilton does not regard God as one of the characters and his emphasis is not that much on the role of the narrator.

situation based on the custom of the day. The same situation occurred in the case of Rachel (Genesis 30) as we are not told by the narrator that there was any negotiation with Bilhah (Rachel's maidservant). Bilhah also had no voice in the plan. It was an instruction from Rachel to Jacob; the voice of the maidservant was not heard. Sanders (2002:11) states that the plan might seem preposterous to us, but archaeologists have discovered evidence that suggests that this was a custom of the times.

On his part, Hamilton (1990:447) considers the position of the narrator between the two women (Sarai and Hagar). He argues that the narrator treated both women equally but the customary laws were against Hagar. Like Westermann, he does not specifically address the question of whether the narrator sympathizes with Hagar or not. He only emphasizes that the treatment of the two women (Hagar and Sarai) by the narrator was equal and fair. One could only note that his view falls within that of the group, which claims that the narrator writes from and was guided by the customary laws of the day.

4.8 The Church and the interpretation of the Bible

The aim of the previous subsection was to find out whether the narrator could be listed as one of Hagar's enemies or not. From the foregoing, it is safe to conclude that the narrator did not abuse or mistreat Hagar and cannot be listed as one of Hagar's enemies. Instead, he sympathized with her. The aim of the narrator was to narrate the story in an attempt to highlight certain issues, but not to free Hagar out of her slave status. He did this without having to give Hagar a better treatment and status, as this was not the case for slaves/maidservants of the time. The narrator had to be true to the custom of the time. Von Rad notes that the narrator wrote from within the custom and social culture of the day. Anything less or more by the narrator on the situation of Hagar would compromise the realism of the narrative and cause confusion to the reader, given the status of maidservants in the ancient Israel. Freitheim concludes that, "With this status, she [Hagar] possesses no choice and no voice in becoming a surrogate mother" (1994:454).

The narrator is accused of being biased when the reader starts to sympathize with Hagar. It should be noted that in most cases, the reader is unfortunately, not in the customary and social position of the narrator, and reads the story from a different angle. According to Freitheim (1994:489), the modern reader may tend to side with Abram rather than Sarai on the issue of sending Hagar and Ishmael away. Yet, some such move must occur if the two sons

were to shape their separate future in consistence with God's choice. This was a historical and theological reality for the narrator. Moreover, the objective of the narrator seems to be on target, even if the means are unnecessarily harsh. He depicts Hagar as a woman of strong faith, who was obedient to God and who was willing to wait for the promise of a son by God, unlike Sarai and Abram.

From the above discussion, one other issue comes to the fore. The community of faith could be so centred on speaking of God that the theme of the seeing God is ignored. With Hagar, the situation was different. The report of the narrator shows that Hagar spoke to God and he further portrays God as a Creator who makes promises to even those who do not belong to the people of God. This could mean that God acts in both word and deed outside the boundaries of what we normally call the community of faith. Furthermore, Fretheim (1994:454) states that the chosen people cannot confine God's work and ways; God did not exclusively commit himself to Abram and Sarai.



It can also be observed that God chooses to work through complex situations and imperfect human beings for His divine purposes. God works with individuals on the scene; He does not perfect people before deciding to work through them. In addition, God chose the lineage of Isaac and not that of Ishmael.

4.8.1 Problem of interpretation

The problem of interpretation of the Bible is hardly a modern phenomenon, even if at times that is what some have believed. The Bible itself bears witness that its interpretation can be a difficult matter. In the Acts of Apostle, an Ethiopian of the first century found himself in the same situation with respect to a passage from a book of Isaiah (Isa. 53:7-8) and recognized that he needed an interpreter. The church therefore, should lead the initiative of interpreting the Bible because, "no prophecy of Scriptures is a matter of private interpretation" (2 Peter 1: 20).

According to Scholer & Johnson (2002: xxx), the appeal to Scriptures' authority and how to interpret and apply Scriptures are in some ways two sides of the same coin. This is to say that

the authority of Scriptures as witness to the transforming and redeeming power of Jesus Christ can be jeopardized if one's reading of Scriptures does not reflect its life-giving core. Distorted readings of Scriptures can make its message meaningless and void. Furthermore, how the church handles Scriptures, how the church reads Scriptures and how the church embodies Scriptures, become a reflection of God's transforming work in and through the body of Christ. The authors argue that a primary purpose of biblical interpretation must be to present a faithful reading of the text to shape and empower the church toward a life characterized by the central gospel message.

According to Grant & David (1963:7), the interpreters of the Scriptures have to realize that like all Christians, they stand not only in the community, which is the church but also in the community, which is the world outside. Much of the story, which they read in the Bible, is the story of smaller groups, told from the inside by one within, but there is also the outside history, and the two overlap. Moreover, if Christians concentrate solely on the inner story, their understanding will be mythological, irrational, and pietistic. Alternatively, if they know nothing but the story of the world outside, their myth will disappear in a matter-of-fact way; their sense of God's working in the world will be lost. To avoid losing this divine message, MacArthur (2005:xvi) suggests that the church should teach that all who place their faith in Jesus Christ are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual body, the church and the bride of Christ, who Himself is the Head.

Besides, sometimes the Bible is also used to justify certain types of abusive practices. In the light of this, this section serves as a challenge to the church to devote more attention to biblical interpretation to avoid simplistic readings of biblical passages either to legitimate or to condemn forms of abuse. It is worthwhile here to highlight a few examples in the case of Hagar where the Bible could be misinterpreted and misread. We shall offer three examples, in which interpretation can go wrong. Even though this study has used the method of narrative analysis, in this section we shall show that it is not the only method to interpret the Scriptures, and it may not be advisable to consider only one method of biblical interpretation.

For instance, there is a view that allegorical interpretation makes the Bible fruitful to its readers. This is important, but according to Jonker & Conradie (2005:11), it should be clear that allegorical interpretation can easily lead to far-fetched speculation (as will be shown later). Again, feminist interpretation has an agenda of seeking justice and equality for all

people, especially for women. Therefore, in the case of Hagar, feminists such as Teubal argue that Hagar was raped and mistreated. Such forms of committed reading of the Bible can also be fruitful. Historical interpretation (reading the text from the angle of the first audience) can be used to discipline other modes of interpretation, including allegorical and feminist interpretation. Jonker & Conradie (2005:19) believe that it was an important insight of the modern era that Scriptures have to be interpreted historically; the text has to be interpreted taking into account the context in which it was written.

In this chapter, historical interpretation and narrative analysis will be used later to discipline feminists and allegorical modes of interpretations. We shall examine the three methods of interpretation, allegorical, feminist and historical interpretation. Thereafter, we shall consider certain issues as examples of how the story of Hagar could easily mislead when interpreted casually.

4.8.1.1 Allegorical, feminist and historical methods of interpretation

At this point, we shall examine three methods of interpretation, namely the allegorical, the feminist and the historical.



4.8.1.1.1 Allegorical interpretation

Wayne Blank & Nigel B. Mitchell⁴⁵ define an allegory⁴⁶ as a symbolic representation of one thing by another, and an allegorical interpretation as an interpretation, which is a hermeneutical (interpretive) method used to uncover hidden or symbolic meanings of a biblical text. It is rooted in the techniques developed by Greek thinkers who attempted to overcome the problems posed by literal interpretations of ancient Greek myths. Further, allegorical interpretation is a method, in which the literal meaning of the text is superseded by an interpretation, in which each element is understood to signify another. Thus, an allegory is a text, which requires an allegorical interpretation to discern the true meaning.

Jonker & Conradie (2005:10) highlight certain features of allegorical interpretation. Allegorical interpretation is useful because it allows an old text to be made meaningful and

⁴⁵ See <http://www./jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/9201.htm> (visited 2007-06-23).

⁴⁶ According to Grant & Tracy (1963:19), the word, allegorically (allegoroumena) is from a verb commonly used by Greek interpreters, especially by Stoics who interpreted allegorically and explained away the myths concerning the gods. According to these exegetes, some of whom were Paul's contemporaries, "saying one thing and signifying something other than what is said is called allegory".

relevant to a later audience. However, allegorical interpretation is for the initiated few who are competent to appreciate the hidden deeper meaning of the text. Ordinary people could comprehend these deeper mysteries only by accepting the doctrinal authority of the church or by participating in the sacramental ministry of the church. If one wishes to uphold the authority of the biblical texts, allegorical interpretation provides an excellent tool. Jonker & Conradie (2005:10) conclude that, “It should be clear that allegorical interpretation can easily lead to far-fetched speculation, almost anything can be read into the text”.

Today it is often assumed that all application of texts involves a certain degree of allegory. It is tempting to apply what is said in one context to another context by referring to a deeper meaning, which remains unchanged. For instance, it is possible to claim that the story of Hagar shows that the Bible accepts slavery and the abuse of women. Christians can then follow this example today. Nevertheless, the dangers also remain. Is this really what the story of Hagar wishes to tell us?

4.8.1.1.2 Feminist interpretation

Pam Morris (1993:1) defines feminism as a political perception based on two fundamental premises, namely, that gender difference is the foundation of structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice and that the inequality of the sexes is not the result of the biological necessity but is produced by cultural construction of gender differences. In Morris’ view, this perception provides feminism with its agenda. For Newton (1990:157), the feminist critic’s role as interpreter is to determine the degree to which sexist ideology controls the text, which involves the refusal to accept any separation between aesthetics and morals. Newton further states that the goal of this form of feminist interpretation is political, since its aim is to create a situation in which literature will no longer function as propaganda for furthering sexist ideology.

Moreover, Goldingay (2003:392) comments that feminist’s interpretation starts from women’s experience of life, especially their experience of being held down and held back by men. He illustrates the method with the account of the creation of man and woman in Genesis 1-3. The fact that the woman was formed after the man and for the man had been taken to imply that the woman was intrinsically secondary. Feminists argue that the creation of man before woman does not imply her inferiority:

Feminist interpretation begins from the conviction that women are as fully human as men and are intellectually, morally and spiritually as strong as men. It then re-examines the biblical text and suggests that the interpretation of Scriptures has been affected by patriarchy, which is the assumption that human life should be lived in the light of hierarchy of relationship that gives authority to certain groups, such as the educated, the members of certain families or particularly the men (Goldingay 2003:392).

There are many different types of feminist hermeneutics but here we shall only mention three principal forms, namely the radical form, the neo-orthodox form, and the critical form. The radical form denies all authority to the Bible, maintaining that it has been produced by men simply with a view to confirming man's age-old domination of woman. The neo-orthodox form accepts the Bible as prophetic and as potentially of service, at least to the extent that it takes sides with the oppressed and invariably, women. It highlights whatever in the Bible favours the liberation of women and the acquisition of their rights. The critical form seeks to rediscover the status and role of women disciples in the life of Jesus and in the Pauline churches. The feminist interpreters of the Bible have succeeded, often better than men, in detecting the presence, the significance and the role of women in the Bible, in Christian origin and in the church. Feminine sensitivity helps to unmask and correct certain commonly accepted interpretations, which were tendentious and sought to justify the male domination of women. For instance, with regard to the Old Testament, several studies have striven to come to a better understanding of the image of God. The God of the Bible is not a projection of a patriarchal mentality but God is Father/Mother and the God of tenderness and maternal love.

According to Elna Mouton & Franziska Andrag-Meyer (2005:204), feminists are re-reading classic texts to deny the subordination of women. Dealing with those texts that have been used throughout the history of the church to sanction the subordination of women is one of the most essential functions of feminist reading strategies. Feminists often read contra-texts to show the equal value of men and women, thus balancing texts that seem to affirm the subordination of women by refocusing texts that deny this subordination. This is an important strategy for feminist readers. Mouton & Andrag-Meyer cite an example from the reading of Ephesians 5:23, which seemingly subordinates women and Galatians 3:28 that explicitly states that we are equals through the work of Christ, regardless of our social status or gender.

It can be noted that feminists are often interested in narratives; “Feminists and womanists have argued for the power of story-telling for a long time” (Sarojini 2006:78). When it comes to biblical narratives, feminists point out that the way stories are told often contributes to the subordination of women. Since the stories are told from a male perspective, it makes the inferior place of women seem natural.

As the above discussion shows, feminist hermeneutics is a committed form of interpretation. Its point of departure is the equality of women and men and it is sensitive to issues that seem to reflect negatively on women or support male domination. In this respect, it has often helped to show biases within the biblical text. However, because feminist interpretation starts with women’s experience of being oppressed, it can become a type of allegorical interpretation. A hidden meaning, open only to a specific group, can be imposed on the plain meaning of the text.

4.8.1.1.3 Historical interpretation

Klingbeil (2003:403) notes that historical criticism developed during the age of enlightenment and sought to transcend subjective cultural limitations to establish the historical meaning of the text for all time. The method seeks to uncover the repressed or forgotten historical, religious and literary realities that informed the biblical tradition. According to Sproul,⁴⁷ the aim of the historical approach is to understand first what the text in question would have meant to its original hearers. The second task, which follows only after a clear understanding of a text has been reached through the completion of the primary task, is to find how this text applies in our modern context. Sproul advises Bible interpreters should first ask themselves the question; would this interpretation have made sense and have been understandable to the original hearers or addressees who first received this section of the Bible? If the answer to this question is no, the historical interpreter must return to the text to find what it would have meant in its original context.

Klingbeil (2003:401) notes that the adjective, historical, emphasizes the interest of the modern era to determine the meaning of a given text in its original historical context in order to establish the historical meaning and circumstances of that text. Thus, the historical-critical method⁴⁸ is an indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of an ancient text.

⁴⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical> (visited 2007-05-12).

⁴⁸ Klingbeil (2003:402) argues that the most important approaches, which are grouped together under the

The assumption is that the Bible, in as much as it is the “Word of God in human language”, has been composed by human authors in all its various parts and in all the sources that lie behind them. Certain elements of this method of interpretation are very ancient; they were used by Greek commentators of classical literature and, much later in the course of the patristic period, by authors such as Origen, Jerome and Augustine. The Reformation made historical interpretation its main method of dealing with the Bible; “The reformers understood that the meaning of a text had to be determined by its historical context” (Jonker 2005:24). For the reformers, the Bible was a literal account of historical facts.

Later, historical critics no longer believed this premise. It is through historical interpretation that authors found it difficult to attribute the entire text of the Pentateuch to a single Mosaic authorship. According to Jonker (2005:23), such historical interpretation abolished the practice of denying contradictions and uncertainties through harmonizing techniques, and is thus, much more honest and realistic about the plausibility of biblical narrative events. For Sproul, the historical method will never take a surface “plain meaning” interpretation of the text unless it first qualifies whether or not the text should be read differently within the context that is found in the Bible; especially regarding biblical genres such as parables, prophecy, apocalyptic, poetry, wisdom literature and figures of speech and idioms. Nevertheless, Sproul states that historical interpretation of the biblical text is not the same as considering the Bible as fallible and that most of those who make use of this interpretive method consider the Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God. Additionally, the method of interpretation simply implies that the text is to be interpreted according to its appropriate literary style. As an example, he states that historical narrative is to be interpreted as historical literature.

However, the problem with historical interpretation is that it assumes that we can get a clear and unbiased view of the past. It is seldom possible to get clarity about the time and conditions of the writing of biblical narratives. It is also true that our own interests will colour our interpretations. What historical criticism does, to some extent, is to apply the brake on allegorical interpretation and on committed interpretations that encroach too blatantly on the

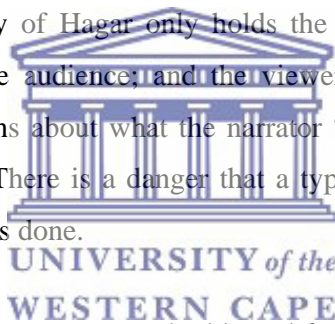
heading, historical are, *source criticism*, which deals with the sources utilized by the ancient author, the written stage of a document, textual inconsistencies, repetition, doublets and stylistic differences. The second is *traditional history*, which is mainly interested in determining the pre-compositional stage of the texts when stories and sayings were composed, retold, recited and preserved over long periods. Klingbeil concludes that historical criticism in all its incarnations is based upon specific philosophical presuppositions, which try to bring uncontaminated conditions to a discipline dealing with real history, real people, real language, and real theological perspectives.

text. In conjunction with other methods, historical interpretation remains an important resource.

It is important to note that allegorical and feminist interpretation can go wrong, hence, end up being disciplined by historical interpretation and narrative analysis. We shall shortly look into this possibility.

4.8.2 The narrator abuses Hagar

It is easy to accuse the narrator of being also abusive in the story of Hagar because he does not comment on serious issues or allow Hagar to speak so that reader would be aware of her feelings. This could promote abusive actions by the readers or be used to justify certain elements of abuse in real life. We should understand nonetheless, that the narrator here does nothing, offers no judgement, expresses no opinion and has no physical form in or out of the story. The narrator in this story of Hagar only holds the camera, which determines what information is passed on to the audience; and the viewers look at events, which unfold through this camera. Conclusions about what the narrator “really” wants to say have to be justified by narrative analysis. There is a danger that a type of allegorical meaning will be attached to the story unless this is done.



One possible view is that the narrator cannot be blamed for what happens in the story as he operates from a customary point of view. The intention of the narrator is to show how customs were observed; Hagar was abused by the system and Sarai, not by the narrator. According to Westermann (1987:35), the narrator simply reports customary behaviour of the past and passes no judgement.

To avoid accusing the narrator of abusing Hagar, it is important to consider the time of the narrative and the customary laws of that time. It is unusual for a narrator to narrate stories, which have no customary and historical background, as this background will influence the story, with or without the narrator’s permission. Here, it is important to identify the mode of interpretation we use to reach a conclusion. To get to the background and customary laws of the day and to understand the angle, from which the narrator speaks, we need to know something about the historical situation and its customs. This will enable the reader to find out whether the events in the story were in line with the customary laws of the day. If the laws of the day were bad and abusive, the narrator may not necessarily take the blame for

that. To arrive at this point, historical interpretation becomes a useful tool. However, the problem with this is that it is still possible to claim that the narrator approves of the customary laws that he describes. To go beyond this, other methods may need to be applied.

Narrative analysis may help to determine whether the narrator really has no interest in Hagar and ignores her situation. As Jonker (2005:100) notes, time is an important factor in analysing a narrative. Hawk (2003:540) also confirms that narratives utilize time as a means of organizing, explaining and evaluating experience. According to Hawk, telling stories requires decision about how to situate it in time. Where and how will the story begin? How and when will it end? In interpreting the story of Hagar, the distinction between narrated time and narrative time is particularly important. The narrative time clearly shows where the interest of the narrator lies.

In Genesis 16, the first six verses focus on Abram and Sarai who used Hagar. Hagar had no say in the events, which must have taken several months (narrated time). The next seven verses describe a single scene within a short narrated time and deal with Hagar's meeting with God. The scene ends with the birth of her son. Here, the narrative time indicates that the narrator is interested in Hagar. In Genesis 21, attention is also given to Hagar. The story does not end when Abram sent her out to the desert because the narrator shows interest in her further welfare. This episode ends when it is stated that God was with the boy (21:20).

One can also look at the portrayal of the characters. According to Fretheim (1994:455), the narrator pictures Hagar as a person of faith. In Genesis 16:13, she recognized the messenger's voice as the voice of God, though he offered no word of self-identification. The narrator pictures Hagar as one who listened, understood and believed the promise – unlike Sarai and Abram who looked for alternative means to speed up the process of promise and could not wait. The narrator contrasts Hagar with Sarai and Abram, who could not trust the promise of a son. God further made a promise to Hagar. Ishmael would be free, roving the wilderness, and would not be submissive to oppressive people like Abram and Sarai. The narrator again pictures Hagar as trusting God's promise that the future would bring a new form of freedom. Salvation for Hagar must take the form of waiting (which Sarai and Abram failed to observe), but she knew that God sees and hears the afflicted, so she could rest in the knowledge that God would keep the promise.

From the above, it is clear that one cannot assume that the narrator abuses Hagar by ignoring her plight. In both stories, the narrator shows interest in her.

4.8.3 Is God on the side of the abusers?

It is easy to jump to conclusions when a text is read at face value, without using the tools of narrative analysis to determine the point the narrator wants to make. For instance, Mbuwayesengo (1997:34) asserts that the role played by God in the Genesis narrative is disturbing. In the first narrative, God is presented as endorsing patriarchy because he told Hagar to go back to Sarai. In the second narrative, God endorsed the banishment of Hagar and her son.

However, in the narrative context, God is not pictured as the enemy of Hagar, but as a councillor, who respected Hagar by calling her by name (16:8), the only character in the story who did this. God listened to her and Hagar understood Him. This God is not confined to only those who are within his kraal, the chosen ones. This “God remains focused on Hagar; Sarai and Abram have sent Hagar away, not God. God appears on the scene on behalf of this oppressed one, as one day God would for oppressed Israel” (Fretheim 1994:452). Fretheim argues further that Hagar had to return to Sarai, she needed to get this matter resolved because she would not find salvation in being freed from Sarai yet. After that, God responded to the affliction and made promises to her. God addressed her by name, unlike Sarai, and for the first time Hagar spoke. God was present with her, drew her into conversation and did not reduce her to silence.

Fretheim (1994:453) states that Hagar’s confession focused on a God who sees rather than a God who speaks. Her experience mirrors those of Leah and Jacob (Gen. 29:32; 31:42) and Israel in Egypt whom God also “sees” and delivers. God made promises to this woman and did not practise patriarchy against Hagar. God restored her dignity as a human being and did not humiliate her as Sarai did. He entered into a dialogue with Hagar and made promises to her, unlike Sarai who took decisions on her behalf and treated her as an object. According to the narrator, God cannot be seen as favouring the patriarchal system here, but as being against it. Although all that Abram and Sarai did was approved under customary laws and the patriarchal system, God disapproved of it and did not endorse it when he met Hagar in the wilderness. Schneider remarks that, “It is significant that Hagar is the only woman in the

Hebrew Bible reported to dialogue with the Deity in earthly manifestation, at least the Deity messenger” (2004:49). Even the name Hagar gave to the well also centred on the God who saw, who cared for and respected her.

4.8.4 Did Abram rape Hagar?

Aruna Gnanadason (1996:105) explains that a person is raped whenever she/he⁴⁹ is forced to have sexual intercourse with a man without wanting to, whether or not physical violence is used. She claims that rape happens without the woman’s consent and against her will; it is a crime of violence and not of passion. Fear of it restricts women’s mobility and freedom of movement; it violates physical safety, and sexual and psychological integrity. The act of rape is not only marked by violence, but by a form of sexual terrorism. It is dehumanizing and humiliating; it tortures, and results in the loss of the ability to trust; it violates freedom and identity, and it is life threatening. The consequences for the rape victims are severe and life-long. Bafana & Puleng (2003:19) also emphasize that rape is more often an expression of attempted power and conquest than of mere sexual pleasure. As a solution to the rape crisis, Mercy Oduyoye (1998:34) argues that we need to challenge societal beliefs and cultural values that promote and condone sexual violence; the silence surrounding rape in society, including the church, denotes its acceptance and allows it to continue. It should be noted here that in ancient Israel, rape was not taken seriously when done to a slave woman; it was not a punishable crime (Burrows 1962:135).

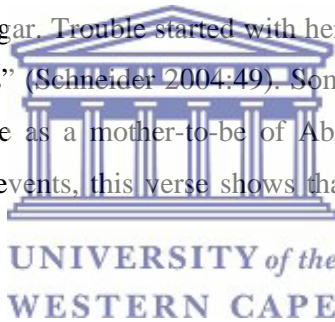
Based on current understanding of human rights, sex without consent constitutes rape and there is no evidence that Hagar gave her consent to the sexual intercourse with Abram. Therefore, according to the modern standards and our definition of rape, Abram did rape Hagar, that is, if Hagar indeed did not consent to the act. This judgment makes some believers uncomfortable, but without effective historical interpretation, such statements could be justifiable. It is through historical interpretation that one can be able to dismiss such a dangerous and narrow interpretation of the Scriptures.

The truth of the matter is that Hagar gained status from having sex with Abram. It was more advantageous to her than to anyone else in the household of Abram. The action added more

⁴⁹ Khumalo Bafana & Lenkabula Puleng (2003: 18) quotes the South African white paper on social security in which rape refers to sexual intercourse that is coupled with violence, force and coercion. However, in South Africa, the term rape has been limited to women in the sense that it is defined as unlawful and intentional sexual intercourse with a female without her consent.

value to Hagar’s life. Furthermore, this was within the custom of the day. According to Fretheim (1994:452), Hagar too may have accepted the customs of the time. In the case of Rachel and Leah,⁵⁰ we are not told that maidservants were against this practice, because at that time it brought status and recognition to them. The narrator reports that, “When she knew that she was pregnant; she looked down on her mistress” (Gen. 16:4). According to the law of the day, Hagar’s pregnancy was a victory and a means of guaranteeing a better life. Schneider (2004:47) argues that for Sarai to get what she wanted she had to promote Hagar to the status of wife. Sarai was the one who lost status.

On the other hand, the situation of Hagar cannot be compared with that of Tamar who was raped by Amnon (2 Sam. 13:1-22). It may not also compare with that of Dinah who was raped by Shechem (Gen. 34). Denise Ackermann (2001:32) points out that Tamar cried, “This is not done in Israel”. Ackermann notes that Tamar’s body was violated but this was not necessarily the case with Hagar. Trouble started with her conception and “she perpetrates some action toward her mistress” (Schneider 2004:49). Somehow, Hagar diminished Sarai’s status in view of her new place as a mother-to-be of Abram’s child. In the voice of the narrator who is recounting the events, this verse shows that at that stage, Hagar was more than happy with her situation.



From the discussion, one could conclude that Abram did not rape Hagar⁵¹, as it is possible to assume according to the modern standards. Fretheim (1994:453) shows that Sarai allowed Hagar to be a wife to Abram. It is also clear that Hagar was the one who benefited more from this action; this action elevated her status from being a slave woman to becoming a powerful family member. Burrows (1962:138) also confirms that a captive woman whom her captor wished to marry had to be treated with respect. The problem started when she knew she was

⁵⁰ Leah and Rachel had maids, Zilpah and Bilhah. According to Schneider (2004:49), Hagar’s situation was not far from the latter’s; she was promoted to a better status. In the case of Leah and Rachel, their maids bore children “upon the knees” of the mistress, the sons are counted as those of wives, and the maids, because of their relationship with the mistress, inherited with the mistress’ sons. It should be noted that Sarai’s strategy was customary; she should not be condemned on that score. Her decision stemmed not only from an interpretation of God’s action, so that she had to do as she did, but also from a recognition that God works through human agents. Nevertheless, one can criticize Sarai for lack of faith.

⁵¹ Through various methods of interpretation used in this thesis, including historical interpretation, we conclude that Hagar was not raped; one could still claim that she was sexually abused. This follows from her status as slave. Hagar, because of her status as a slave, was at the high risk of being raped and misused, since slaves were properties of their owners. Haas (2003:778) defines slavery as a condition acknowledged in the Pentateuch in which a person is deprived of freedom at least for a period, by being subjected to a master in order that the master may benefit from the labour of the slave. The slaves were there to fulfil the needs of their masters and in that process; they could be sexually abused and raped. Hagar might have willingly consented to be Abram’s concubine because as a slave she had no other means of advancing her status.

pregnant; “and once she knew she had conceived her mistress counted for nothing in her eyes” (Gen. 16:4 - The Jerusalem Bible). Furthermore, ancient Near Eastern parallels show that this was a commonly accepted practice.

4.8.5 Challenge to the church and conclusion

Unless we transform the way in which we read the Bible, not only within the academy but also in our communities of faith, we will perpetuate the justification of the rape and abuse of women (Mercy Oduyoye 1998:80).

Oduyoye’s submission is that biblical scholars who claim to be committed to liberation have to take into account the communities of faith who interpret the Bible and the way in which their interpretations either liberate or oppress. To achieve such transformative reading and interpretation of the Bible, she suggests that liberative academic interpretive resources need to be shared with faith communities so that gender-social transformation can begin. The church should encourage its members who study theology to study modules, which deal with the interpretation of the Bible and share their knowledge with the entire church. This challenge is prompted by the fact that, sometimes because of poor skills of interpretation, the Bible is used to justify certain types of abusive practices. Our challenge is to the church to devote more attention to biblical interpretation to avoid simplistic reading of biblical passages to legitimate or condemn forms of abuse.

It may sound harsh and more conservative to suggest that the church should possess the interpretation of the Bible. In another sense, the church should be enjoined to take responsibility in equipping those who are faced with this enormous task of biblical interpretation. This can be done in the form of well-organized workshops, retreats, and seminars on Bible interpretation, where people could be taught the basics of interpretation and be sensitized to the subject. All these attempts should focus on discouraging the casual interpretation of the Scriptures. Stock asserts that; “the fact of the matter is that every time we find something in the Bible, we have interpreted the Bible. Yes, there are good and bad ways of interpretation, but there is no escape from biblical interpretation”⁵². According to Stein

⁵² Peter Stock: <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/faculty/stuart.php/> (visited 2007-06- 22).

(1994:12), the Bible itself bears witness that its interpretation can be a difficult matter. Alongside texts that are clear, are found passages, which contain elements of obscurity. For instance, when reading certain prophecies of Jeremiah, Daniel pondered at length over their meaning (Dan. 9:2). It is also observed that the letters of the apostle Paul contains some difficult passages.

We have considered how the story of Hagar can be misread and misinterpreted from the examples given in this chapter. It becomes crucial for the church to take initiative and responsibility of training its own people up to a point where they are able to interpret Scriptures responsibly on their own to maintain the dignity and value of Scriptures. This thesis has shown that the interpretation of the Bible is not an easy task and cannot be left uncontrolled. Any damage, which could be done in this process will affect the reputation of the church and compromise her biblical mandate. Crichton declares:

There is the Word of God which the church proclaims and must proclaim before ever men can be brought into the church, and this Word, which is an invitation from God, a word in which a life-giving grace is contained, must meet with a response from man, otherwise it remains dead (Crichton 1964:42).



His stance also is that the church should take responsibility for the interpretation of the Bible. Similarly, Griffith remarks:

The Scriptures is given to the Church and the Church is the communal treasurer of the entire body of believers. Sacred tradition and sacred Scriptures form on sacred deposit of the Word of God, entrusted to the church. The church is the only body, which ought to take responsibility of looking at the correct way of biblical interpretation (1926:28).

Without the adequate interpretation of the Bible, the divine messages could be easily distorted. Therefore, the mission and the relevance of the church depend on the adequate interpretation of the Bible. This research has shown how interpretation can go wrong and affect the preaching and the message of the Word. It has also shown how the Bible can be interpreted to favour certain ideas and how foreign ideas can be imposed on those of the Bible. The church should come to terms with the fact that something needs to be done about the interpretation of the Bible and that it is part of her divine mandate and responsibility to

see to this. According to Griffith (1926:28), the Bible has been given to the church as a sacred manual; the understanding of the mystery of God depends solely on the adequate interpretation of the Bible. It goes without saying that if the Bible loses its impact because of misinterpretation; the church will suffer severely, because the Bible is the heartbeat of the church. MacArthur (2005: xvii) admonishes that as the church, we need to teach cooperation with God to accomplish God's purpose in the world. God's purpose is contained in the Scriptures and this has to be interpreted for the ordinary people in such a way that, it will have a positive impact and make a meaningful difference in their lives.

It is through accurate interpretation of the Bible that the people can experience the miraculous gifts of divine revelation. For example, if we were to look at the suffering of Hagar from the viewpoint of theodicy⁵³, it would require an explicit biblical interpretation method; complex messages such as this can only be understood by means of justified, adequate biblical interpretation⁵⁴.



⁵³ Louw (2000:30) defines theodicy as the means of maintaining God's justice undiminished, to convince believers that God is incapable of injustice; and that everything serves to glorify God. Louw further notes that even suffering must be seen as being allowed by God in order to reveal his justice and his holiness. In the case of Hagar, she suffered and through her suffering, she met God, knew God and received His promises. In the same breath, Louw warns readers to bear in mind that, although suffering and evil in theodicy are regarded to be closely connected, the two are not necessary identical. Suffering as in the case of Hagar refers to the character of human reaction and response to loss, threat, disaster and ailments; evil refers to moral and ethics of good and bad as well as the principle of disruption, lawlessness and destruction. Our point here is that biblical interpretation is not an easy task, and should not be left unattended.

⁵⁴At the tail end of this study, the researcher came across two books which could have been used if found early: Tikva, Frymer-Kensky 2002. *Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of their Stories*. New York: Schocken Books. And LaCocque, Adre 1990. *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

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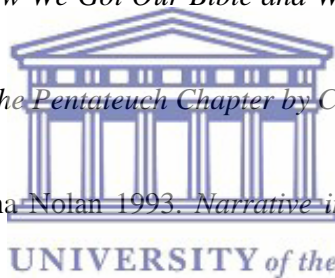
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