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The Meaning of ἀλληγορέω in Galatians 4.24 Revisited

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Abstract

The meaning of the verb ἀλληγορέω stands at the heart of the debate concerning Paul's hermeneutic in Galatians 4.21–31. If by using the term Paul means 'I am interpreting these things allegorically', then the question of Paul's interpretive procedure would be all but answered – he would likely be allegorising as the Greeks did before him and the early church fathers did after. However, if he does not mean this, then the question remains open. This article argues that the phrase ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα means 'these things are symbolic', which would indeed leave this question open. This rendering is best for two reasons: First, the majority of the uses of ἀλληγορέω available in the two hundred or so years surrounding the writing of Galatians mean 'to speak symbolically'. Second, the contextual clues surrounding Paul's use of the term in Galatians itself, such as his call to hear the law in verse 21, strongly suggest such a reading. To prove this thesis, this article provides detailed exposition of the texts in which ἀλληγορέω occurred around the time Paul wrote Galatians before turning to Paul's own use of the term in Galatians 4.24.

Keywords: allegory; Paul; hermeneutics; Old Testament interpretation; typology; literal sense

The meaning of ἀλληγορέω stands at the heart of the debate over Paul's hermeneutic in Galatians 4.21–31.[1] If Paul means 'I am interpreting these things allegorically', then the question of Paul's interpretive procedure would be all but answered—he would likely be allegorising as the Greeks did before him and the early church fathers did after.[2] In this article, I will argue that the phrase ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα means 'these things are symbolic,' which would leave this question open.[3] This rendering is best for two

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[1] Both Origen and Chrysostom discuss the meaning of ἀλληγορέω in their comments about Paul's hermeneutic. Origen reads Paul's use as a straightforward description of his hermeneutic (see *Princ.* 4.2.6). Chrysostom thinks Paul misused the word (see *Hom. Gal.* 4.24). Things have not changed: ἀλληγορέω often receives attention when trying to figure out how Paul was reading the narratives of Sarah and Hagar. See the following: Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, (trans. Donald H. Madvig; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 140; R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture.* (London: SCM Press, 1959) 37–41; Iain W. Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017) 147.

[2] See the following for examples of this translation: CSB, ESV, Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989) 239, 243; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1990) 209–10; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993) 247; Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2011) 295; Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013) 299; A. Andrew Das, *Galatians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014) 479.

[3] Scott and Lincoln are the closest to my argument. Provan criticises translations that use 'allegory', doubting that ἀλληγορέω was associated with the hermeneutic represented by Philo, but he does not investigate whether evidence bears this out. My work complements his by confirming his doubts. Ian W. Scott, *Paul's Way of Knowing:*

reasons: First, a majority of the extant occurrences of ἀλληγορέω available in the two hundred or so years surrounding the writing of Galatians mean 'to speak symbolically'. Second, the contextual clues surrounding the term in Galatians, such as Paul's call to hear the law in verse 21, strongly suggest this reading.

1. To Speak or To Read?

The word ἀλληγορέω occurs fairly late in the Greek corpus, with only a handful of occurrences before the first century CE, most of which are from fragmentary texts. Most scholars interpret it either: (1) to speak allegorically or (2) to read allegorically depending on the context.[4] The difference lies in the agent of the action: in 'to speak' the text or the author is allegorising, whereas the reader is the agent of 'to read'. In definition one, ἀλληγορέω merely denotes a textual trope. In definition two, the interpreter is indicating his method of reading.

2. A Deeper Definitional Problem

The primary evidence contains both of these senses, but it also reveals a level of complexity. For example, if the term means 'to read allegorically', then what exactly does 'reading allegorically' entail? Matthew Harmon thinks ἀλληγορέω means to read a text in light of some sort of external framework.[5] Steven Di Mattei thinks it means to read something as a this-for-that trope.[6] David Dawson argues that it means to construct an extended narratival metaphor that includes a beginning, middle and end.[7] Although these scholars agree that ἀλληγορέω denotes reading, they do not agree on what sort of reading it entails. The same problem occurs for speaking allegorically. If the word refers to a literary phenomenon, what sort of phenomenon is it? Pierre Bonnard argues that the meaning is closer to typology than Philonic allegory.[8] Gerhard Sellin disagrees, arguing that it means allegory (*Allegorie*).[9] F. F. Bruce insinuates that the word refers to something like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.[10] Both definitions struggle to provide clarity past the basic textual-hermeneutical dichotomy.

Story, Experience, and the Spirit (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 239 n20, 249 n24; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Reference to His Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 13. Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture*, 148–50 See also Albrecht Oepke, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater*, 4th ed. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1973) 148; Franz Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief*, 5th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1988) 139.

[4] Most scholars point to Büchsel's article in the *TDNT* as the source of this view. See Friedrich Büchsel, 'Ἀλληγορέω', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (ed. Gerhard Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich; vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 260–3. See also Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, 'Introduction', in *Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 2.

[5] Matthew S. Harmon, 'Allegory, Typology, or Something Else? Revisiting Galatians 4.21–5.1', in *Studies in the Pauline Epistles: Essays in Honor of Douglas J. Moo* (ed. Matthew S. Harmon and Jay E. Smith; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) 150.

[6] Steven Di Mattei, 'Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21–31) in Light of First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics', *NTS* 1 (2006) 106.

[7] David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 7.

[8] Pierre Bonnard and Charles Masson, *L'épitre de saint Paul aux Galates: L'épitre de saint Paul aux Éphésiens* (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1953) 97.

[9] Gerhard Sellin, 'Hagar und Sara: Religionsgeschichtliche Hintergründe der Schriftallegorese Gal 4.21–31' in *Das Urchristentum in seiner literarischen Geschichte: Festschrift für Jürgen Becker zum 65* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999) 67.

[10] Bruce brings up these works as examples of allegories. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 215.

Once ἀλληγορέω is understood, one must then decide what modern phrase captures this type of speaking or reading. For example, Steven Di Mattei claims ἀλληγορέω merely refers to a this-for-that trope.[11] The phrase 'to speak allegorically' probably does not capture that meaning because it suggests robust pieces of literature such as *Pilgrim's Progress*.[12] Allegories like Bunyan's classic contain too many essential attributes to be reduced to this-for-that tropes. Therefore, although the basic speak-read dichotomy has survived in scholarship, it leaves many questions unanswered.[13]

3. Summary of the Solution

I answer these questions in three ways: First, Paul's use falls within the speaking sense, suggesting the verb refers to something Genesis itself does. The rendering 'these things are symbolic' attributes the 'allegorical' quality *to the text itself*. Second, 'symbolic' captures how the term ἀλληγορέω functioned in the ancient world. Around the time Paul wrote Galatians, ἀλληγορέω often referred to a broad range of figures of speech such as euphemisms, proper metaphors, synecdoche, similes, parables, and metonyms. The adjective 'symbolic' functions similarly in modern English.

Third, 'symbolic' preserves Paul's view of the literal sense of Genesis in a way that 'metaphorical' does not. Admittedly, the noun 'metaphor', used colloquially, maintains the closest sense to ἀλληγορέω.[14] It can refer to an entire trope in a way that 'symbol' cannot, and it refers to a broad range of textual tropes. The problem with using the adjective 'metaphorical' in Galatians 4.24 is the connotation that Paul does not think that the literal sense is true, a problematic connotation 'symbolic' does not have. 'Symbolic' merely communicates that these narratives have additional significance. Thus, although 'these things are metaphorical' comes close to capturing Paul's meaning, 'these things are symbolic' shares the same benefits of 'these things are metaphorical' because the adjectives share a similar range of meaning, and 'symbolic' avoids obfuscating Paul's understanding of Genesis 16–21. Nevertheless, I will use the noun 'metaphor' when analysing the use of ἀλληγορέω because of the weakness of 'symbol', but I will show why 'symbolic' is the best fit for Galatians 4:24.

4. Sense One: 'To Speak Symbolically'

Up until the end of the second century CE, ἀλληγορέω predominantly meant 'to speak metaphorically or symbolically'.[15] Three pieces of evidence make this clear. First, when

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[11] Di Mattei, 'Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21–31) in Light of First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics' 106–9.

[12] The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'allegory' as 'a story, picture, etc., which uses symbols to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one; a symbolic representation; an *extended* metaphor'. *Oxford English Dictionary Online.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), s.v. 'allegory, n.', https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/view/Entry/5230?rskey=Xu0kaK&result=1#eid.

[13] Cf. Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* (London: SPCK 1974) 91.

[14] This definition of metaphor attempts to the thread the needle between two different senses. On the one hand, the word metaphor refers to a specific form of figural speech like a simile. On the other hand, metaphor is an all-encompassing frame to explain how language functions. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: Routledge, 2003). I am using a common-use definition of the word that is only known when seen. For a further discussion of this view of metaphor and others, see L. David Ritchie, *Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 3–18.

[15] At the end of the second century, the word became entangled in the hermeneutical debate between Christians and their opponents, crystallising it into a technical term. Plutarch attests to an analogous change in Greek literature when he says that 'some forcibly distort (Homer) through what used to be called "the

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the verb means 'to speak metaphorically or symbolically', the subject of the active verb is the author or the text itself, not the reader. Second, the examples of ἀλληγορέω would be called metaphors by modern English speakers. Finally, when ancient authors define ἀλληγορέω, they describe a trope that fits the modern notion of metaphor in the broad, colloquial sense.

One of the first occurrences of ἀλληγορέω in the ancient Greek corpus comes from a scholion on Euripides' *Phoenician Women*.[16] The ancient Greek commentator compares Empedocles, a pre-Socratic philosopher from the middle of the fifth century BCE, to Euripides, the famous poet from a few decades later. The scholion reads, '"Do not sow the furrow of children". Empedocles speaks symbolically (ἀλληγορῶν φησι) when he uses the phrase, "the divided meadows of Aphrodite", by which he means "the genesis of children". Euripides, speaking of the same thing as Empedocles, flees shameful thoughts, and he uses the metaphors "sowing" and "furrow"' (*Schol. Eur.* Phoen. 18. 66.3–5).[17] The author is commenting on how both men referred to the female anatomy: Empedocles with 'the divided meadows of Aphrodite' and Euripides with 'the furrow of children'.

In this paragraph, several contextual clues indicate ἀλληγορέω means 'to speak symbolically'. First, Empedocles is the agent of the action, meaning that ἀλληγορῶν refers to a literary or authorial phenomenon, not a hermeneutical method. Second, the literary technique the commentator discusses is a metaphor. In the author's opinion, Empedocles uses 'the divided fields of Aphrodite' as a *metaphor* for the female anatomy. It is not an allegory but a 'euphemism'; that is, a metaphor to modestly refer to something considered crude. Third and finally, the parallel drawn between the two authors suggests that ἀλληγορέω refers to the same thing as μεταφορά (metaphor).[18] The author is saying that Euripides is doing the *same thing* better than Empedocles, thereby binding ἀλληγορῶν φησι ('he speaks allegorically') to ἐχρήσατο . . . τεχνικαῖς ταῖς μεταφοραῖς ('he uses skillful metaphors'). Thus, at the time this scholion was written, ἀλληγορέω meant 'to speak metaphorically'.[19]

Although Pausanias was writing in the early part of the second century CE, he was one of the founders of Attic lexicography.[20] Thus, his discussion of ἀλληγορέω reaches back to the conquests of Alexander the Great. In his work, Ἀττικῶν ὀνομάτων συναγωγή (*A Collection of Attic Words*), Pausanias defines the term διομήδειος ἀνάγκη as, 'a proverb like that from Tydeus or from Thracian, who compelled the foreigners to sleep with his deformed daughters, whom the sentence represents symbolically (ἀλληγορεῖ) as horses' (Pausinias, Ἀττικῶν ὀνομάτων συναγωγή 14.2). Just like above, Pausanias uses ἀλληγορέω to refer to an action of the text. 'The sentence' (ὁ λόγος) is the subject of ἀλληγορεῖ and refers to the episode he just described between Tydeus and the daughters with whom he

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undersense" (ὑπονοίαις) but is now called "allegory" (ἀλληγορίαις)' (Plutarch, *Adol. poet. aud.* 19F). His statement suggests that the development of the hermeneutical sense of ἀλληγορέω was decades after the time Paul wrote Galatians.

[16] This scholion dates at least to the beginning of the first century BCE if not back to the third (Eleanor Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship: A Guide to Finding, Reading, and Understanding Scholia, Commentaries, Lexica, and Grammatical Treatises, from Their Beginnings to the Byzantine Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 31–4).

[17] Most of the texts discussed were accessed using the TLG, and the translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

[18] According to Trypho, μεταφορά means metaphor, that is, something is described in light of something else based on a shared likeness (see Trypho, Περὶ τρόπων 191.23–192.1).

[19] Stefania Giombini uses the word 'metaphor' to describe the figure of speech the author refers to as ἀλληγορέω, further corroborating this connection. Stefania Giombini, 'Μεταφορά. The Figure of Speech before Aristotle', *Isonomia - Epistemologica* 9 (2017) 29.

[20] Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship*, 99.

slept. Thus, the verb likely refers to a literary phenomenon.[21] Second, although it is less clear than the instance from the scholion on Euripides, the idea of 'metaphor' fits. The deformed daughters (θυγατέρες αἰσχραί) serve as symbols for horses (ἵππους), which modern English speakers would call a metaphor.

Demetrius' two uses of the term in his book *De eloctutione* are clearer.[22] In section 151, he discusses how some allegories (ἀλληγορίαι τινές) have a colloquial flavour (τι στωμύλον). In his third example, Demetrius claims that the poet Sophron 'speaks symbolically (ἀλληγορεῖ) about women in the following line about fish: "tube fish (σωλήν), sweet-fleshed oysters, dainty meat for widows"' (*Eloc.* 151).[23] This line from Sophron quoted by Demetrius is a crass joke, playing off the meaning of the word σωλήν or 'tube fish' which serves as a double entendre for male anatomy.[24] This example demonstrates that Demetrius used ἀλληγορέω to refer to a double entendre resembling a modern metaphor.

The second occurrence of ἀλληγορέω in *De eloctutione* is similar. In section 285, Demetrius quotes the line, 'a city which is no longer anchored to our ancestors prepared for battle at sea, but an old woman, wearing sandals and gulping down some gruel' (*Eloc.* 285). Then Demetrius explains, 'Here, "old woman" functions as a symbol (ἀλληγοροῦν) for a city that is already weak and fading while at the same indicating its weakness by speaking hyperbolically. Likewise, "gulping down some gruel" functions as a symbol, describing a city that was formerly concerned with meat distribution and banquets while squandering the needs of its soldiers' (*Eloc.* 285).[25] Even without Demetrius' explanation, modern readers would recognise this as a metaphor.[26]

Trypho most likely wrote in Rome in the second half of the first century BCE.[27] Although he uses the cognate noun ἀλληγορία, his discussion in Περὶ τρόπων provides an ancient definition of ἀλληγορέω and an example.[28] Trypho claims that 'an allegory (ἀλληγορία) is a statement that, describing one thing regularly, actually brings to mind the thought of something else according to a likeness with the former thing'. As an example, he quotes 'whose bronze pours out most straw on the ground'.[29] Trypho's definition fits the idea of a metaphor. A metaphor is a trope that seems to describe something straightforwardly but

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[21] In ancient Greek scholarship, ὁ λόγος often referred to whole sentences rather than individual words (Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship*, 124).

[22] Traditionally, this work was attributed to Demetrius, the famous student of Aristotle. Unfortunately, both this attribution and the date of the work are highly uncertain. It is likely that it was written sometime in the first century BCE, making it still useful in this study. See the introduction of Aristotle, Longinus, and Demetrius, *Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, trans. Stephen Halliwell et al., Rev. ed., LCL 199 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) 310–11.

[23] Note that Demetrius uses the noun ἀλληγορία and the verb ἀλληγορέω almost interchangeably. He uses the noun to introduce his discussion and the verb to introduce his example.

[24] Cf. Henry G. Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 1748; Aristotle, Longinus, and Demetrius, *Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, 441 n184.

[25] The participle ἀλληγοροῦν is elided into the clause discussing the second metaphor 'gulping down some gruel'.

[26] Di Mattei oddly calls this example an 'allegory'. In my view, his discussion shows exactly why ἀλληγορέω does not neatly map onto the modern term 'allegory.' Di Mattei, 'Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21–31) in Light of First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics', 113.

[27] Unfortunately, Trypho's work only remains in fragments and a few extant treatises, most of which are of doubtful authenticity. According to Dickey, the best text of his work is by Spengel and can be accessed through the TLG. Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship*, 84; L. Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1856).

[28] Given how Demetrius above and Heraclitus below both use ἀλληγορία and ἀλληγορέω to refer to the same phenomenon, Trypho discussion of the trope is still very useful, despite only using ἀλληγορία.

[29] The text from Spengel reads as follows: Ἀλληγορία ἐστὶ λόγος ἕτερον μέν τι κυρίως δηλῶν, ἑτέρου δὲ ἔννοιαν παιστάνων καθ᾽ὁμοίωσιν ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον, οἷον ἧς τε πλείστην μὲν καλάμην χθονὶ χαλκὸς ἔχευεν Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci*, 3.193. His differs slightly from Di Mattei's, but the definition in Di Mattei communicates

actually brings to mind something else by tying the two things together through something they share.

Trypho's example further corroborates this reading. The line he quotes occurs in book 19 of the *Iliad* in a conversation between Odysseus and Achilles. Incensed by the death of Patroclus, Achilles announces his intent to seek revenge against Hector (*Il.* 19.199–214). Odysseus intervenes and tries to convince Achilles of the cost of war by arguing that 'men quickly have their fill of war, *whose bronze spills most straw upon the ground*' (*Il.* 221–2). In other words, men grow tired of war because it is not worth the blood spilled. Odysseus is using straw as a symbol for men of war and bronze as the weapons by which they fall. Trypho claims that this is ἀλληγορία, thus providing evidence that the trope is similar to what modern speakers would call a metaphor.[30]

In, *Antiquitates judaicae* (e.g., *Ant.* 1.5), Josephus defends the theological statements in the Pentateuch that would offend Hellenistic Greeks:

> It will be evident for those who look into these things carefully that nothing will appear to them as unreasonable or out of step with the majesty and benevolence of God, for all things are in keeping with the nature of the universe. To be sure, some things the lawgiver (τοῦ νομοθέτου) kindly presents through riddles (τὰ μὲν αἰνιττομένου τοῦ νομοθέτου δεξιῶς), others he presents through symbols with dignity (ἀλληγοροῦντος μετά σεμνότητος), but whatever commends straightforward speech (εὐθείας λέγεσθαι συνέφερε), these things he explains literally (ῥητῶς ἐμφανίζοντος) (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.24).

Josephus is claiming that Moses may say some confusing things, but he does not describe what such statements might be, nor does he give examples. However, two clues shine light on ἀλληγορέω.

First, the lawgiver is the one who allegorises. The participle ἀλληγοροῦντος occurs within a genitive absolute with τοῦ νομοθέτου ('the lawgiver') as its subject. Second, ἀλληγοροῦντος is surrounded by other actions that the lawgiver is performing: Standing parallel αἰνίσσομαι ('to speak in riddles'), λέγω ἐξ εὐθείας ('to speak straightforwardly'), and ἐμφανίζω ῥητῶς ('to explain literally'). Therefore, ἀλληγορέω must refer to some form of symbolic but understandable speech, although Josephus' use of the term does not allow an exact understanding of what he meant.

In Philo's work, ἀλληγορέω means to 'speak symbolically' multiple times.[31] For example, in *De ebrietate* on Exodus 32.17, Moses descends Mount Sinai with the tablets of the law. Joshua hears a noise in the Israelite camp and assumes that it is the noise of war (Exod 32.15–17), but Moses tells Joshua that it is singing. Philo, however, defends Joshua: 'That war was in the camp is very natural, for where else might there be contentions, fights, hostilities and all the works that go with interminable war if not in the life of the body, which speaking symbolically he calls "the camp" (ὃν ἀλληγορῶν καλεῖ στρατόπεδον)' (Philo, *Ebr.* 99). Before this, Philo discussed the nature of the interaction between the body and the mind. Philo thinks Joshua was right because, since passions

the same basic point. Di Mattei, 'Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21–31) in Light of First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics', 106 n11.

    [30] Trypho's discussion shows that ἀλληγορέω fits the modern colloquial use of the term metaphor because the example he provides is an entire sentence. Thus, the trope cannot refer to a 'metaphor' over a simile, but neither does it refer to something as robust as a modern allegory.

    [31] Although I agree with Di Mattei when he claims that Philo's use of the term can be hard to place, I would describe the following uses of ἀλληγορέω as meaning 'to speaking metaphorically': *Leg.* 2.5, 2.10; *Cher.* 25; *Ebr.* 99, *Migr.* 131, 205; *Somn.* 2.31, 2.205; *Ios.* 28; *Spec.* 2.29; *Praem.* 125, 159; *Contempl.* 29. Di Mattei, 'Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21–31) in Light of First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics', 107 n20.

are constantly churning in the body, one could properly say that this churning operates as a war. For Philo, Joshua is using 'the camp' as a symbol for the human body. The verb ἀλληγορέω, in this instance, does not refer to Philo's reading but to Joshua's symbolic speech.

In *De migratione Abrahami* 131, Philo ponders the meaning of Deuteronomy 13.4 that commands the Israelites to 'walk *before*' God and decides this cannot be literal because God is not a corporeal being. He concludes that 'walking before God' must refer to living in accordance with God's statutes: '(Moses) seems to be speaking symbolically (ἔοικεν ἀλληγορεῖν), describing a soul's following of God's doctrines' (Philo, *Migr.* 131). Here, ἀλληγορέω refers to the action of the author, and that action seems to be what modern English speakers would loosely call a metaphor.

Philo's discussion of the Joseph narrative serves as an example of ἀλληγορέω meaning 'to speak *symbolically*' rather than 'to speak *metaphorically*'. After describing Jacob's grief upon hearing the news of his missing son, Philo writes, 'Surely, it is worth it, after a literal account of the story, to further explain the underlying meaning, for approximately all or most of the law-book is symbolic (ἀλληγορεῖται)' (Philo, *Ios.* 28). Philo's statement suggests that ἀλληγορέω refers to a quality of the text despite being in the medio-passive voice. One should explain the symbolic meaning of the story because the law contains this meaning. The wider context, however, demonstrates that Philo thinks the literal sense is true; therefore, rendering ἀλληγορεῖται as 'the law-book is metaphorical' risks miscommunicating that he thought otherwise.

Writing around the same time as Philo, Heraclitus (not to be confused with the pre-Socratic philosopher) uses ἀλληγορέω twenty-six times, all of which mean 'to speak allegorically'.[32] In *Allegoriae Homericae*, Heraclitus defends Homer against critics who saw him as propagating irreverent myths about the gods.[33] Heraclitus repeatedly argues that the poet's critics read him too literally, missing the significance of his metaphors: 'it is a weighty and damaging charge that heaven brings against Homer for his disrespect of the divine. If he was not speaking symbolically (εἰ μηδὲν ἠλληγόρησεν), he was impious through and through' (*All.* 1.1).[34] Throughout the defence that follows, Heraclitus exhibits all three pieces of evidence. He attributes the action to Homer by making him the subject of the active verb and showing that the metaphors are objectively in the text. Heraclitus' definition fits with the modern idea of metaphor, and modern English speakers would readily label his examples as metaphors.

Other than the rare occasion when Heraclitus uses ἀλληγορέω as an attributive participle, he uses Homer as the subject of the verb.[35] Also, throughout his reading of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Heraclitus shows that the metaphors are in the text. For example, Heraclitus asks his interlocutors why Homer might not be allowed the use of such a trope: 'So, since the trope of allegory (ὁ τῆς ἀλληγορίας τρόπος) is familiar to all and not unknown to Homer, what has possessed us that we shall not mend all the instances in which he seems to think poorly about the gods?' (*All.* 6.1).[36] Clearly, Heraclitus thinks Homer used ἀλληγορία, demonstrating that ἀλληγορία refers to a literary phenomenon.

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[32] Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship*, 26.

[33] Heraclitus often criticises Plato (e.g., *All.* 4.1). For a more detailed discussion of Plato's problem with Homer, see the introduction of Konstan and Russell's translation of *Allegoriae Homericae* Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, xix–xxi.

[34] I have only slightly modified Konstan and Russell's translation, which can be found in Heraclitus, 3.

[35] See *All.* 5.5, 5.10, 13.5, 15.2, 24.1, 24.5, 24.8, 29.4, 41.12, 59.1, 60.1, 61.3, 68.2, 69.12, 70.11. Although Heraclitus does not mention Homer by name in these examples, the context is clear that he or poets that resemble him are the grammatical subjects.

[36] Heraclitus begins his discussion with the verb ἀλληγορέω and then uses the noun ἀλληγορία suggesting that he thinks the terms refer to the same thing much like Demetrius.

Heraclitus attempts to provide a cogent definition and multiple examples of ἀλληγορέω, which closely resemble Trypho's: 'Now perhaps it is necessary for me to provide a concise and careful definition of "allegory" (ἀλληγορίας), for the word itself, having been formed etymologically, implicitly attests to its own meaning. For the trope which speaks (ἀγορεύων) of one thing but signifies another thing (ἄλλα) other than which it speaks has been named "allegory" (ἀλληγορία)' (*All.* 5.1–2). Heraclitus provides multiple examples to illustrate this: Archilochus uses ἀλληγορία when he compares war to a surge of the sea as does Mytilene who compares the woes of tyranny to the sea (*All.* 5.3–9). Heraclitus even appeals to the same metaphor of straw and copper from Odysseus found in Trypho (*All.* 5.15). Therefore, Klauck is likely wrong when claiming that 'in Quintilian, ἀλληγορία designates a literary form; in Pseudo Heraclitus, the process of interpretation steps in'.[37] Admittedly, the hermeneutic of Heraclitus closely resembles what would come to be known as allegory in the following centuries, but he is adamant that the verb ἀλληγορέω refers to a literary form that closely resembles the modern English notion of metaphor.

This sense continues late into the first century CE and into the second. Plutarch uses the term three times – once to refer to a literary phenomenon and twice to refer to a method of interpretation.[38] The former occurs in his treatise *De esu carnium*, in which Plutarch defends vegetarianism. He introduces his opinions by quoting from Empedocles, whose words Plutarch claims served as a veiled critique of carnivorism: 'Here, (Empedocles) speaks symbolically (ἀλληγορεῖ) about the soul, namely, that as a judgement for murder, the eating of flesh, and cannibalism, it has been imprisoned in a mortal body' (*De esu* 7 (996.B–C)). It is unclear what Plutarch thinks Empedocles is doing, but ἀλληγορέω refers to a mode of composition since Empedocles is the subject of the active verb.

These sources show that ἀλληγορέω quite often meant 'to speak metaphorically or symbolically'. Each author attributes the action to the author of the text they were reading or to the text itself. The definitions describe the term in a manner that matches the modern idea of metaphor and provide illustrations that are clearly metaphors. This sense seems to have dominated the few centuries surrounding Paul's writing of Galatians 4.24, but there are multiple examples that show that it was not the only sense in which the term was used.

5. Sense Two: 'To Interpret Allegorically'

In some occurrences, the verb refers to a mode of reading identifiable by the agent of the action. If the reader – as opposed to the text or author – is the agent, then the word does not refer to a textual trope but an interpretive method.

Philo uses the term in this sense multiple times.[39] For example, in book 3 of *Legum allegoriae*, Philo pairs ἀλληγορέω with the indefinite pronoun τις, which functions much like the dummy subject 'one' in modern English. 'Let us see next see how someone is said actually to hide himself from God. Were one not to read allegorically (εἰ δὲ μὴ ἀλληγορήσειέ τις), it would be impossible to accept what has been written down' (*Leg.* 3.4). The pronoun τις refers to a reader, meaning that ἀλληγορέω must refer to some form of interpretation.

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[37] 'Bei Quintilian bezeichnet ἀλληγορία eine literarische Form, bei Pseudo-Heraklit tritt der Auslegungsvorgang hinzu' (Klauck, *Allegoria und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1978) 52).

[38] The TLG displays four occurrences in Plutarch's corpus, but one of those is Eusebius describing the work of Plutarch (Plutarch, *fr.* 157.2).

[39] Philo uses ἀλληγορέω to refer to a mode of interpretation nine out of the twenty-five times he uses the verb. Some of these occurrences are ambiguous. See *Leg.* 3.4, 60, 238; *Post.* 51; *Agr.* 25, 157; *Abr.* 99; *Spec.* 1.268; *Contempl.* 28.

In *De migratione Abrahami,* Philo claims,[40] 'Do you not see that the five daughters, whom by allegorising we say are the outward senses (ᾶς ἀλληγοροῦντες αἰσθήσεις εἶναί φαμεν), have come from the tribe of Manasseh' (*Migr.* 205). 'We' serves as the subject of the allegorising, indicating that Philo does not use ἀλληγορέω to refer to a textual trope but to a form of reading.[41]

Plutarch uses ἀλληγορέω to refer to a mode of reading twice. Both occur in his treatise *De Iside et Osiride*, in which he attempts to explain some of the more fantastic portions of Egyptian mythology to a priestess named Clea by appealing to parallels within Greek mythology. He claims, 'Those who think it proper to call the body of the soul "Hades" because it is deranged and drunk inside of it allegorise (ἀλληγοροῦσι) too frivolously' (*Is. Os.* 27 (362B)). Leading up to this statement, Plutarch has been discussing various interpretations of Greek mythology. Some argued that the stories originally depicted the kings of old (*Is. Os.* 22 (359E)), and others thought that they depicted demigods (*Is. Os.* 25 (360E)). Given this wider context, these frivolous allegorisers are interpreters, not composers, of Greek mythology. Thus, ἀλληγορέω means 'to interpret allegorically'. The second instance in *De Iside et Osiride* is similar. After discussing various interpretations of Egyptian mythology, Plutarch suggests looking to writers that think more clearly and philosophically (*Is. Os.* 32 (363D)). He claims that these sorts of men are 'like the Greeks who allegorise (ἀλληγοροῦσι) Kronos as time' (*Is. Os.* 32 (363D)). Again, Plutarch refers to interpretations of Greek myths, suggesting that the verb is a method of reading.[42]

The only other author in the centuries surrounding Paul that uses ἀλληγορέω to refer to a method of reading is Celsus. His treatise Ἀληθὴς λόγος, probably written in the second half of the first century CE, is one of the earliest known criticisms of Christianity, but only fragmented quotes in Origen's work *Contra Celsum* have survived.[43] The instances of ἀλληγορέω attributed to Celsus can be difficult to distinguish from Origen's own voice. For example, in *Contra Celsum* 1.17, Origen complains that Celsus wrongly faults those who allegorise Moses' works: 'In what follows, assailing the history of Moses, (Celsus) finds fault with those who read it figuratively and allegorically (τοὺς τροπολογοῦντας καὶ ἀλληγοροῦντας αὐτην)' (*Cels.* 1.17). ἀλληγορέω refers to a method of reading because the history of Moses is the object of the verb, but it is unclear if these words reflect the voice of Celsus.[44] They read more like a paraphrase of Celsus, meaning the use of ἀλληγορέω would reflect Origen's later use not Celsus' in the second century CE.

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[40] The daughters of Zelophehad are discussed in Num 27.

[41] Di Mattei argues that even instances like this one should be understood as 'speaking allegorically', claiming that perhaps Philo thought of himself as imitating Moses. Although I sympathise with Di Mattei, his view is ultimately unprovable, and it seems prudent to simply accept that ἀλληγορέω refers to a mode of reading in certain contexts. Di Mattei, 'Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21–31) in Light of First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics', 107 n20.

[42] It could be that Plutarch is referring to the writings of natural philosophers like Empedocles, who were more straightforward in their discussions of the world but still could not separate themselves from the language of myth, in which case the verb would again refer to a method of composition. Empedocles, for example, uses the names of gods to describe the four elements (cf. Klauck, *Allegoria und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten*, 35). 'Pay attention first to the four roots of all things: bright Zeus and life-bringing Hera and Aidoneus and Nestis, who wets the moral stream with her tears' (*fr.* 6). Although this fragment provides little context, the four roots (τέσσαρα ῥιζώματα) clearly refer to the four elements of Empedocles' philosophy, and this statement operates as a metaphor, depicting abstract concepts by personifying them as gods.

[43] James Carleton Paget and Simon Gathercole, eds., *Celsus in His World: Philosophy, Polemic and Religion in the Second Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) 1.

[44] The antecedent of 'it' (αὐτήν) is 'the history of Moses' (τῆς Μωϋσέως ἱστορίας), which undoubtedly refers to the text of the OT.

Book 4, however, seems to provide a direct quote Celsus that includes ἀλληγορέω. Origen writes, 'As if solely to hate and despise, (Celsus) has devoted himself to the statements of the Jews and the Christians, saying that "the most reasonable of the Jews and the Christians, being ashamed of such things, attempt somehow to allegorise them (πειρῶνταί πως ἀλληγορεῖν αὐτά), but these things are not to be taken as some allegory but are straightforwardly mythological"' (*Cels.* 4.48).[45] If truly from Celsus, this quote would provide evidence that ἀλληγορέω referred to a method of reading in the middle of the second century CE. Although it is not obvious from the quote, the pronoun αὐτά, which is the object of the verb ἀλληγορεῖν, probably refers to Christian and Jewish writings. Celsus would then be claiming that Christians and Jews used a certain method of reading, ἀλληγορέω, to avoid the uncomfortable parts of their Bibles. These examples from Philo, Plutarch and Celsus demonstrate that ἀλληγορέω did not exclusively mean 'to speak symbolically' but, on multiple occasions, referred to a method of reading.

6. The Meaning of ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα

Based on the texts above, the basic dichotomy between speaking and reading in the scholarly discussion of Galatians 4.24 fits the data. The question, though, is which of these did Paul mean?

7. Reading or Speaking?

The reading view accounts for the medio-passive form of the verb. A. T. Hanson argues that the voice of ἀλληγορούμενα indicates a shift from speaking to reading, a phenomenon not uncommon in ancient Greek.[46] However, more compelling evidence commends the speaking view. First, the sense 'to interpret allegorically' is relatively rare and late.[47] Philo only uses the term in this sense about nine times, Plutarch twice, and Celsus once, and the latter two authors were writing almost a century after Paul wrote Galatians. Thus, although context ultimately determines the meaning of a word, contemporary Greek literature slightly favours the speaking view.

Second, the medio-passive form of ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα is not sufficient evidence because the form could be truly passive ('these things were written symbolically') or stative ('these things are symbolic'). The stative rendering would emphasise the 'symbolic' character of the story, like Philo's description of the Joseph narratives. Philo's point is to ground his symbolic interpretation in the fact that the law-book has a symbolic quality to it, and the medio-passive form ἀλληγορεῖται helps communicate this point. Paul's use of the term in Galatians 4.24 occurs in a similar context. He claims that by reading Genesis too literally the Judaizers failed to understand the true significance of the narratives.

The passive reading would have a similar effect. The sentence 'these things were written symbolically' could place emphasis on the subject. As Porter argues, 'the frequent

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[45] The Greek varies toward the end of the quote depending on what version of *Contra Celsum* one chooses. For the Greek source I used, see R. Bader, *Der Ἀληθὴς Λόγος des Kelsos* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1940). The portion that differs does not change the fact that the wise Christians and Jews (οἱ ἐπιεικέστεροι Ἰουδαίων τε καὶ Χριστιανῶν) function as the subject of ἀλληγορεῖν.

[46] The verb χράω, for example, means something different in its active and medio-passive voices. See Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology*, 91.

[47] Sellin, 'Hagar und Sara: Religionsgeschichtliche Hintergründe der Schriftallegorese Gal 4.21–31', 67; Curtis D. McClane, 'The Hellenistic Background to the Pauline Allegorical Method in Galatians 4.21–31', *Rest Q* 40, No. 2 (1998) 131; Di Mattei, 'Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21–31) in Light of First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics', 106.

result of the use of the passive voice is that attention regarding the action is placed upon the grammatical subject (recipient) rather than the agent'.[48] However, context suggests that the emphasis would fall on the symbolic quality of the text much like the stative rendering. Both Paul and his opponents are reading the same Abraham narratives, making the identity of the grammatical subject irrelevant to his point. Paul's issue is that his opponents are missing the narrative's significance (cf. Gal 4.21). The truly passive reading, therefore, would read 'these things were written *symbolically*', not '*these things* were written symbolically'. Since the medio-passive form of the verb could support any of these views, the voice of ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα seems inconsequential in determining the sense of ἀλληγορέω.

Most important in determining the sense are Paul's opening words in Gal 4.21, 'tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not hear the Law?' If Paul beckons his interlocutors to hear the text, he must think the text is speaking. The text speaking in verse 21, pushes the phrase in the direction of 'to *speak* symbolically'.[49] Thus, the text serves as the agent of the action, and ἀλληγορέω does not refer to Paul's method of reading.

8. Allegorical, Metaphorical, or Symbolic?

The last question that must be answered concerns the nature of the action. Should one render ἀλληγορούμενα as 'allegorical', 'metaphorical', or 'symbolic'? The modern word 'allegory' does not fit the examples from the ancient world. The verb ἀλληγορέω referred to simple metaphors, euphemisms, double entendre, and other figures of speech. It did not refer to robust metaphorical narratives.

Used colloquially, 'metaphorical' refers to a similar range of tropes, effectively meaning little more than 'non-literal' in modern English. Unfortunately, this rendering risks communicating that Paul thought the Abraham narratives were not historically true, which is not the case. Paul begins the pericope by paraphrasing the events of Genesis 16–21 as if they were true (Gal 4.22–23), and his argument in Galatians 3.17 hangs on the historical sequence of Abraham's promise and Mosaic law. The law does not nullify the promise because it came 430 years after. Paul did not think the Abraham narratives were mere metaphors. The adjective 'symbolic', therefore, fits best because it shares the broad sense of ἀλληγορέω and avoids the problems caused by the connotations associated with 'metaphorical'.

Paul uses the phrase to call out his opponents for missing the significance of the story of Ishmael and Isaac. The circumcision party presumably read Genesis 16–21 like Jubilees 16.17: 'All the seed of [Abraham's other] sons should be Gentiles, and be reckoned with the Gentiles; but from the sons of Isaac one should become a holy seed, and should not be

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[48] Porter means that if an author were to change the sentence 'Johnny throws the ball' to '*the ball* was thrown by Johnny', the pragmatic effect would be to highlight the ball over the action of throwing. Porter is certainly right about many cases of the passive voice, but his view does not fit Paul here. Whether the recipient or the stative result of the action function as the focal point of a passive sentence depends on which of these is in question in the surrounding context. To continue with the Johnny example, it would make sense for the author of 'Johnny throws the ball' to place emphasis on 'the ball' if readers were not sure what it was that Johnny had thrown because the context had left such a detail ambiguous. Perhaps the boy had a stick or a boomerang lying around, all of which would quite adequately serve as a projectile. However, if the action were in question in the context, then the passive sentence would place emphasis on said action. Perhaps no one knew whether the ball was *thrown* or *caught* by Johnny. In this scenario, 'the ball *was thrown* by Johnny' would focus on the action of throwing, not the ball. Such is the case above. Stanley E Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (JSOT; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 64.

[49] Cf. A. B. Caneday, 'Covenant Lineage Allegorically Prefigured: "Which Things Are Written Allegorically" (Galatians 4.21–31)', *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14 no. 3 (2010) 53.

reckoned among the Gentiles'.[50] In other words, true sons of Abraham consisted of Isaac's circumcised descendants (Gal 5.2, 6.13). Paul uses ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα to accuse these opponents of reading Genesis 16–21 too woodenly. Yes, Isaac was Abraham's true son, and modern-day Jews were his progeny. However, Abraham had two sons, not just one (Gal 4.21), and they were both circumcised. If circumcision were what made one a true child of Abraham, how can Ishmael be excluded or reckoned among the Gentiles? The story of Ishmael and Isaac contains significance that these Judaizers missed. The phrase ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα draws attention to this fact, whether stative or passive.

9. Implications

At least since Origen's day, scholars have attempted to categorise Paul's hermeneutic in Galatians 4.21–31. Was he employing a method of interpretation developed by the Greeks that has now come to be known as 'allegory'? Understanding the precise meaning of ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα is crucial to answering this question. The affirmative answer emphasises Paul's use of ἀλληγορέω, arguing that the apostle was intentionally flagging his reading as allegorical. The negative answer often explains the term away. Steven Di Mattei, for example, claims that Paul's hermeneutic is the same allegory represented by authors like Philo, and he grounds this in the meaning of ἀλληγορέω.[51] Interestingly, Di Mattei's reading of the phrase is similar to my own, agreeing that the word refers to a textual phenomenon, but if this is true, then Di Mattei's conclusion does not seem to follow.[52] Paul's claim would be an innocuous statement about the text that would not be sufficient to bridge that gap between him and an allegorical hermeneutic like that found in Philo.

On other hand, those who do not think Paul was using an allegorical hermeneutic struggle to provide a meaning for ἀλληγορέω that fits its wider use. In his classic comment on Galatians 4.24, Chrysostom claims that Paul misspoke. 'With a misuse of language (καταχρηστικῶς), Paul calls a type an allegory'.[53] Iain Provan defends a modern version of Chrysostom's view, but argues that Paul was not using ἀλληγορέω as it was typically used in the ancient world. In his words, ἀλληγορέω 'does not signify in Paul what it signifies in other ancient authors like Philo and his later fellow Alexandrians (such as Origen). It signifies rather the kind of typological/figurative reading that . . . is best considered as one aspect of what is involved in the literal (and canonical) reading of Scripture'.[54] Both authors emphasise the context of the statement, arguing that Paul's use of the term is unique. Although context plays a significant role in determining the meaning of any word, it would be odd for Paul to use a common verb in a way that was completely novel. My thesis, however, allows for the possibility of readings like Chrysostom's and Provan's that recognise the differences between Paul and Philo's hermeneutics, but also does justice to the wider use of the term. Paul may be reading the text typologically as

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[50] According to Wintermute, Jubilees was originally written in Hebrew and then translated into Greek. Only fragments of the Greek text survive. This translation is taken from Hays, who helpfully brings out the Jew-Gentile dichotomy by rendering 'nations' as 'Gentiles'. James H. Charlesworth, ed., 'Jubilees', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, trans. O. S. Wintermute, vol. 2 (Peadbody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983) 41; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 111.

[51] Di Mattei, 'Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21–31) in Light of First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics', 108–9.

[52] Di Mattei, 106–8.

[53] The Greek reads as follows: 'Καταχρηστικῶς τὸν τύπον ἀλληγορίαν ἐκάλεσεν' (John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gal.* 4.24).

[54] Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture*, 138.

opposed to allegorically, but ἀλληγορέω does not refer to this method of reading. In fact, it does not refer to a method of reading at all. Paul is calling attention to the fact that his opponents were missing the significance of the story. He is not flagging his allegorical hermeneutic, but neither is he flagging a typological hermeneutic. Paul's hermeneutic must be determined by what he does with the text, not his use of ἀλληγορέω.

10. Conclusion

Perhaps the debates concerning Paul's hermeneutic in Galatians 4.21–31 will never end, but they cannot be decided on the basis of Galatians 4.24. David Starling is right to point out the 'sterility of this particular war of words'.[55] Given the popularity of the speaking sense of ἀλληγορέω in the ancient world and the contextual clues around Galatians 4.24, Paul was not using ἀλληγορέω to indicate his hermeneutic. Rather, he was using the phrase ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα to communicate that the narratives concerning Sarah, Hagar, and their sons pointed beyond themselves. 'These things are symbolic'.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

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[55] David Starling, 'Justifying Allegory: Scripture, Rhetoric, and Reason in Galatians 4.21–31', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 9 (2015) 228.