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# “ABBA” REVISITED: MERGING THE HORIZONS OF HISTORY AND RHETORIC THROUGH THE NEW RHETORIC STRUCTURE FOR METAPHORS

## ABSTRACT

This study uses the “Abba” metaphor to demonstrate the New Rhetoric model of metaphor as a tool to understand Paul’s rhetorical purpose in using metaphors. By looking closely at the *theme* (i.e., the idea the author tries to convey) and *phoros* (i.e., the picture the author uses to convey the idea). From a historical perspective, the “Abba” metaphor used in Galatians 4:6 can be linked to Palestinian origins. At the time of writing of the Letter to the Galatians, “Abba” had already been ingrained firmly in the Galatian Christian community. Paul used the metaphor to attack the agitators by excluding them from the spiritual *familia* of Jesus. In this recipient-oriented reading, it is shown that Paul used the metaphor to exhort with great urgency those on the fringe to return to the fold. In this way it is illustrated that, by using the approach of the New Rhetoric in describing a metaphor, an interpreter can raise questions on both the understanding of the author and readers, as part of the communication process.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The issue of rhetoric

About eighteen years ago, in a thought-provoking article, which primarily focused on the meaning rather than the function of the “Abba” metaphor, James Barr (1988:173-179) proclaimed “Abba isn’t ‘Daddy’”. Since then, studies have moved more in the direction of function, thus creating a stronger rhetorical emphasis. No doubt Hans Dieter Betz has contributed much to the rhetorical revolution by his commentary on Galatians. Through the contributions of scholars such as Johan Vos (2002), many have rightly come to see Paul as being well capable of using multiple categories of rhetoric even within the

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same letter. It is clear that Paul freely adopted rhetoric for his purpose without keeping to the rigid categorization of the Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks (Vos 2002:92).

This study differs from many previous rhetorical analyses. Instead of focusing on categorizing Paul's rhetoric, this study narrowly examines the structure of metaphors in terms of their rhetorical functions. The New Rhetoric provides the necessary theoretical foundation for this study. It is believed that this flexible model can also be adopted by other interpreters for the rhetorical interpretation of Galatians. In so doing, the New Rhetoric does not need to become the overarching approach, but can be used selectively. Regardless of one's inclination in the rhetorical approach to Paul's Letter to the Galatians, the model suggested here for interpreting metaphors allows for enough flexibility to serve all rhetorical interests regarding Galatians. The special concern of the present study has to do with the rhetorical function of the "Abba" metaphor/tradition in Galatians 4:6.

## 1.2 The issue of metaphors

Studies dating as far back as Aristotle (*Poetics* 21.7) have asserted the analogical force of metaphors. In dealing with metaphors in general, many models have been proposed. A popular understanding of metaphors suggests that they are the images the author uses to show a message, thus creating a dichotomy between metaphorical and literal usage of language. For example, the work of G. Lakoff and M. Johnson focuses on metaphor as an abstraction in that something visible or substantive is turned into a concept by being a metaphor. However, through more nuanced structures and models the notion of "literal versus metaphorical" meaning is shown to be artificial. What is perceived as "metaphorical" is in reality a perceived structural similarity between signifier and signified (Kövecses 2002:72).

In dealing with the issue of representing the signifier and the signified, some choose, instead, to define the two as the linguistic and the conceptual. Kövecses (2002:5, 12) comments on the function of conceptual metaphor in this manner: "In conceptual metaphors, one domain of experience is used to understand another domain of experience. The metaphorical linguistic expressions make manifest a particular conceptual metaphor." The distinction between the linguistic and the conceptual points out the signifying function of language that is not limited to metaphors, but occurs in all kinds of expressions. As a result of many studies along these lines, it became clear that metaphor should be viewed as a blending of what is popularly conceived as metaphorical and literal.

Recent studies also indicate that approaches to the analysis of metaphors are crossing boundaries between various disciplines. A study of Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner is such an example. Even though reviews of the study by cognitive scientist Fauconnier and literary expert Turner have been mixed, their research does demonstrate the connection between the speaker or writer's mind and the writing process in literature (Fauconnier & Turner 2003). Furthermore, the complex process of making a metaphor has prompted new studies that attempt to blend various elements together (Von Gemünden 1993: 16), resulting in new and more three-dimensional models in describing metaphors. A very important element in this regard is the background of the metaphor creator. The issue of background arises from a theoretical base of "symbolic modeling" in the discipline of psychotherapy. Penny Tompkins and James Lawley (2000:9) define the function of symbolic modeling as unlocking creativity and opening prison doors through the client's (or in this case the audience's) inherent understanding. Thus, a model that is all-inclusive of the above insights ought to consider the picture of the audience's corporate or inherent understanding.

Cognitive studies of the mind confirm the natural ability of the human brain to blend concepts, thus making the model suggested by New Rhetoric useful for this study, because such a simple model creates a meaningful blend of external and internal factors in the function of a metaphor.

What then is the model for metaphor according to the New Rhetoric? In order to understand what the New Rhetoric model is about, one has to reckon with what the model is not. What is popularly known as metaphor is only one component of metaphor, construed as the "metaphorical meaning." For instance, the expression "the twilight of his career" can be construed as metaphorical with the metaphor being "twilight." However, this study abandons the dichotomy between literal and metaphorical in favour of the merging of another two horizons: history and text. The New Rhetoric model focuses on two components in a metaphor, not one, thus providing a more nuanced way of looking at a metaphor through two components: *phoros* and theme. So long as those two components exist and interact with one another, the expression, word or phrase can be categorized as a metaphor. This study is not proposing the New Rhetoric as the only answer or model to understanding metaphors, but it is one way of doing it. The following will define and give examples of *phoros* and theme.

The *phoros* is the "picture" used, such as the image of "twilight." However, when linked with "of his career," "twilight" no longer acts independently but supports the whole expression as a self-contained metaphor. With the common background shared between author and readers, "twilight" then expresses the ending of something rather than a mere sunset. Thus, the *phoros* itself is not the metaphor, but its associated context makes it part of a meta-

phor containing the information pool for the signifier (i.e., the *phoros*) and the specific meaning of the signified (i.e., the theme).

There are many other such examples in modern communication. A statement such as "That man is a lion" becomes a lively description by encompassing a lot of external and internal qualities. The man could possess certain character qualities. The popular formulation tends to view the theme as the message of the metaphor while the New Rhetoric model makes both the *phoros* and the theme the two halves of the metaphor. Even though the genitive construction "twilight" and the predicate structure of "lion" are somewhat different in their grammatical categories, they still contain a *phoros* and a theme causing the two expressions "twilight" and "lion" to be metaphors, because the interaction between the *phoros* and theme creates a rhetorical phenomenon called metaphor. According to the New Rhetoric model, metaphor functions far beyond mere logical argumentation, but actually evokes emotive response in some cases. The final product results in some value modification in the listener created by the author's written text. The real question the New Rhetoric model addresses thus is "What value is being changed through the metaphor?"

### 1.3 The issue of text and history

One recent trend of New Criticism focuses almost exclusively on the text. In his recent essay, David S. Dockery notes the overall influence of Paul Ricoeur who sees the text as transcending historical and cultural distance by opening its meaning to the modern reader (2001:36). Paul Ricoeur's *Essays in Biblical Interpretation* has been especially influential. According to simple caricature, New Criticism ignores historical critical data. Thus, text and history are hermeneutically set in opposition to one another. However, with the flexible New Rhetorical model for metaphor, any radical dichotomy between history and text can be overcome.

The above discussion has already identified *phoros* and theme as the two components of the New Rhetoric model on metaphors. What then is contained within each component?

*Phoros* contains the image itself, based on the shared linguistic and cultural understanding of the author and readers which some may wish to call the "symbolic universe" (Neyrey 1990). Some scholars, such as R. Lemmer (2002: 473), prefer to use the word "metanarrative" to describe something similar to *phoros*.

*Theme*, as defined by this study, differs from the way in which it is normally used in New Testament scholarship, especially in studies dealing with narratives. Here, theme is defined along the line stipulated by the New Rhetoric.

Theme refers to the historical background or circumstances for which a piece of writing is created. Theme also refers to the literary context and argumentative structure of the writing. The literary context of the writing will finally determine and set the boundary for the meaning and function of the metaphor. Thus, not all parts of the symbolic universe (i.e., the *phoros*) are useful in understanding the metaphor; the theme sets the boundary for limiting what is and what is not applicable from the symbolic universe.

Together, the *phoros* and *theme* communicate a message the author wishes to convey to his audience. For those scholars with historical concerns, the shared cultural and linguistic understanding of the author and readers will be of interest. For others with literary concerns, the literary context and structure of the writing will be of interest. This model, then, answers both historical and literary questions without violation of either.

## 2. A NEW RHETORIC STUDY OF “ABBA”

The above discussion deserves a demonstration of the merit of the New Rhetoric analysis of metaphors. Paul’s usage of “Abba” in Galatians 4:6 would be a good place to see how the New Rhetoric works. The analysis below will show that Paul’s metaphor sought to create socially honourable and dishonourable categories in the adversarial relationship between Paul and the agitators. Galatians then is a war of words in which Paul strove to win the hearts and minds of the Galatians on the one hand and defeat the agitators’ argument on the other. By means of the New Rhetoric model, this study seeks to examine the metaphor of “Abba” in Galatians and answer the question, “What is the exact rhetorical function of ‘Abba’?” The answer to this question comes from a three-step process based on the model for metaphor by the New Rhetoric. First, the interpreter must define the *phoros* in terms of its source and the cultural concepts associated with it. Second, the interpreter must define the theme from the literary context. Third, and finally, it must be shown how the *phoros* and theme inform each other in terms of the exact function of the metaphor.

### 2.1 A study of the *phoros* of “Abba”

#### 2.1.1 *Phoros*: Lexical study of “Abba” — the general symbolic universe associated with “Abba”

Before one can understand the rhetorical function of the “Abba” metaphor, one must answer the question, “What is commonly understood by the word ‘Abba’ both in society and religion?” For the answer, this study now turns to

evidence of this word — a word infrequently used of God. There are two ways to examine the word. First, one can look at the general usage. Secondly, one can look at the specific New Testament usage.

If we examine the general usage, it should be pointed out that the root for "Abba" probably comes from the Hebrew word for father, אב. Writings in the Hebrew Bible show a connection between God as Father and YHWH as Israel's God. The connection is very rare and has its source in Israel being the children of God (e.g., Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9, etc.). This unusual religious vocabulary demonstrates a special relationship between YHWH and Israel that is different from his relationship with non-Israelites. Furthermore, this unique relationship differs from those between the gods of other religions in the Ancient Near East and their worshippers. With Aramaic as a common language in Palestine and this word being a household word, "Abba" no doubt had very ordinary usage within society. However, people did not commonly use it to describe God. Right from the beginning, there is little evidence that Israel addressed God as "Abba" in New Testament times, either as "my Father" or "our Father." This is exactly why N.T. Wright (1996:649) asserts that Jesus' ministry was something entirely new. Widespread evidence indicates that any address to God as Father is exceptional rather than normal (e.g., 4Q372; Wisdom of Solomon 14:3; Sirach 23:1, 4; 51:10, etc.). In fact, later evidence shows a contrast between the earthly "Abba" and God the sovereign ruler (Taanith 23b).

G. Kittel (1964:6) observes that the word is used more like a title or a proper name for God in the limited evidence of the New Testament (Matt. 6:9; 11:25-26; Jn 5:36, etc.). On the contrary, from the lexical data collected recently in *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* of the Hebrew Bible and the Dead Seas Scrolls, it is clear that a child frequently used אב to address his father, especially as "our father" or "my father" (Clines 1993). The word אב was also used of ancestry (Gen. 10:21; 4:20; Dt. 26:5; Josh. 24:3, etc.). Moreover, it was used for the head of the household, predominantly in the figure of the father (Ex. 6:25; Num. 31:26; Ezr. 1:5; 2:68; 3:12; 8:1; Neh. 7:70, etc.). Thus, according to the usage in the Hebrew Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls, "Abba" was commonly a term of endearment reserved for an earthly father; outside of the New Testament, which is precisely why it so rarely referred to God, the sovereign ruler of Israel.

In the context of the New Testament, the word is used in two other instances. The first instance "Abba" is used is in Mark 14:36. Jesus uses the exact address as in Galatians 4:6, "Abba, Father," to pray to God. This prayer is found in the Passion narrative in Mark. This unique address in Mark is not found in any of the other Synoptic Gospels. The closest parallel is found in

Matthew 26:39 where Matthew records in 26:39 and 42 “My Father.” While both prayers have Jesus asking about the cup of suffering, the wording of the prayer is somewhat different. Mark has an added πάντα δυνατά σοι (Everything [all things] is possible for you). Luke has a shorter version still in 22:42 where God is addressed directly and simply as “Father”.

From the comparison so far in the Synoptic Gospels, a few observations can be made about the word “Abba” and its synonymous term. First, the immediate context within which the term is used is the suffering of Jesus, linked to the cup metaphor. In the wider context of the Synoptic Gospels, the establishment of the cup metaphor had to do with the Lord’s Supper where Jesus, as well as the early Christian community, reinvested the Passover with new meaning. Second, the term “Abba” is linked to a direct address to God the Father in Mark. Based on this usage, “Abba” conveys an intimacy between the worshipper and God. Within the Gospels, the semantic relationship between “Abba” and “Father” is very close. The best explanation for such semantic closeness is the close link between the Lord’s Supper and the Passion tradition.

In light of the above study, the interpreter must now examine all intimate descriptions of God as Father in order to identify a more specific meaning for the term “Abba.” As a description of the relationship between God and the disciples, the term “father” is used in two major ways in the Gospels. The first way is simply as indicating the Father in relation to the disciples as a group as in “our Father” (e.g., Matt. 6:9). This expression harks back to the concept of God being Father to his people in the Hebrew Bible. The New Testament church now became God’s people by calling Him “Father.” The second way it is used is in “your (singular) Father/ὁ πατήρ σου, which describes the relationship between the individual disciple and the Father. This occurs only rarely (e.g., Matt. 6:4, 6, 18). In fact, there is no evidence of the disciples ever addressing God as “my Father” in the Synoptic Gospels. In contrast, the address of Jesus to God as “my Father” is much more common (e.g., Matt. 11:25; 26:39; Luke 2:48-49; 10:21; Jn 8:19 etc.). Thus, the direct address to God the Father seems to be a privilege given only to Jesus in the Synoptics.

Having briefly looked at the place and usage of the “fatherly” vocabulary in the Synoptic Gospels, one must now examine how the New Testament tradition interacts with the Pauline usage of the word. Outside of Galatians, Paul only uses “Abba Father” in Romans 8:15. Although the address is similar to Mark 14:36, the difference here is that the believer now addresses God directly, using “Abba” with the same intimacy and directness as Jesus, a practice unseen in the Gospel records. One noteworthy commonality between Mark 14 and Romans 8:15 is the usage of the article to describe the Father. The Father is not just any father, but THE Father of Jesus Christ. Thus, the recog-

dition of the unique authority of God still exists in Paul's usage. Yet, the intimacy between the believer and God by means of the Holy Spirit has progressed to a level beyond anything found in early Judaism or early non-Pauline Christianity.

### 2.1.2 *Phoros*: Cultural/conceptual understanding of "Abba" — the symbolic universe of Paul's audience

Besides the basic lexical uniqueness of "Abba" in Paul, the importance of cultural factors cannot be overstated. What exactly did "Abba" mean to a non-Aramaic speaking audience? The aforementioned "symbolic modeling" in the discipline of psychotherapy may provide an answer. In short, the audience's corporate inherent understanding prompted Paul to use the "Abba" tradition in Galatians 4:6. In his approach, D. Mitternacht (1999:156-168) calls for an understanding of the rhetorical disposition as an integral point of departure for reading Galatians. This disposition obviously relates to the audience's general and specific situations. The present study does not focus on classifying the genus of the letter. Rather, it examines the general meaning and specific situation of the audience of the metaphor "Abba."

The metaphor "Abba" gives rise to two questions related to the issue of culture, "What exactly did the Galatians understand of "Abba"?" and "How did a group of gentiles gain access to an Aramaic word?"

Although most interpreters presuppose that the Galatians did understand the Aramaic term and that Paul's writing was mostly comprehensible to his original audience, the pre-understanding of the reader is often a neglected issue among some interpreters. The very issue of what was understood by the readers versus what was new is indispensable to the interpretive process of any Pauline letter. How one determines what was understood versus what was new, depends on whether Paul spent much time in the letter elaborating on the topic in question. For instance, the discussion on Sarah-Hagar in Galatians 4 lacks any elaboration or repetition of the original story. Without any explanation of the narrative on Sarah and Hagar, Paul launched directly into his discussion of various typologies. His abruptness, which spawned many studies and debates, may indicate that the audience had enough knowledge of the story to understand the typologies discussed.

Based on the aforementioned criteria, there can be no doubt that Paul thought that his audience would understand the "Abba" tradition as he used it to enhance his argument. Now that it has been established that the audience would have understood the term, one may ask exactly through which context this knowledge came. Did the Galatians get their knowledge of "Abba" from the agitators, from Paul, or from some other tradition?



So far, based on the study of the linguistic usage of “Abba”, it seems as if the Galatians probably got the usage from the early church tradition which was shared by Paul and his agitators. However, the agitators may not necessarily have been the main source. This can be evidenced in Romans 8:15, where Paul uses the same term to describe the believer’s relationship with God, in spite of the fact that there is little to no mention of agitators.

Although the New Testament evidence for the usage of the term “Abba” is quite scarce, some discussion based on what happens in the Synoptics is in order. The context of Jesus’ last prayer before his arrest is the Passion. The particular link to the cup of suffering, thereby the new covenant, seems to point towards the Lord’s Supper. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the original source of the “Abba” tradition among the gentiles came from liturgical practices related to the Lord’s Supper. As David Wenham (1995:278) points out, “‘Abba’ was especially associated with Gethsemane and ... that occasion was especially important in the memory of the church.”

In addition to the Lord’s Supper as a possible origin for the “Abba” tradition, Kittel (1964:6) mentions the possibility of another origin, namely the Lord’s Prayer (as in “our Father”). Either way, both these origins have their applications in corporate prayers. The text of Galatians 4:6 shows evidence of corporate prayers as Paul consistently uses the plural to describe the believers’ sonship (i.e., “You are sons:”). The believers in Galatia did not call out individually but corporately, “Abba, Father.” Thus far, the evidence indicated above, establishes the most likely sources and corporate application of the “Abba” metaphor.

How did the Galatians, as gentiles, receive the “Abba” tradition? One way was to indigenize the original Palestinian Christian expression into a gentile church. As such, there must have been a link between the “Abba” metaphor and imageries from the gentile world. The closest Greco-Roman institution to the “Abba” metaphor would be the *paterfamilias* within the *familia*. The *paterfamilias* was the oldest surviving male in the household (i.e., the *familia*). Taking her cue from the *paterfamilias* institution, Mary Rose d’Angelo (1992:623, 629) argues for the influence of Roman imperial ideology in the Caesar being *paterfamilias* of the empire. However, the context closest to the text seems to be the situation of the ordinary *familia* rather than an imperialistic setting.

According to a recent study by David A. deSilva, many social ideas were wrapped up in the institution of the *familia*. DeSilva especially notes the idea of the patronage of the *paterfamilias* towards those who were within his kinship circle (2000:95-197). The *paterfamilias* did not need to be a biological or even an adoptive father. Rather, his authority was based on his gender and his associated legal status (Tsang 2005:55). Evidence in later records of

first-century Roman laws indicates that the adoption laws were intended to emulate the "father-son" relationship (Justinian *Institutes* 1.11.4). The institution of the *paterfamilias* is exactly why Galatians and Romans both used the imagery regarding sonship (with adoption being an implication).

Based on the discussion above, one can safely conclude that the "Abba" metaphor was transmitted by Paul in the establishment of the church during the original Galatian mission. At the onset, the fatherhood of God, as part of the gospel, was taught based on the Jesus tradition, modelled after the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Prayer. However, the issue of circumcision and food laws, which became the hotly debated topic in Galatians, remained a huge stumbling block in their understanding of the "Abba" tradition.

Why then did Paul use such a bold and vivid metaphor in Galatians 4:6? The dominant Greco-Roman imagery of slavery in contrast with sonship must have played a central role in the debate, as the content of Galatians clearly indicates. Legally, there was much stigma associated with slavery. Although Greco-Roman slaves were given much leeway in their activities in comparison to colonial slavery, slavery meant social shame and legal vulnerability (Cicero *De Officiis* 1.150; *Pro Plancio* 15; Pliny the Younger *Epistulae* 8.6, 9.5). On the other hand, an adopted son, especially one in a prominent household, would be entitled to social honour and legal protection.

The *phoros* of "Abba" thus is the combination of the best of both Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds. While Paul used the legal imageries of adoption to convey honour, he also used "Abba" from the Jesus/Palestinian tradition to encourage a full participation in Christ's church. For Paul, God the "Abba" did not require the converts to associate purity with circumcision and food laws. Rather, the new household was formed under the patronage of God the Father, dictated by Jesus the Lord, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, rather than ceremonial laws, became the guiding force for defining membership in the household.

### 2.1.3 *Phoros*: Concluding remarks

The above discussions on "Abba" demonstrate that honour was bestowed upon the believers in two ways: the first way was by the inclusion of the Galatians into full membership of the church, as passed down through the Jewish-Christian tradition; the second way was by the inclusion of the Galatians into God's household under the authority of the *paterfamilias* within the Greco-Roman social convention.

Based on the Galatians' cultural and conceptual understanding of "Abba," Paul suggested that the Galatians received the highest honour upon being

incorporated into God's plan. As a reminder of his initial preaching of the gospel, Paul restated that the Galatians had the same sonship status as Israel. This is not to say that such an understanding was widespread in early Christianity. At the same time, Paul granted the Galatians a freedom far beyond that of the ordinary Israelite by doing away with circumcision and food laws.

Paul made clear that sonship could only be possible through conversion by a special work of the Holy Spirit. In so doing, the church was not merely the replacement of the Old Testament Israel. In their experience with the Holy Spirit during conversion and the Lord's Supper, the gentiles in the Galatian church experienced something entirely innovative in their relationship with God. Paul's encouragement for the gentile believers was thus marked by unprecedented boldness indeed.

## 2.2 A study of the theme of "Abba"

### 2.2.1 Theme: the literary context of "Abba"

According to the methodology outlined at the beginning, the next step in the interpretation process is using the literary context to arrive at the specific theme regarding "Abba." From Paul's appeal to the Galatians in 4:6, it is clear that the title "Abba" was already used as part of the Galatians' prayer practice. As a rhetorical device, "Abba" is part of the literary unit of Galatians 3:26-4:11. The literary context is Paul's concerns regarding the law.

The entire section of Galatians 3:26-4:11 deals with the Galatians' identity as children of God. The section begins with reference to the fact of sonship in 3:26-29, where all who have faith in Christ share the same status (i.e., Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, and female). In Galatians 3, Paul established the priority of the Abrahamic covenant as the basis for sonship. Thus, the statements in 3:26-29 are to be taken *prima facie* as something true and normative in all Christian experiences. 4:1-2, an illustration regarding the immature child remaining in the same status as a slave, with no inheritance rights, explains the timing of God's plan in Jesus Christ (4:3-6). In 4:1-2, the disruptive λέγω δέ shows that Paul was concerned with his audience's ability to understand his argument. Therefore, he clarifies his point by breaking up the argument into smaller units (e.g., 5:16; 1 Cor. 1:12; 7:8). Paul then brings his audience back to the argument in 4.3 by using οὕτως καί (and in this way/so then). Paul proves his case by first appealing to the Jesus event in 4:3-5 and then to the Galatians' spiritual experience in 4:6-8, before finally lowering the gavel to indict them for their present downfall in 4:9-11. The "Abba" prayer occurs within the section where Paul appeals to the Galatians' spiritual experience.

Now that the above survey has located the "Abba" prayer within its literary unit, it is important to examine its role within the literary unit. The section within which "Abba" is found is part of a proof based on the experience of the Galatians. If the "Abba" metaphor is part of the proof, what exactly is it proving? The answer is found in 3:26-29. In reality 3:26-29 is part of the larger statement about God's timing in allowing faith to overcome the supervision of the law (3:23-25). This appeal to the salvation history of the Christian (3:23-25) is very similar to 4:3-7. From this parallel, one can say that 3:23-29 foreshadows the argument of 4:3-7, within which the metaphor of "Abba" occurs. Thus the section 4:3-7, which contains the "Abba" prayer, complements 3:23-29.

While much of this section describes God's work in salvation history, Paul also uses concrete first-hand experiences of the Galatians to strengthen his case. These experiences undergird Paul's whole appeal. The experiences these Galatians had were baptism, mentioned in 3:27, and the crying out of "Abba", mentioned in 4:6. These were such commonplace experiences among Christians that Paul saw no need to give an explanation whatsoever.

Paul further strengthens the link between individual and corporate experiences by deliberately switching his reference to the individual Christians from plural υἱοί (sons) in 3:26 to a mixture of the singular σπέρμα (seed) and plural κληρονόμοι (heirs) in 3:29, and then to the second person singular υἱός (adult?; son; versus the νήπιός [child] in 4:1) in 4:7. These experiences of baptism and sonship were corporate as much as they were individual. The plurality of those who were baptized (3:27) is further strengthened by the plurality of those calling out "Abba" (4:6). The second-person address in 4:7 is plural, while the predicate nouns, "slave" and "son," are singular. This unusual usage of the singular demonstrates the corporate identity of the church in the same way the singular "seed" describes all heirs of the Abrahamic promise. This corporate experience thus strengthens and confirms the individual conviction. All individual experiences should fit within the confines of the corporate identity.

In Paul's argument within Galatians 3 and 4, the format moves from God's salvation history to the believer's experience. Paul argues that the Abrahamic covenant, which culminated in Jesus Christ, supersedes the Mosaic covenant. Paul then proceeds to delineate the sonship of the Galatians through Jesus Christ. In this way, the theme of "Abba" functions exactly as the rhetoric behind baptism. Both were within the Galatians' first conversion experiences.

### 2.2.2 Theme: Concluding remarks

A summary of the literary function of the “Abba” theme is in order. “Abba” gives credence to Paul’s case in convincing the Galatians regarding circumcision and food laws. When placed side by side with baptism, the “Abba” theme highlights the essential part of the salvation experience. In contrast to such experiences, the non-essential experiences would be the keeping of the food laws, religious dates, and circumcision. The experiences of both baptism and the “Abba” prayer were corporate in Galatia. These were not experiences based on an individual’s whims and fancies. Rather, they were the common denominator of all Christians.

## 2.3 Merging history/social relations and rhetoric: *phoros* and theme

Now that the social and rhetorical aspects of the “Abba” metaphor have been studied by paying attention to both *phoros* and theme, the interpreter must merge the data to come to a synthesis which takes into consideration not only the “what” but also the “how” of Paul’s usage of this metaphor.

### 2.3.1 Merging *phoros* and theme in light of Palestinian and Greco-Roman traditions

In terms of the *phoros* of “Abba,” the fatherhood of God is an unusual and obscure concept in the prayers of Judaism. The statistical rarity of the “Abba” prayer within Judaism serves to buttress Paul’s argument in Galatians 3-4 regarding law-keeping. According to Paul, those following circumcision and food laws were under the Mosaic covenant; their fate was very much like those under Judaism who kept ceremonial traditions. Paul’s invocation of the “Abba” metaphor was an attempt to overcome any argument for the Mosaic covenant. While the agitators insisted that the church should become the sons of Israel by following the Mosaic laws, which was the distinctive of the sons of Israel, Paul went against their argument by introducing an innovation (i.e., “Abba” tradition) that was already normative in the early church. As such, Christianity, according to Paul, was very different from the law-abiding Christianity of his agitators. The privilege afforded those who followed Paul’s gospel far surpassed those who followed the “other” gospel.

In terms of the *phoros* of “Abba,” the Gospel source is significant when read in light of the theme of Jesus’ ministry within Galatians. The use of “Abba” indicates a reference to the prayer of Jesus as found in the Markan version of the Passion. The historical fact of the Passion is particularly telling

in the theme of redemption in Galatians 4:5 specifically and Galatians in general (e.g., 2:20; 3:13; 6:12, 14). The link between the early church liturgy and the Lord's Supper seems quite strong. The theme of redemption within the Gospel tradition must have found its way into the earliest church worship. The "Abba" prayer, which was within that tradition, eventually made its way to Galatia via Paul's ministry. Such a ministry was already firmly established by the time of the writing of Galatians. As such, the link between the redemption of Jesus and the newly found relationship with God as represented by the "Abba" prayer is unmistakable. This is not to say that the Galatians necessarily used this prayer only in the Lord's Supper. Nor is the context of the Lord's Supper required for the validity of this prayer. However, the redemption of those saying such prayers could be traced back to the early Passion tradition, especially relating to the Lord's Supper. Here, Paul was appealing to their pre-understanding from earlier preaching, which passed on the essential practices of the early church, including the "Abba" prayer.

In the study of the *phoros* of "Abba," the associated imagery of the heavenly Father from the Lord's Prayer is more distinct and apparent. The Aramaic tradition within the gentile community no doubt first originated from the Lord's Prayer. The revolutionary prayer was a result of Jesus's teaching. Without the arrival of Jesus and the associated teaching, the address to God as Father would have remained an obscure exception rather than the rule. To Paul, the arrival of Jesus was the key to the innovative "Abba" prayer.

Not so coincidentally, the theme of Jesus's arrival in terms of God's salvation history also precedes the reference to "Abba" in 4:3-6. In so doing, Paul referred to Jesus to convey the progressive fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. This progression is important indeed, because it provides the foundation and the legitimacy for the early Christian innovation of calling God "Abba." The "Abba" prayer then is the indicator of a new eschatological age unlike any other period in history, including the time of Moses' ministry.

Besides examining the audience's understanding of the possible Jewish source of the "Abba" prayer, one must also address the issue of the agitators. When studying Paul's Letter to the Galatians, the interpreter cannot make sense of certain aspects unless he/she seriously considers the views of the agitators. For example, one cannot understand the Hagar-Sarah allegory to its fullest extent without some background of the Old Testament story and its many first-century Jewish interpretations (Tsang 2005:93-96). Analogically, the "Abba" prayer is similar to unusual passages like the Hagar-Sarah allegory. As in the case of Hagar-Sarah allegory, the best way to answer the questions "How did the gentiles understand such an obscure story?" and "When did they know it?", is to see the *ad hominem* strategy Paul utilized as a counter-attack to the agitators' claim.

The Letter of Galatians mirrors not only Paul's concerns, but also those of his agitators and readers (Barclay 1987:73-93). This "mirror-reading" strategy can explain the "Abba" prayer with clarity. Possibly, the agitators were claiming that since the "Abba" prayer originated from the Jewish believers in Palestine, the practice of food laws and circumcision must also have originated from the Jesus tradition. The agitators may have argued in this manner: "You know the 'Abba' prayer, but Paul did not tell you other traditions. Get circumcised. Keep religious dates. You need to know and keep the full Palestinian Christian tradition. Then you are true heirs."

Another option in looking at the source is to accept that the argument existed in Paul's mind in anticipation of the objection of the agitators. Paul's strategy can then be classified as "pleonastic tautology" (Tolmie 2005:32), which creates for him the preemptive rhetorical strike by use of the "Abba" metaphor. First, Paul countered by arguing for God's promise, along with salvation history in Galatians 3-4. Then, he brought in the "Abba" prayer to demonstrate the legitimacy of Galatian inheritance without the law. Due to its widespread practice in formative Christianity, the "Abba" prayer was a shared tradition among Paul, the agitators, and the Galatians. Due to the fact that the agitators may have abused the usage of the "Abba" prayer for their cause, Paul had to remind his audience of his "original" version.

So far, the interaction between the *phoros* and theme in the "Abba" prayer has focused primarily on the Palestinian or Jewish origin. Now the discussion will be expanded to include the audience background, which brings in the Greco-Roman *paterfamilias*. Earlier discussions on *phoros* covered the ideas of fatherhood within the Jewish and gentile worlds. It will be beneficial to compare and contrast the usages between the two cultures.

In looking at the Roman *paterfamilias*, the similarity between the two perspectives comes from the way Paul used the metaphors of slavery, adoption, and inheritance within Galatians 3 and 4. God as the father acts as the head of the household. On the other hand, while the Roman *paterfamilias* was more legal in its institution, the heavenly Father model of the gospel has a more intimate relationship.

Nevertheless, the commonality of the usages enabled Paul to select the imageries that best accomplished his rhetorical purpose. The commonality between the Christian heavenly father and the Roman *paterfamilias*, then, allowed for the notion that the believer inherited the honour and possession exclusive and unique to Jesus Christ. Paul wanted to convey the honour clearly to his audience. The theme of legality merged nicely with the *paterfamilias* institution. While Paul's language was mostly in relational terms, his concern for legality needed clarification. He wanted to make it amply clear that it was

legal for the gentiles not to keep the Old Testament law. By invoking the authority of and relationship with the "Abba," the intimacy far surpasses legality. Yet, the close relationship between the Galatian converts and their "Abba" was totally in accordance to the law. According to both God's promises in the Old Testament (e.g., 3:6-14) and the Greco-Roman law (4:1 -2), the new relationship was legal! This was the case Paul was arguing for when using the "Abba" language within the mixture of its Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts.

### 2.3.2 Rhetorical situation of the metaphor "Abba"

The "Abba" prayer provided a litmus test for the opposing claims of lineage between Paul and the agitators. Since Paul's original gospel was within the wider tradition of early Christianity, the concept of community with the wider church was indispensable. Even while the agitators who advocated the Palestinian Jewish tradition claimed their legitimacy, Paul's claim was that his alone represented the full gospel stemming from the first Christian community. Paul was clearly defining who could legitimately utter the "Abba" prayer and who were indeed the children of promise (e.g., 4:21-31). More importantly, the prayer gave honour and inheritance rights to the one who called upon "Abba." It also distinguished between those who followed and those who rejected Paul's gospel. The mere fact of the ability to pray the "Abba" prayer implied the acceptance and rejection of certain belief systems and practices. For Paul, those who followed his gospel came from the true lineage of the original Christian gospel. They alone could call God, "Father"; they were the true children of Abraham. Those who did not follow Paul's gospel remained outsiders. Although the outsiders might have called God "Abba," they were not legitimate children and had no inheritance rights.

The "Abba" metaphor is also important for the rest of Galatians 4 in terms of rhetoric and theology. Rhetorically, from the Judeo-Christian perspective, the metaphor legitimised Paul's claim to continuity with the rest of primitive Christianity. This strategy becomes clearer in the later allegory about Hagar and Sarah. Traditions such as the "Abba" prayer and Abrahamic stories were the basic foundation for early Christians. By invoking such traditions, Paul prevented anyone from accusing him of creating something in contradiction to God's will.

## 2.4 "Abba" within the argumentative strategy of Galatians 4

The data gathered from the above discussions are readily relevant in understanding Galatians 4. By appealing to God as "Abba," Paul not only invoked the Jesus tradition, but also linked the Aramaic word to the metaphor of slavery and the household in Galatians 4.



Within the Greco-Roman household, the will of the *paterfamilias* was absolute. The added strength to Paul's claim comes from the powerful imagery of the *paterfamilias*. In using such imagery, Paul's message to the Galatians was clearly indicated as non-negotiable.

From the audience's perspective, Paul used the "Abba" metaphor to appeal not only to their Roman background, but also to their experience of the Spirit. Paul connected his argument with the early Christian church, which experienced such a powerful manifestation of the Spirit (e.g., Acts 2:4; 8:17; 10:44, etc.). The Galatians probably had some extraordinary experiences they could identify as work of the Spirit. By linking the Spirit with the "Abba" metaphor, Paul was reminding his audience of those "realistic" experiences they had from the onset of conversion (Gal. 3:2-3). This kind of argumentation strategy blended well within the context of the introductory chapters, Galatians 1-2, in which Paul discussed the situation of the early church before turning to the Galatians themselves in Galatians 3-4.

Within the text of Galatians 4, the "Abba" metaphor was particularly useful in furthering Paul's cause for what follows in the rest of the chapter. In the subsequent section, Galatians 4:8-20, Paul sought to reinstate his goodwill towards the Galatians by appealing to his first missionary experience. This appeal, on the one hand, tried to gain the loyalty of the audience (Gal. 4:12-16, 19-20), and on the other, attempted to vilify the agitators (Gal. 4:17-18). This relational bridge, which Paul created, allowed him to launch into yet another long allegory which clarified his meaning. Once Paul obtained the audience's attention, he proceeded to teach about Hagar and Sarah.

In relation to the Hagar-Sarah story, the "Abba" metaphor was especially relevant. As the above discussion has already indicated, Paul tied the "Abba" metaphor closely to the household. In order to be consistent with his Jewish tradition, Paul used a Jewish household narrative to conclude his argument regarding freedom in Christ. The invocation of this Jewish allegory further legitimized his mission. Since this household narrative also related closely to slavery, the "Abba" metaphor indicated how God decisively freed the audience from any bondage Paul perceived them to have fallen under.

## 2.5 Interpretive issues in light of the "Abba" metaphor

Some key interpretive issues need to be addressed as this study draws to a close. The first issue is how the interpreter views the source of the "Abba" prayer. How much of the background found in the source of Mark 14 is blended into the Galatian understanding of the prayer? The choice of how wide the interpreter casts the net will impact on the interpretation. An interpretation based on the entire tradition of the Lord's Prayer or the Lord's Supper would

be quite different from one based solely on the “Abba” prayer as a mere idiomatic formula with little meaning.

The second issue is where the Abba tradition used in Galatians and similar to the Gospel tradition (e.g., Mark 14) comes from. In terms of rhetoric as a process, the question must be addressed as to whether Paul or the agitators provided the backdrop for such a saying in Galatians 4. Different approaches to dating the initial Pauline mission to the Galatians and the Galatians letter will cause minor to major variances in reading the “Abba” prayer. If an interpreter dates the letter very early, then little time has elapsed since Paul established the church. The possibility of a Pauline source is slightly greater with an early date. If one takes the letter to be later, while the church was founded early, then a lot of Christian traditions besides Paul’s had probably reached the Galatians. In this case, no one can be certain whether the “Abba” tradition within the Galatian community came from Paul, others, or a combination of both.

The third issue relates closely to the first. Having determined whether Paul or the agitators or some others learned the “Abba” prayer to the Galatians, the interpreter must also try to understand Paul’s rhetorical purpose in using the prayer. This issue will have an impact on how one views the function of the metaphor. If Paul was echoing his original gospel preaching through the “Abba” metaphor, his main purpose was to link the content of his preaching to the Galatians’ experience of the Spirit. On the other hand, if Paul was responding to the agitators, he was most likely answering the Galatians in an *ad hominem* manner in order to defeat the agitators’ argument. Perhaps he was doing both.

The aforementioned three issues are indispensable for understanding Paul’s rhetorical use of the “Abba” metaphor. The interpretive choices will have an impact on the outcome. Based on the hermeneutical discussions in this study, it is clear that history and text are inseparable. They impact each other in the study of a metaphor.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Using the “Abba” metaphor, this study has demonstrated the relationship between the metaphorical model from the New Rhetoric and components within rhetorical analysis, namely history and text.

What exactly did Paul accomplish by using the “Abba” metaphor? He incorporated a familiar idea, the fatherhood of God, from his initial preaching of the gospel, into his Galatian argument. Since there is little evidence within the Jewish sentiment for the usage of “Abba” as an address to God during Paul’s time, the best source of the “Abba” metaphor is Paul’s understanding

of Jesus' teaching, which was already a normative liturgical practice in the early church. In his rhetoric, Paul creatively used the Jesus tradition that was passed down to the Jerusalem church, which then filtered down to other Christian communities. The agitators could also be using the tradition in quite a different way to legitimise their mission. However, no one can be sure of this hypothesis without further study on the agitators.

By playing to the strength of the tradition without agreeing with his agitators' message and mission, Paul not only preached this idea of sonship but also appealed to the Galatians' experience of the Spirit. By noting the commonality between the Galatians and Jesus, Paul used the "Abba" prayer to indicate that both have the Holy Spirit who represented a new work of God among the gentiles (3:2; 4:6). Since Paul was the initiator of the Galatians' experience of the Spirit, he had the rhetorical upper hand over the later agitators. Paul's "Abba" metaphor, which was consistent with the Jesus tradition, the early Jerusalem church experience, and the Galatian experience, worked against the authority of the agitators. Part of Paul's argument is what Tolmie (2005:50) calls "the notion of divine authorization." Vos (2005:99) points out that Paul used appeal to divine authority very early in his letter (1:11-12). Recognizing the importance of divine authority as a foundation for his rhetoric, Paul claimed an authority, which stemmed from Jesus and the fellow apostles, in using the "Abba" metaphor. The combination of divine and apostolic authority made Paul's case doubly strong for the Galatians. Thus, Paul used a metaphor from his formative proclamation to create a new connection between "Abba" and circumcision in order to persuade the Galatians to change their minds.

No matter what method the interpreter chooses to read when interpreting Paul's rhetoric, the bottom line comes in the form of two questions when dealing with metaphors at every point of a rhetorical analysis: "How much did the audience know?" and "From whom did they receive their knowledge?" These two questions can carry the interpreter a long way in understanding Paul's communication strategy.

While there is no such thing as a neutral observer in any kind of interpretation, this study of metaphor illustrates one of many models that can serve at different levels of rhetorical analysis. While it is not the only model for metaphor, it is helpful in understanding Paul's letters because it does not only deal with the "what" but also the "how" of the communicative process. In spite of recent interpretive trends, as difficult as the historical question is, it cannot be avoided. Models that balance both historical and literary aspects of interpretation will surely create a better grid for interpretation of any text. The New Rhetoric model for metaphors is one belonging in this category.

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