

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Paul's Illustration Contrasting the Law's Slavery and the Believer's Freedom Galatians 4:21-31

You want to be under the Law? Well, look at how Abraham's kids turned out - one slave and one free! (Gal 4:21-22)

- The Galatians want (*thelo*) to be under the Law - they desire or insist on putting themselves under the Jewish legal system.
- Paul is saying, "Okay, you Law-lovers, listen to what the Law really says!"
- Paul wants to graphically illustrate the difference between the two systems he has been talking about: Law and Faith. He has already used Abraham as his primary example of justification by faith, so now he turns to the next generation after Abraham for his illustration.
- Abraham had two sons: Ishmael (by Hagar the slave woman) and Isaac (by Sarah the free woman).

The story of Ishmael and Isaac is actual Old Testament history - one born by the flesh and one through promise (Gal 4:23)

- The Flesh = reminds us of the use of this term in Gal. 3:3 - It implies doing works in our own strength apart from God's plan, God's Spirit, and God's enablement.
- In Genesis 15:1-6 God confirms His promise to Abraham.
- In Genesis 16:1-6 Sarah comes up with a plan to help God (see Gen 16:15-16)
- In Genesis 17:1 Abraham is 99 years old, and still no child of promise.
- In Genesis 17:17-21 Abraham laughs (Sarah is 90 years old).
- In Genesis 18:10-14 Sarah laughs too.
- In Genesis 21:1 Sarah has a son just as God promised (and she quarrels with Hagar).
- In Genesis 21:11-12 The strife bothers Abraham, but God confirms that His promises go to the "son of promise" (Isaac) and are not shared with Ishmael.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul makes an analogy using actual OT history (Gal 4:24)

- The apostle Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - he is writing Scripture. At that point in the history of New Testament *revelation* God inspired Paul to use the Old Testament story to represent a truth He wanted communicated about the difference between the Law and Faith as means to justification. God prompts Paul to use *figurative* language: analogy, simile, metaphor.
- Paul is NOT saying that the Old Testament story of Isaac and Ishmael was an allegory! Many people interpret the Bible by inventing fanciful doctrines out of actual biblical events. They say they are applying the principle of "allegory" to the Scriptures, but they are actually twisting the Scriptures to make them say whatever the interpreter wants them to say. This is absolutely wrong! We must always strive to understand what the biblical writer intended to say when he wrote to his original audience. That message contains the true meaning of Scripture.
- Paul is using the story of these two women and the experience of their pregnancy and childbirth to

represent the difference between the two opposing principles of Law and Faith.

- What are the two covenants?
 1. The *Abrahamic Covenant* which was a set of unconditional promises made by God to Abraham, his descendants, and to "all nations."
 2. The *Mosaic Covenant* involving the Law given to the nation of Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai.
- Paul focuses first on the Mosaic Covenant, saying that those under the system of the Law are in bondage to the Law. Hagar, the slave woman, represents the Law and the nation of Israel which is under bondage to the Law.

Mount Sinai, the earthly Jerusalem, and the Mosaic Law illustrate the bondage of slavery to the Law (Gal 4:25)

- The experience of the slave woman (Hagar) represents the *bondage* of the Law under the Mosaic Covenant.
- This Law was given to the nation of Israel at an *actual mountain* in the area of Arabia. The *actual city of Jerusalem* also represents the focus on the Law, since Jerusalem was the actual capital of Judaism under the Mosaic Law.
- Paul is identifying the false teachers in Galatia with Hagar, the woman in the bondage of slavery.

The heavenly Jerusalem and the child of promise illustrate the freedom we have as sons of God through faith in Christ (Gal 4:26-28)

- Now Paul turns to the Abrahamic Covenant. He compares the unconditional promises given to Abraham with the heavenly Jerusalem (see Hebrews 11:10; 12:18, 22; Revelation 21:1-2).
- Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1 and applies the aspect of rejoicing in this passage to Sarah (a barren woman). Isaiah 54:1 was originally written to comfort the Jews in captivity in Babylon. Just as Jerusalem would become the "mother of children" when the Jews returned from captivity, so Sarah will be able to rejoice because God's promise to her will also come to pass.
- Just as Isaac was conceived and born under humanly impossible circumstances, so today people who believe the promise of God are *children of promise*. Paul identifies those pursuing justification by faith with Sarah and her descendants through the "son of promise."

Legalists tend to be persecutors and opponents of spiritual freedom (Gal 4:29)

- Ishmael mocked Isaac (Genesis 21:9) and the Arabs have continually opposed the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- Just as this has actually happened from Old Testament times onward, Paul is saying that those who are seeking justification by works of the law are opposed to those seeking justification by faith alone.
- Paul is certainly NOT saying that the legalistic Jews of his day were really Ishmaelites, any more than he was saying that the believing Gentiles of his day were really Jews. He was simply using an event from Old Testament history to make a point about the relationship between the Law and Faith.

The *children of promise* are the ones who receive the inheritance - all the riches God gives by grace (Gal 4:30-31)

- Paul quotes Genesis 21:10 because he wants to bring in the idea of the *inheritance* that he discussed earlier (see Gal. 3:18, 29; 4:1, 7). Only the ones related to God by promise will inherit the blessings.

- The ones hopelessly seeking justification by works of the law will end up being outcasts - like Ishmael was - and they will miss the inheritance, even though they intensely desired it.
- Paul concludes his illustration by stating the logical conclusion of the previous verses: those seeking justification by faith in God's promise are not in bondage, but are truly free.
- Paul had already given one illustration of this principle (see Gal. 4:4-7). He had previously contrasted the person who was a slave in a Roman household with the fully mature, free sons who inherit the riches of their family. Here Paul has provided another illustration of the same principle: those seeking justification by faith alone are not in bondage, but are free by God's grace.

Illustrating The Contrast Between...	
BONDAGE	FREEDOM
Hagar	Sarah
Ishmael	Isaac
Earthly Jerusalem	Heavenly Jerusalem
The Law	Faith
Works of human effort	The work of Christ alone
The Flesh	The Promise
Outcasts	Heirs

Putting yourself under the law - trying in vain to obey a set of impossible rules - is like putting yourself under slavery or into prison. But God promises freedom when we see the hopelessness of our own efforts and put our faith in Christ alone for our justification before God.

Copyright © 2006 Some Rights Reserved by Steve Lewis
 This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/).