

The Book of Galatians
Lesson 8 - Galatians 4:12-31
Gospel Living
A Choice of Allegiance

“Brethren, I beseech you!” This is the appeal of a loving spiritual servant, a concerned father addressing his spiritual children. *“I became as one of you when I first preached to you,”* writes Paul; *“now become as I am and be true to Christ.”* He reminds them that it was through some physical affliction that he first came to them, and that they had then treated him like an angel. Now they treated him like an enemy because he was telling them the truth. *“Your false teachers make a big show of their love for you, but their motives are not pure. They want to use you to show off their spiritual conquests!”*

An allegory is an event or story that has a hidden meaning. Paul uses the story of Abraham’s two sons to show that the new covenant of grace has superseded the old covenant of law.

We Christians are children of promise, like Isaac, and therefore children of liberty. God had promised Abraham a son long before Ishmael was born. Ishmael *“was added”* and was a son of the flesh, a slave’s son. The old covenant of law was never God’s final plan for Israel. It was added, like Ishmael, and brought bondage and sorrow. God’s commandment to Abraham was to cast out Ishmael and Hagar! Law and grace, faith and works, promise and commandment, can never live in the same household. The Judaizers in Galatia wanted to invite Hagar and Ishmael back into the family again!

Paul refers to Isaiah 54:1 and applies this verse to the church. Just as Sarah was barren and had to wait for many years for her son, so the Jews had to wait many years before God’s promises to Abraham were fulfilled. Isaiah described the joy of Jerusalem after the return from exile. Paul sees a deeper meaning: joy in the church in spite of its persecution and suffering.

The danger Paul saw in Galatia is with us today. The flesh loves and craves *“religious excitement”* and feels gratified when it can keep some religious law. While there is nothing wrong with church traditions that are tied to Scripture and magnify Christ, we must beware of inviting Hagar and Ishmael back into the family. There can be no mixture of law and grace. May God help us to hold fast to His simple grace.

Read Galatians 4:12-19 and answer the following questions

1. Read 1 Corinthians 9:20-23 in light of Galatians 4:13-14. In what ways did Paul “*become like*” the Galatians? (4:12)

2. In what ways did Paul want the Galatians to become like him?

3. How does the Lord turn trials, and difficulties into opportunities for the gospel to be preached?

4. Why did some believers turn away from Paul? (vs. 4:16) Do you ever do that?

5. How are we to communicate the truth to others when we know they’re not going to like it? (4:16)

6. What motivated the Judaizers to turn the Galatians against Paul? (4:17) How does this happen today?

7. What is Paul trying to say to the Galatians by comparing himself to a mother giving birth?

Read Galatians 4:20-31 and answer the following questions

8. What was the difference in status between Abraham's two sons? (Galatians 4:22, Genesis 15:17-16:10, 21:1-13)

9. What parallel did Paul draw between Abraham's two sons and the two covenants between God and man? (4:22-28)

10. The Galatians were trying to live by both covenants. Why wouldn't that be possible?

11. What was Paul telling the Galatians to do in 4:30? How does that relate to your walk today?

Hagar

A helpless outcast serves as a metaphor for Paul's warning to the Galatians against turning to the Law for salvation. Hagar, was an Egyptian slave of Sarah, the wife of the Old Testament patriarch Abraham.

God promised Abraham and Sarah that He would give them a son. But after 10 years of waiting, Sarah presented Hagar to her husband so he could father a child by her, according to the custom of the day. However, God viewed the substitution as a lack of faith.

When Hagar became pregnant, she mocked her mistress, who dealt with her harshly. Fleeing into the wilderness, Hagar encountered an angel of the Lord. The heavenly messenger revealed that the child she was about to bear, Ishmael, would be the father of a great nation even though he was not the son that God had promised to Abraham and Sarah.

Hagar returned to Abraham's camp and bore Ishmael, who was accepted as son. But when Ishmael was 14, Sarah gave birth to Isaac, the promised son. Later Ishmael mocked Isaac at the festival of Isaac's weaning. At Sarah's insistence, Hagar and her son were expelled from Abraham's family. However, God took care of them as they wandered in the wilderness.

The Lord also carried out His promise to make a great nation of Ishmael. He had 12 sons who had many descendants who lived as nomads in the deserts of northern Arabia. Tradition holds that all of the Arab peoples are descended from Hagar.