

A TALE OF TWO TESTAMENTS

The remaining portion of Galatians chapter four is an allegory. The Jewish rabbis often used allegory in their teachings. When Paul began to use allegory to drive home the truth that he has been teaching for four chapters, I am certain that ears began to open and hopefully hearts did as well. In the etymology of the word “allegory” we find it to mean: “allos” from Greek meaning “another or different” and “agoreuo” meaning to speak specifically in the assembly. The definition would therefore be: “to say in another way.” Pilgrim’s Progress is the perfect example of allegory. It is a story with two levels of meaning. It tells of the story of Christian on his way to the Celestial City. And every person he meets and every episode he encounters is chock full of spiritual truths which parallel to biblical teachings. Allegory can be most profitable in that it can often unlock hidden truths that we may miss on the first presentation of a truth.

Paul identified his teaching as allegorical, “Which things are an allegory...” (Galatians 4:24a). Allow me to present to you the characters in the allegory.

- Abraham represents faith.
- Sarah represents grace.
- Isaac represents the new man brought forth by the new birth.
- Hagar represents the Law.
- Ishmael represents the old nature.

I. TWO SONS

Galatians 4:22a: “For it is written, that Abraham had two sons....” Ishmael was born by the works of the flesh. This was Sarah’s and Abraham’s attempt to help God fulfill the promised gift of a son. God’s choice for the son was always Isaac.

Romans 8:5 teaches us, “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.” We read in Romans 9:7-9, “Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for

the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.”

II. TWO MOTHERS

Galatians 4:22b: “...two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.” Hagar was Abraham’s second wife. God never meant for Abraham to be married to Hagar. Even among Jewish custom today, the mother determines the identity of the child. If a Jewish young lady marries a Gentile, their child is considered a Jew. Hagar was a slave; therefore her child was born a slave. Sarah was free; therefore her child was born free.

III. TWO BIRTHS

Galatians 4:23: “But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.” God rejected Cain over Abel. He rejected Esau over Jacob. He rejected Ishmael and chose Isaac. He rejected the firstborn in Egypt. He rejected your and my first birth. It is the second birth that gives us new life. Isaac was the second born. In John 3:3 we learn, “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:6, 7 tells us, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” We read in John 1:12, 13, “But as many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Ishmael will only produce the works of the flesh. It takes the miracle birth of Isaac to generate the new life. Romans 4:16-21 illustrates that God waited until both Abraham and Sarah were past human ability to bear children before he brought Isaac into the world. God wanted no human explanation for Isaac’s existence!

IV. TWO COVENANTS

Galatians 4:24: “Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants....” Isaac represents the covenant of grace; Ishmael represents the covenant of the law. The name Ishmael means “God will hear.” The name Isaac means “laughter.” The law demands extrinsically as Deuteronomy 5:1 points out, “And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them.” Grace commands intrinsically as Romans 5:11 says, “And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” It takes the grace of God to make us Christians! Paul

declared in I Corinthians 15:10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” Hagar, who named Ishmael, reminds us that the God who hears has allowed us, by the Law, to hear the truth of our nature. Hagar was a servant. The law was never meant to be your servant permanently. The law convicts. The law reveals. Hagar showed what a sneak Sarah was. Sarah was impatient and liked to scheme. Hagar revealed Abraham’s weakness. Hagar was a servant, not a master. She could not even control Ishmael. Genesis 16:12a: “And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him....” It took Isaac’s birth to give laughter, true joy. And by the same token, it takes the New Covenant (which is synonymous with the New Testament) to give us “...joy unspeakable and full of glory” (I Peter 1:8). Our Lord reminds us, “...This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20c).

God did not deliver Israel by law, but by grace. It was the blood on the door, not the law on the door of the first Passover. God gave grace first. The law was added. Galatians 3:19, “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.” The Old Covenant came through a mediator, Moses. Christ Himself gave us grace in the New Covenant. John 1:17: “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” In I Timothy 2:5 we read, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Genesis 17:18, 19: “And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.” God rebuked Abraham when Abraham suggested that Ishmael might be the covenant child who brings forth life. God interrupted and informed Abraham that only Isaac would bring forth the everlasting covenant. The old covenant brings forth death. Everlasting life comes to us from the new covenant.

V. TWO MOUNTAINS

Galatians 4:24b-26: “...two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.”

God gave Moses the law from Mount Sinai. Christ gave us grace from Mount Calvary. Paul likened ancient Sinai to present Jerusalem. The Jews who rejected Jesus and held to the old covenant are proprietors of death. Those who are recipients of new covenant are birthed from above, i.e., Heavenly Jerusalem. “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...” (Hebrews 12:22a).

VI. TWO NATURES

Hagar gave birth to a slave. Ishmael illustrates the rebel nature and cannot operate in freedom. He mocks God's plans and purposes. Genesis 21:9: "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking." Galatians 4:29, 29: "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman."

What a comparison! From the moment Hagar conceived, chaos was in Abraham's house (Genesis 16:4). Ishmael had a rebel heart and was a wild man consigned to the wilderness, whereas Isaac brought nothing but blessing to Abraham's household. He was obedient in all things, even to the point of death (Genesis 22:8-10). The two natures were never designed to peacefully co-exist.

Conclusion:

Romans 8:1-5 is the perfect commentary to our story.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.