

LSB Galatians 4:21 - 5:1 *An Allegory of Two Covenants*

21 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the Law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the servant-woman and one by the free woman. 23 But the son by the servant-woman had been born according to the flesh, while the son by the free woman through the promise. 24 This is spoken with allegory, for these women are two covenants: one from Mount Sinai bearing children into slavery; she is Hagar. 25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 27 For it is written, "Rejoice, barren woman who does not give birth; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For more numerous are the children of the desolate one Than of the one who has a husband." 28 And you brothers, in accordance with Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh was persecuting him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the servant-woman and her son, For the son of the servant-woman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman." 31 So then, brothers, we are not children of a servant-woman, but of the free woman. . (5:1) It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Therefore, stand firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

This morning we have the privilege to consider a text that is one of those portions of scripture that is proof of the blessings of verse by verse exposition from beginning to end of a Bible book. When you are committed to verse by verse exposition, sooner or later you're going to get to the hard passages that anyone with any sense doing topical preaching would skip over and ignore.

Indeed, as I read this passage this morning some of you may have thought to yourselves, what in the world is he going to do with this. But the truth

is, being forced to stop and consider what Paul says here is going to unleash riches for us to enjoy.

It's a lengthy portion, so lets jump right in and get our feet wet.

21 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the Law?

What does it mean to be under the law? Apparently, these folks desire to be under the law. What does that mean. We need to understand that first in order to have the same mindset in mind that Paul is arguing against. They want to be under the law.

Paul wants them to understand that desiring to be under the law is folly. Paul is going to equate being under the law as slavery, and being In Christ as freedom. Being under the law is regressive. It's going backwards from freedom into slavery. Nobody does that!

The law here is the law of Moses given in the first five books of the Bible. It would include not only the moral law, the 10 commandments, but also the ceremonial law of temple worship with all of it's different required offerings on alters and all of the sabbath observances and requirements.

Plus it would include all of the civil laws given to Israel as a nation. All the feasts and observances, all of the rules that governed their interactions as citizens with each other. Civil law. Ceremonial law. Moral law. All of it.

And the reason it's a question is because these judaizers had come and told them, their salvation was an insufficient one as given according to Paul's gospel. God wants you to be jewish. You have to get to Jesus by way of Moses. Be jews first, then Christ can save you.

But to be under law also forfeits the grace of salvation accomplished in your place, by Jesus on the cross, because being under the law means it's you who is responsible for a righteousness acceptable to God, which is a perfect and flawless righteousness. You do it by keeping all of God's laws,

both outer and inner, perfectly. And that's impossible. We can't accomplish that. Only Christ lived a perfect life without sin. Works righteousness can never attain to God's perfection.

And Paul has been combatting that for 4 chapters. And this treatise, this letter we are studying is the earliest of the combined writings that make up our new testament. So Paul is relying on using the old testament for his arguments.

And it's almost as if Paul goes out on a bit of a limb here and says, let's take a look at a parallel, in the old testament, a story where God promises something that can only come by His miraculous involvement and intervention. And what happens when men try to achieve God's promise by doing it themselves.

Paul is going to use an old testament story to compare works righteousness, a self righteousness trying to achieve God's promises by our own works in our own fallen flesh, or achieving God's promises by waiting for Him to accomplish the impossible. Divine accomplishment, or human effort.

Is salvation accomplished by us doing it, or is it accomplished by God doing it and us believing He will accomplish the impossible, for us, and in us.

So Paul says, I've got a story for you. A perfect picture of works, man trying to achieve God's promise in his own strength which corresponds to being under the law, in a works righteousness system, OR, rather, believing His promises, His word, and waiting for Him to achieve those promises that are impossible for us to do.

22 For it is written . . .

Stop right there. Paul doesn't argue using his own authority. Do this because I say so. Although, as a chosen apostle, hand picked by Jesus, to build his church, Paul does have authority that we don't have.

But Paul uses the authority of the written word of God to make his argument. And in the time frame that he writes, it's the old testament that Paul has to work with.

So it is brilliant that Paul can pull a story out of the law to show a picture of the impossibility of man achieving God's work. Paul pulls a story from the law to show the ineffectiveness of the law. Paul carefully "rightly divides the word of truth" here.

22 For it is written . . . The whole reason christianity is in dis-favor and conflict with the world stems from the authority of this book. It is written. If it is written, and if this book is the word of God, and the word of God has authority over our lives and is the final say in what we believe is truth and error, *then* we must believe and obey this book, even if the world calls us lunatics.

We are under the authority of the unchangeable "it is writtens" of this book. Sorry world, the book says God made boys and God made girls. The book says sex is the singular possibility of one man married to one woman, for life and anything outside of that blessed union is sin.

The world hates us and that hate will escalate because of what Paul writes here. He argues, it is written. We are under that authority. Have you noticed that the world doesn't hassle so called christians who do not believe the Bible is the authoritative word of the living God. Cancel the authority and the world will let you go your marshmallow way.

But we have to be diligent to rightly divide what is written. There is diligence, hard work involved. The old joke; It is written; *"And Judas went and hanged himself."* *"Go, and do thou likewise."* *"What thou doest, do speedily."*

We apply some diligence to rightly dividing the word of truth, or we'll all be drinking the Kool-aid this afternoon, right. Paul pulls a story out of the

law to illustrate the ineffectiveness of trying to achieve God's promises by human works. Human effort. Human achievement apart from God. This is a vivid illustration of rightly dividing God's word in order to teach God's truths.

21 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the Law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the servant-woman and one by the free woman.

Paul keeps falling back on Abraham as illustrative of salvation by grace through faith. Abraham, abraham, Abraham.

Abraham is mentioned 8 times in Galatians 3. He is the prototype of our salvation. He is the patriarch who believed God, and it was accounted unto him as righteousness. A righteousness not achieved by works. A righteousness by accounting. God provided Abraham with a righteousness not his own, accounted unto him by faith. Abraham believed in God's promises.

Abraham is the source. Through Abraham's seed all nations will be blessed. Pinch yourselves, here we are. We are Abrahams children by adoption. Christ came through Abraham's seed. We are in Christ.

Let's review; Gal. 3:6 *Just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness, 7 so know that those who are of faith, those are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.*

Abraham is our prototype. The first of many who receives a foreign righteousness. A righteousness not his own. A righteousness credited to his account. By faith alone.

Verse 18 sums up; *18 For if the inheritance is by law, it is no longer by*

promise, but God has granted it to Abraham through promise. And then Paul sums up his argument again linking all of our inheritance back to Abraham. Listen to vss. 26 - 29 of chapter 3;

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise.

So, Abraham is the prototype of a righteousness by faith in God's promises apart from works. That's Paul's entire premise. You want Abraham, you want to be jews, let me show you Abraham as our prototype of a faith apart from works that resulted in blessing. In Christ we are Abraham's true children, if we follow in his faith. He believed God's promises.

But Abraham was flawed. Like all of us. And Paul picks this story to compare Abraham's result of trying to cause the promises by him doing it instead of waiting for God to do it. Force the promise by human achievement. Try to reach a Godly result by human effort apart from God.

23 But the son by the servant-woman had been born according to the flesh, while the son by the free woman through the promise.

Let me give you some background. God has promised Abraham blessing, a mighty nation, from his loins, from which ultimately one seed will be born who will be a blessing for all the nations.

Great. And the waiting begins. Wait. Wait. Wait. And then in Genesis 15 we read; 1 *After these things the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision, saying,*

*“Do not fear, Abram,
I am a shield to you;
Your reward shall be very great.”*

2 And Abram said, “O Lord Yahweh, what will You give me, as I go on

being childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 And Abram said, “Since You have given no seed to me, behold, one born in my house is my heir.” 4 Then behold, the word of Yahweh came to him, saying, “This one will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.”

Abraham says this heir thing doesn't seem to be working out. Eliezer of Damascus is going to inherit my wealth. I don't have any kids of my own. And Abraham is 86 years old.

So, in the next chapter, Sarah, Abraham's wife decides she has to get Abraham to give God a little help on this heir thing. Can't wait forever and God doesn't seem to be getting this done.

Perhaps she reasoned, God said Abraham's loins, but He didn't specify my womb, now did He. Maybe God meant someone else is involved in all of this heir business. So, in chapter 16 we have this story of man forcing the blessing to come, by the flesh.

Gen. 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian servant-woman whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, “Now behold, Yahweh has shut my womb from bearing children. Please go in to my servant-woman; perhaps I will obtain children through her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 And after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram’s wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant-woman, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. 4 So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived.

So Paul draws a parallel lesson, again from Abraham. Who makes the blessing happen? Do we force the blessing by doing stuff. Righteousness by works in our flesh. Or do we believe God will bring the blessing, the promise, apart from the works of our flesh.

Ishmael is what you get by forcing the promise through your own fleshy works. Isaac is what you get when you wait for God.

Isaac was born 14 years later, when Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90. Both of them are incapable of producing a child by that time. Abraham's body is as good as dead, and Sarah's womb has always been dead to conceiving children for their entire life together.

The promised heir is only possible one way. Miracle. These two can only produce a child by miraculous intervention. But God causes Sarah to become the mother of Isaac by Abraham who is also incapable of children at this point. Total miracle. All God, nothing from either Abraham or Sarah has brought the promised blessing.

23 But the son by the servant-woman had been born according to the flesh, while the son by the free woman through the promise. 24 This is spoken with allegory,

We have to be intensely careful here. Allegory has been the cause of immense harm to God's word. In fact the translation of the greek word here as allegory is tenuous. And the translators understand that and different versions have chosen different words like; this is figuratively, or this is an illustration.

Paul says, we can step outside of the literal story and take a figurative lesson from what occurred. This is an illustration of a spiritual truth. And Paul achieves that brilliantly. But damage can happen when people take literal truth and say it means something else.

We have a lot of that in modern liberal christianity. The first eleven chapters of Genesis are not literal. They're poetry. They're a beautiful allegory. And damage is done. We wreak havoc on scripture by doing that. The book of revelation is allegory and it means whatever meaning we assign to it. Nonsense.

Paul was a chosen apostle. His allegory takes a historical story and uses what happened at that time to illustrate a broader spiritual truth. What

happens when we force God's promise by working for the attainment of that promise by works of our flesh instead of by believing with faith.

Chaos happens. Just like what happened when Sarah talked Abraham into not waiting for God, but taking the situation into his own hands and helping God, in his flesh. Disaster happens when we take the reigns in our flesh, and go about to cause God's promises to come about by our effort, our works.

24 This is spoken with allegory, for these women are two covenants: one from Mount Sinai bearing children into slavery; she is Hagar.

Paul says, Hagar and Ishmael correspond to a system of righteousness by works of the law. And Paul draws attention to the giving of the law at Mount Sinai.

God came to Abraham quietly. God chose Abraham to be His friend. Scripture refers to Abraham as the friend of God. There is intimacy. Quietness. Covenanted blessing through unconditional promise.

But Mount Sinai is terrifying. The law is terrible. Terrifying. Fire and earthquakes and clouds of smoke. And God is not intimate. He tells Israel to keep their distance. So much so that even one of their cattle, if it strayed upon that mountain, it would be killed. Mount Sinai is a covenant of terror.

The law brings slavery. The law condemns us as slaves to our sin. The law is a mirror that shows us our helplessness and weakness. We are slaves to sin. Mount Sinai is terror and slavery and condemnation. That's the covenant of a righteousness by works of our flesh. Horrible. Hagar the Horrible. Paul's version. Long before Dik Browne's comic strip.

25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

Here Paul assigns slavery and condemnation and the horrors and terrors of

Sinai to the present Jerusalem. Covenant judaism as it was in Paul's life time, and still is today. Righteousness by works of the law.

When Paul says Jerusalem, he means all practicing jews of the old covenant. Including these judaizers who were following Paul around and molesting Paul's spiritual children, stealing their freedom and giving them slavery in it's place. Hagar and Ishmael represent Mount Sinai and the terrors of the law no one could keep, and the resulting slavery to sin in Paul's analogy.

26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

Sarah, the mother of Isaac, by promise and by miraculous conception beyond human possibilities is the Jerusalem above. She is our mother. In this analogy, we are free of the condemnation of the law. We are also free of the ceremonial law that was completed in Jesus death and resurrection, and we are not bound by Israel's civil laws as a nation, set aside by God, until the church is removed at the rapture.

In Paul's analogy, righteousness by works of the flesh brings terror and slavery and the weight of unforgiven sins. Righteousness by promise brings freedom from sins and the blessings of God by unconditional promises. We are IN the seed of promise. We are in Christ. All of the blessing promised to Abraham is ours in Christ. Ours by faith alone, without works.

27 For it is written,

*“Rejoice, barren woman who does not give birth;
Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor;
For more numerous are the children of the desolate one
Than of the one who has a husband.”*

Judaism was a closed club. It was possible to convert to judaism, but you still weren't Abrahams offspring. That was their mindset. The pharisee's telling Jesus, Abraham is our father. And Jesus tells them, their father is

the Devil.

They relied upon that blood line. We're Abraham's children. We're chosen. And yet their own prophet, 700 years earlier speaks of the blessing of the nations in the Messiah of Israel.

We are those numberless children of the desolate one. We are Abraham's true heirs. We are in Christ who is the singular seed of promise. We are adopted children, heirs of promise, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

28 And you brothers, in accordance with Isaac, are children of promise.

Paul writes that to gentiles in Asia Minor who were so far removed from anything Jewish it was the last thing from their minds. We were outcasts, nobodies from nowhere. According to the pharisees, these Galatian gentiles were under a curse. Forgotten by God. Chaff for the burning. Nothing at all. Outcasts.

Paul says, In Christ, you are in the lineage of Isaac, the miraculous promised seed of blessing, adopted children, heirs with Christ, the very children of the very promise. In Paul's analogy, the nation of Israel is on the outside looking in, and those of us in Christ are the recipients of all the promises and blessings.

We are in Isaac's miraculous lineage. We are the children of the promise. Children born by miraculous intervention from God. Miracle babies, all of us.

29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh was persecuting him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

This is most interesting to us in our day. The record of Ishmael is in the Bible. He married an Egyptian wife and settled in Paran, north of Egypt. He also had 12 sons, like Jacob. And he is the father of the northern Arab nations. A quote from an internet source;

"The area of Havilah where Ishmael's descendants lived is in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula; Shur is a wilderness area between Beersheba in the Negev Desert and Egypt. Isaiah 60:7 mentions the descendants of Nebaioth and Kedar as those who raise flocks. The descendants of Ishmael became known as Arabs, which basically means "nomads." From the beginning, the descendants of Ishmael were a warlike people, as "they lived in hostility toward all the tribes related to them" (Genesis 25:18). This fulfilled God's earlier word that Ishmael would be "a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers" (Genesis 16:12).

Mohammad the prophet of Islam claimed lineage to Abraham through Ishmael in the 10th century. Who am I to argue. It is almost eerie that these biblical warlike persecutors of God's promised heir are still at each other's throats, as we speak. Paul's allegory on steroids.

30 But what does the Scripture say?

*"Cast out the servant-woman and her son,
For the son of the servant-woman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman."*

This whole event fascinates me. I have been a watcher of Israel since my teens. Watching God's prophecies unfold. The world chooses to divorce itself from the God of the Bible and tries to be secular, as if there was no God.

How strange that events from 3500 years ago in this region of the world are still playing out today as if they were written down yesterday. Listen for some moments to Genesis 21;

1 Now Yahweh visited Sarah as He had said, and Yahweh did for Sarah as He had promised. 2 So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. 3 And

Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." 7 And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

8 And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. 9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing in jest. 10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maidservant and her son! The son of this maidservant shall not be an heir with my son, with Isaac." 11 And the matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son.

Sin haunts us, even in blessing. Abraham was distressed that Ismael, also his son, had to be driven away. That must have been heart breaking. Yet, if you read further, God tells Abraham to listen to his wife Sarah and drive out the fleshly son who persecutes the miraculous son of promise.

31 So then, brothers, we are not children of a servant-woman, but of the free woman.

I hope you understand Paul's point in his allegory of this ancient but literal incident. If you try to accomplish salvation by works of the law generated from your fallen flesh - Ishmael's are all you'll ever get.

However, if you wait on God, and believe His promises, He will cause every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies to be yours.

Salvation by works of the flesh gets you Ishmaels and slavery. Salvation by faith in the promise of a Redeemer who came through a miracle birth, as promised. God did it all, that makes us sons of Abraham through Isaac.

Paul's final point, the whole purpose of the allegorical lesson, is in vs. 1 of

chapter 5. Those chapter breaks were added later. 5:1 belongs as the final object of the allegory Paul just unpacked. It's the whole point.

(5:1) It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Therefore, stand firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.