

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s Letter to the Galatians

(SB_Galatians_Lsn9_Chapter 4C)

As we observed in our previous lesson, we are in the final section of a chiasmic structure in which Paul builds a logical and Scriptural case to support a conclusion then he uses that conclusion to construct the parallel logic regarding the practical consequences and application of that conclusion.

- A** Promise (Abraham) 3:6-14
 - B** Law (Moses) 3:15-22
 - C** Faith (Christ) 3:23-25
 - D** "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." 3:26
 - C'** Faith (Spirit) 3:27—4:7
 - B'** Law (*stoicheia tou kosmou*) 4:8-11
- A'** Promise (Sarah) 4:21-31

As we also noted, a chiasmic structure is one in which the themes of the first paragraphs are repeated in reverse order in the subsequent paragraphs. The genius of the Holy Spirit combines with Paul’s vast familiarity with Hebrew Scriptures and the issues of his day in this chiasmic structure. Paul leads his readers through a logical flow of thought based upon Scripture that proves that justification by faith alone apart from works of the Law is nothing new.

Paul’s argument in the first half of the chiasmic structure – The concept of justification by faith alone preceded the giving of the Mosaic Law (Gal 3:15-22) and is dramatically illustrated in the life of Abraham, the father of the Jews, who believed prospectively in the “Seed” Who would come and fulfill God’s promise (Gal 3:6-14). Christ was that promised Seed and the faith of the Galatians makes them spiritual seed of Abraham, thus spiritual progeny or children of Abraham and sons of God – also in fulfillment of God’s promise (Gal 3:23-25, 26).

Paul’s application in the second half of the chiasmic structure – The evidence of the Galatians’ status as “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” was the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:27-4:7), the receipt of Whom at their salvation was most likely attended by some of the same phenomenon that had been demonstrated to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and to Peter through the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10) not to mention other miraculous events similar to those which had accompanied Philip’s preaching in Samaria (Acts 8:4ff). Such phenomenon should have left no doubt in the minds of the Galatians as to their acceptance by God as sons.

Within the flow of this chiasmic logic, Paul next highlights the discrepancy between their status as “free” sons of God and their captivity to the Law (4:8-11). They had been deceived by the Judaizers to believe that the path to true sonship was through the keeping of the Law. Paul argues that by succumbing to the argument of the Judaizers, the Galatians had traded their freedom as sons of God through their faith in Christ for a system of bondage.

In 4:12-20, Paul takes a break from this chiasmic structure to appeal to the Galatians to remember their time together and the struggle for the Truth against hardship that they had endured. He highlights the self-serving motives of the Judaizers in contrast to his selfless treatment of them similar to the way a mother cares for her own children.

This leads us to the final element of this chiasmic logic that Paul deploys in 4:21-31. In these verses, Paul takes his readers back full circle to Abraham. Abraham had been given a

promise from God (e.g. Gen 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-18; 26:2-4; 28:13-14; 35:11-12). God desired to demonstrate for all of human history to follow that His promise to Abraham did not depend upon man's strength and that it was not something just dreamed up in the mind of man. Rather, God desired to establish His promise in the supernatural birth of a son. The birth of a son to Abraham and Sarah when they were so obviously beyond child-bearing age would establish the genetic "seed" through which the promised "Seed" would come.

At a point in Abraham's life after Yahweh had given Abraham the promise that through he and Sarah would come the genetic heir of the promise (Gen 15:4), Abraham lapsed in the continuance in that faith. Ten years after having received the promise and in a moment of unbelief and spiritual weakness, his wife, Sarai, spoke words contrary to the promise God had given Abram. Sarai encouraged Abram to take matters into his own hands and have sexual relations with Hagar, Sarai's handmaiden (Gen 16:1-3). In the ancient Middle East, if a couple could not have children, then a surrogate birth mother might be found so as to prevent the husband from divorcing his wife. From this act of unbelief on the part of Abraham, Ishmael was born through Hagar. Even though Hagar was evidently a believer (Gen 16:13-14), her son Ishmael was to be a "wild man" whose hand would be "against every man, and every man's hand against him." Yet, Ishmael would dwell in the midst of his brethren – the other descendants of Abraham and Sarah. Ishmael is the father of the Arab peoples who populate the Middle East today.

Abram was 74 years old when he journeyed to the land of promise after being called by Yahweh in the land of Ur (Gen 12:4). He was 86 years old when he became the father of Ishmael (Gen 16:16). Then 13 more years passed without a son being born to Sarai (Gen 12:1-3; 15:3, 5, 13, 18) and at 99 years of age (Gen 17:1), the Lord appeared again to Abram and confirmed His promise and gave Abram the name that he was to give his son to be born of Sarai. Sometime later, in fulfillment of God's promise, Isaac was born (Gen 21:1-7). This is the historic backdrop for Paul's analogy in Galatians 4:21-31.

FAITH AND THE PROMISE IN THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM AND SARAH (GAL 4:21-31)

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 bondwoman and one by the free woman. 23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. 24 This is allegorically speaking: for these *women* are two covenants, one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; 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 BEAR;
BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR;
FOR MORE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE
THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND."

28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is now also. 30 But what does the Scripture say?

"CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON,
FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF
THE FREE WOMAN."

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.¹ (Gal 4:21-31)

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are taken from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

After reviewing and refreshing our memories of the story of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis, it is fairly easy to see the analogy that Paul constructs in this last element of his chiasmic argument. The table below presents this information in a succinct fashion.

Verse	Son of Bondwoman	Son of Freewoman	Notes
23	Born according to the "flesh"	Born according to the "promise"	
24	Mt. Sinai, bondage, born of Hagar		
25, 26	Corresponds to the then present legalism that dominated Jerusalem	Corresponds to the heavenly Jerusalem	
27			The quotation from Isaiah 54:1 prophesied the changing fortunes of Israel, which Paul applied to Sarah's history. Israel before her Babylonian Captivity was likened to a woman with a husband . The barren woman was Israel in Captivity. The woman bearing more . . . children may have pictured Israel restored to the land after the Exile, but more particularly it portrays her millennial blessings. ²
28		"We" (Paul and the Galatians) are the children of Promise	Paul compared the birth of Isaac to that of believers. "Isaac" was born of supernatural circumstances as a result of a promise. Each believer experiences a supernatural birth (John 3:3, 5) and is a recipient of the promise of salvation (Gal. 3:9, 22, 29). As children of promise Christians are in a distinct category and should not live as children of bondage.
29	Persecuted those born of the Promise	Persecuted by those born of the flesh	Ishmael's persecution of Isaac (Gen 21:9) is comparable to the persecution of the Judaizers who wanted to enslave the Galatians in bondage to legalism.
30	Ishmael was to be separated from Issac as the legalism of the Judaizers was to be separated from the free grace salvation that had been received by the Galatians		Ishmael was not entitled to the inheritance since he was born not of faith, but of unbelief. The inheritance of the promise comes only through belief or faith in the Promise – Christ.
31	Paul and Galatians not the spiritual children of the bondwoman	Paul and the Galatians were spiritual children of the freewoman	

² John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament* (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc. 1983, 1985), 604.