

## THE ALLEGORY OF SARAH & HAGAR

### **TEXT: GALATIANS 4:19-31**

#### **Introduction:**

1. The great theme of Galatians is salvation by grace, apart from the law. In this letter, the apostle Paul has taken up the question of law and grace and has been expounding it, clarifying it, illustrating it, and making it very clear that salvation is not by works of the law but entirely by the hearing of faith.
2. The contrast between law and grace is evident to anyone who has ever been born again.
3. Romans 11:6 says, "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."
4. These believers in Galatia were saved by grace but were now turning to legalism. This caused Paul to wonder if they were even saved in the first place (4:20, cf. 4:11).
5. People who try to keep the law do not really understand the law (4:21). James 2:10 says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."
6. The Judaizers made much of their descent from Abraham, and they insisted that believers follow his example by being circumcised. Therefore, Paul turns again to Abraham's life to prove to the Galatians that the law cannot be mixed in with the gospel of grace (cf. 3:6-9,16).
7. God had promised Abraham that he would have a son, even though he and Sarah were old, and well past the normal child-bearing age. But Abraham believed God (Gen. 15:1-6).
8. Eventually, Sarah became impatient and discouraged. She grew tired of waiting on God and suggested that Abraham have a child with Hagar, her handmaid. Abraham followed her foolish advice and Ishmael was soon born (Gen. 16:1-4, 15, 16).
9. However, Ishmael was not the heir promised by God. Ishmael was the son of Abraham's impatience, carnality, and lack of faith.
10. Later on, when Abraham was 100 years old, Isaac, the son of promise, was born (Gen. 21).
11. Later on, Sarah saw Ishmael mocking her son Isaac, and she went to Abraham telling him to expel Ishmael and Hagar from the house (Gen. 21:9-13).
12. This is the background for Paul's allegory in Galatians 4 (cf. 4:21-24). An allegory is a narrative with a deeper meaning behind it.

13. The most famous allegory in the English language is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, a story about a pilgrim named Christian who leaves the City of Destruction with the burden of sin on his shoulders.
14. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to discern the allegory in the story of Sarah and Hagar. Unfortunately, many people have gone to the Bible and found hidden meanings that were not really there. This does nothing but confuse people.
15. The Old Testament is full of stories and types with deep significance, oftentimes unnoticeable to the casual reader. But we must always interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, and not read into it things that God never intended.
16. In other words, the Bible must be interpreted literally and not "spiritually." Tonight, we will study Paul's allegory and see how he draws a lesson from the lives of Abraham and Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac.

## **I. THE PHYSICAL BIRTH MAKES US SINNERS AND THE SPIRITUAL BIRTH MAKES US CHILDREN OF GOD**

1. In Paul's allegory, Isaac represents the man saved by grace. Ishmael represents the sinner "born after the flesh" (4:23).
2. *The Scofield Study Bible* says, "The allegory (4:22-31) is addressed to justified but immature believers (cf. I Cor. 3:1, 2), who, under the influence of legalistic teachers, 'desire to be under the law,' and has, therefore, no application to a sinner seeking justification. It raises and answers, for the fifth time in this Epistle, the question, Is the believer under the law? (2:19-21; 3:1-3, 25, 26; 4:4-6, 9-31)" (p. 1246).
3. Isaac was born "by promise" (4:23). Isaac represents the man saved by grace.
4. First, he was born by God's power – he "was born after the Spirit" (Gal. 4:29). If you are saved, you too were "born of the Spirit." Our Lord said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).
5. Isaac brought joy. His name means "laughter." Isaac's birth brought joy to his elderly parents. Salvation brings joy, not only to the person saved, but to those around him as well.
6. Isaac was persecuted (Gal.4:29). Genesis 21:9 says Ishmael was a mocker.
7. J. Vernon McGee said that when he first started preaching, he made a comment that preaching on prophecy would get him into trouble. A deacon came to him and said, "Pastor, you are mistaken. Preaching on prophecy will not get you into trouble. But if you preach the grace of God, you're going to get into trouble." Eventually, he found this to be true and noticed that very

few preachers preached the pure Gospel message of salvation by God's grace (cf. 5:11).

8. Ishmael created no problems in Abraham's home until Isaac was born. In like manner, our old nature didn't bother us before we were saved. But after we received our new nature, conflicts began (cf. Gal. 5:16, 17; Rom. 7:15-19).
9. Paul Rader was a great preacher of a previous generation. One day he said, "The old nature that you and I have is just like an old dead cat. What you need to do is reach down and get that old cat by the tail and throw it as far away as you can." Another preacher was at that meeting by the name of Lewis Sperry Chafer. Afterward he said to Mr. Rader, "Paul, you forget that the old dead cat has nine lives. When you throw him away, he is going to be right back tomorrow."
10. No wonder Paul cried out: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

## **II. WE ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW; WE ARE UNDER GRACE**

1. Abraham began with Sarah, not Hagar. In this allegory, Hagar represents the law and Sarah represents God's grace (4:24-26).
2. In God's relationship with Israel, He first operated on the basis of grace, not law. For example, his covenant with Abraham was based on grace, not law.
3. Later, when God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, it was on the basis of grace, not law. The law was given after they left Egypt.
4. Like Hagar, the law came later. The law "was added because of transgressions till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3:19).
5. Hagar performed a function temporarily, and then was gone, just as the law performed a special function and then was gone (Gal. 3:24, 25).
6. No doubt, the Judaizers would not like this comparison of the law with an Egyptian slave, but Paul made his point very clearly (cf. Gal. 5:11, 12).
7. Paul does not diminish the law – he exalts God's grace.
8. Hagar was a "bondwoman" (4:23, 30, 31), which means "slave." Sarah was a "freewoman" (4:23, 30). Hagar is identified with Mount Sinai and the law, "which gendereth to bondage" (4:24; cf. 4:3, 9, 25; 5:1).
9. Hagar "is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children" (4:25).
10. Those who try to commend themselves to God by doing good works are "her children" and according to the Bible they are in bondage.
11. Jerusalem was the capitol of the Jewish nation, and the center for the unsaved Israelites who were still seeking to obtain righteousness by keeping

the law. For Paul to link Jerusalem with Hagar instead of Sarah was a rebuke to all unregenerate Jews.

12. Hagar was not meant to bear a child. Abraham's relationship to Hagar was out of the will of God. It was the result of Sarah and Abraham's unbelief and impatience. Isaac was to be Abraham's heir, not Ishmael.
13. Sarah said in Genesis 21:10, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."
14. As far as God was concerned, Isaac was Abraham's "only son" (Gen. 22:2, 12, 16).
15. Ishmael could not share in Isaac's inheritance. The Judaizers were trying to make Hagar a "mother" again, but this would only lead to frustration (Gal. 2:21).
16. No amount of religion or rules or rituals can give life to dead sinners. And all those without Christ are dead -- "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). Only Christ can give life and it is through the power of the Gospel.

### **III. LIKE SARAH, WE MUST "CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN" (4:30; cf. Gen. 21:9, 10).**

1. Lest we think Sarah was being unduly harsh, God approved of her decision. God said to Abraham, "All that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 21:12).
2. The house was not big enough for both Sarah and Hagar, and for both Isaac and Ishmael. Somebody had to go. Likewise, it is impossible for law and grace to stay together. One must prevail, and one must go.
3. The Judaizers in Paul's day, and many of the religionists of our day are trying to scramble together law and grace, faith and works, God's gift of righteousness and man's self-righteousness. It could not work in Paul's day and will not work in ours.
4. Hagar was not married again. And God never gave the law to any other nation or people other than Israel. For the Judaizers to impose the law upon the Galatian Christians was contrary to God's Word.
5. The Judaizers wanted to wed Mount Sinai with the new Jerusalem. This was an unequal yoke which God could not bless.

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. Let me conclude with these words from M.R. DeHaan:
  - The law prohibits – Grace invites and gives.
  - The law condemns the sinner – Grace redeems the sinner.
  - The law says "DO" – Grace says, "IT IS DONE."
  - The law, "Keep on trying" – Grace says, "It is finished."

- The law curses – Grace blesses.
- The law slays the sinner – Grace makes the sinner alive.
- The law shuts every mouth before God – Grace opens the mouth to praise God.
- The law condemns – Grace saves the worst man.
- The law says, "Pay what you owe" – Grace says, "I freely forgive you all."
- The law says, "the wages of sin is death" – Grace says, "the gift of God is eternal life."
- The law says: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" – Grace says, "Believe and live."
- The law reveals sin – Grace atones for sin.
- By the law is the knowledge of sin – By grace is redemption from sin.
- The law was given by Moses – Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
- The law demands obedience – Grace bestows and gives power to obey.
- The law was written on stone – Grace is written on the tables of the heart.
- The law was done away in Christ – Grace abides forever.
- The law puts us under bondage – Grace sets us in the liberty of the sons of God.