

Ln 9 ... Who Is Your Spiritual Mother

Galatians 4:21-31

Who is your spiritual mother? At the conclusion of this lesson, you will know. Paul continues to contrast Law and grace with the analogy of Hagar and Sarah. He asks the Galatians: *Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?* ([4:21](#)). In other words, “Do you really understand what the Law demands?” Since most of the Galatian believers do not have Jewish backgrounds, they probably have a very elementary understanding of the Law. Therefore, Paul explains they, and everyone else, need to know who their spiritual mother is. This requires **three** actions.

Scrutinize the Illustration (4:22-23)

Paul now writes about Abraham’s two sons because the Judaizers taught that a heritage from Abraham was essential to salvation. However, Paul wants them to realize it is also very important to know who your spiritual mother is.

Therefore, what does he write about Abraham’s two sons in [verse 22b](#)?

According to Jewish law and custom, even to this day, the status of the mother determines the status of her child. If you were born of a slave woman, you were a slave; if of a free woman, you were free.

Abraham’s first son, Ishmael, was born through a slave, Hagar, and *was born after the flesh*. However, his second son, Isaac, was born through Sarah, *the freewoman*, and was born *by promise* ([4:23](#)). What *promise*?

When Abraham is 75 years old, God commands him to leave his country and his father’s house and go to the land he will show him ([Gen. 12:1](#)).

Then, what promise does God make to Abraham in [Genesis 12:2](#)?

When Abraham is 85 years old and the child not yet conceived, Sarah’s faith falters. Therefore, she suggests Abraham have a child through Hagar, her Egyptian maidservant. Abraham follows her suggestion, and Ishmael is born ([Gen. 16:1-4](#)). Fourteen years later, when Abraham is 99 and Sarah is 90 ([17:1](#), [17](#)), Abraham requests the *promise* be fulfilled through Ishmael ([17:18](#)).

In response, what does God tell him ([17:19b-c](#))?

God then promises Abraham that He will establish His covenant, or promise, through Isaac, and it will be *an everlasting covenant* ([17:19d](#)). Therefore, Isaac is the son of *promise* through a miraculous birth ([21:1-](#)

3). As was the custom of the Jews, when Isaac reaches age three, he is weaned, and Abraham holds a feast. When Sarah sees Ishmael laughing at her son Isaac, she demands Abraham get rid of Hagar and Ishmael. God confirms Sarah's demand, and the next day Abraham brokenheartedly sends them away ([21:8-14](#)).

Abraham's descendants through Ishmael eventually moved into the Arabian Desert and today are called "Arabs." Hagar and Ishmael represent those who reject God's promise and through human efforts, or works, try to get what God gives freely through faith.

Isaac's birth was miraculous because both Abraham and Sarah were well beyond childbearing years. Therefore, Sarah and Hagar illustrate two kinds of birth—natural birth and miraculous birth. Eternal life requires a miraculous birth.

That's why Jesus makes what statement in [John 3:3b-c](#)?

In this illustration of the two kinds of births, Paul is describing the difference between relying on self, *after the flesh*, and relying on God's *promise*. The two mothers illustrate the difference between salvation by works and salvation by faith.

To know who your spiritual mother is, **scrutinize the illustration** and...

Analyze the Explanation (4:24-27)

Hagar and Sarah represent *two covenants*—one made with Abraham and the other with Moses. Hagar represents the covenant *from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage* ([4:24](#)). Like Hagar and Ishmael, the Law was never part of God's promise to bless the world through Abraham. The Jews misunderstood the purpose of the Law. They expected to be justified before God by keeping the Law, but instead they had become enslaved to the Law.

In the same way, those trying to be saved by self-effort, or works, through the Law are slaves because the Law requires us to keep all its commands. This is humanly impossible; therefore, the Law produces religious slaves who can never be free.

Paul points out that it is not enough to have Abraham as your spiritual father. The real question is: "Who is your spiritual mother?" If you are relying on self-effort, or works, then Hagar is your mother. However, if you have had a supernatural birth, then Sarah is your mother.

How is this spiritual birth, being *born again*, described [1 Peter 1:23](#)?

Being *born again*, or being born from above, is the result of hearing and believing the Word of God.

Paul explains *Agar* (Hagar) represents *mount Sinai*, where God gave the Law to Moses ([Ex 31:18](#)).

However, Hagar also corresponds to *Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children* ([4:25](#)).

At the time Paul wrote the book of Galatians, *Jerusalem* was enslaved to Rome and *in bondage* to the Law.

Paul continues: *But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all* ([4:26](#)). Sarah represents the heavenly Jerusalem, which is where Christ is. The Jews believed there was a heavenly Jerusalem, and the earthly Jerusalem was just a copy.

This is true because in [Revelation 21:2](#), what does John see coming down from God out of heaven?

In [Galatians 4:27](#), Paul quotes [Isaiah 54:1](#), which predicts that Israel was comparatively *barren* during the Babylonian captivity. The *barren* woman is Israel in captivity, who would have more children in the future. This verse was originally written to encourage Jews exiled in Babylon. However, Paul applies it to Sarah by writing she should rejoice because she will have more descendants in the future than in the past. This is because Sarah's descendants include all Christians, who greatly outnumber those following Judaism, which is in stagnation.

Today, the worldwide population of Jews is about 13.3 million, of which about 5.3 million are in the United States. Israel has about 5.7 million. In 1938, before WWII the worldwide Jewish population was 15.7 million. About two billion—one third of the world's population—claim to be Christian. About one billion of those are Catholic. Obviously, not all that number are true believers, because Jesus said: *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven* ([Mt 7:21a-b](#)).

Then, what does Jesus say ([7:21c](#))?

To know who your spiritual mother is: **scrutinize the illustration, analyze the explanation**, and...

Personalize the Application (4:28-31)

Paul reminds the Galatians that they *as Isaac was, are the children of promise*.²⁹ *But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now* ([4:28-29](#)). In other words, Ishmael's persecution of Isaac was the same as the Judaizers' persecution of believers. This continues today. There will always be those who ridicule us for believing in salvation by grace alone ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)).

Quoting [Genesis 21:10](#), Paul adapts Sarah's words concerning Hagar and Ishmael: *Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman*" ([4:30](#)). Abraham did as Sarah requested. Paul compares Abraham's action, which was sanctioned by God ([Gen. 21:10, 12](#)), to the obligation of the Galatians. In the same way, the Galatians should *cast out* the false Jewish teachers because grace and works are mutually exclusive ([Rom. 11:6](#)). Salvation is not after the flesh, or works. It is a miraculous birth.

Therefore, in conclusion and referring to Christians, what does Paul write in [Galatians 4:31](#)?

When we place our faith in Christ alone, we become related to Abraham and Sarah because like Isaac, we are supernaturally born into the family of God. When we receive Jesus by faith, God gives us the right *to become* God's children ([Jn 1:12](#)).

Then, what does [John 1:13](#) declare?

True spiritual children of Sarah are born by a spiritual birth that comes from God.

To know who your spiritual mother is:

SCRUTINIZE THE ILLUSTRATION,

ANALYZE THE EXPLANATION,

PERSONALIZE THE APPLICATION.