

Two Covenants

Galatians 4.17-31

Introduction

Galatians 4:19–20 (CSB)

19 My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you.

20 I would like to be with you right now and change my tone of voice, because I don't know what to do about you.

Galatians 4:21–25 (CSB)

21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, don't you hear the law?

22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and the other by a free woman.

23 But the one by the slave was born as a result of the flesh, while the one by the free woman was born through promise.

24 These things are being taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai and bears children into slavery—this is Hagar.

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

Galatians 4:19-20 contains comments on the personal nature Paul had with these Christians. They meant a great deal to him. He had once labored to bring them to Christ. Now, the problems they were experiencing are compared to the pains of childbirth. Paul was gravely concerned about them and fearful of their continued departure from Jesus. In fact, he desperately wanted to be with them. But circumstances prevented him from being with them face to face, and as a result he was at a loss as to what to do.

4:21-31 – An appeal based on an Old Testament allegory.

Before this chapter concludes, Paul turns his thoughts to those who claimed salvation through the law. He will use two well-known Old Testament characters to drive home the point of spiritual inferiority under the Law. Strict adherence to the Law results only in bondage or spiritual slavery. Faith on the other hand, results in freedom.

Paul makes a comparison to Hagar and Sarah. Both women had sons. One son was born to a slave (Hagar). The other son was born to a freewoman (Sarah). Ishmael was born naturally, through natural means with no miraculous intervention. Isaac was born because of the promise – it was miraculous in nature – because Sarah had long passed the childbearing age. God directly intervened in her case. By using these two examples, Paul wishes to contrast those who held on to their religious heritage through natural progression of genealogy (Judaizing teachers) to those who trust in God through faith (Christians).

In 4:24-25 Hagar and Sarah represent two vastly different covenants: the old covenant and new covenant. Hagar represented the old. She was a slave, and all her descendants were slaves. What is the application? The law could only bring forth more slaves. In Paul's example, Hagar connects to Mt. Sinai and earthly Jerusalem. All who

Galatians 4:26–31 (CSB)

26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

27 For it is written, Rejoice, childless woman, unable to give birth. Burst into song and shout, you who are not in labor, for the children of the desolate woman will be many, more numerous than those of the woman who has a husband.

28 Now you too, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.

29 But just as then the child born as a result of the flesh persecuted the one born as a result of the Spirit, so also now.

30 But what does the Scripture say? "Drive out the slave and her son, for the son of the slave will never be a coheir with the son of the free woman."

31 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave but of the free woman.

sought to achieve salvation through the old covenant requirements were just like Hagar – in bondage. Sarah, by contrast was a free woman, who accepted God's intervention in faith.

Sarah represented the New Jerusalem (already in existence by the way) and is the mother of Christians because they respond to God in the same way she did. 4:27 illustrates how all of this was part of God's divine plan. Like Isaac, the Galatians were part of the promise. The Old Testament passage Paul quotes in 4:27 is found in Isaiah 54:1.

There was a great deal of tension between Hagar/Ishmael and Sarah/Isaac. Paul says here that Ishmael regularly tormented and persecuted Isaac. The problem became so great that Sarah went to Abraham and requested that they be sent away. Genesis 21:9-21 contains the story of how these events took place.

In 4:29-31, Paul concludes his thoughts in this section by emphasizing there could be no compromise between the truth and the Judaizing teachers. This is the application of Genesis 21:10. The Judaizing teachers were teaching a doctrine that would cause souls to be lost. They themselves would be lost through their espousal of such a doctrine. The Galatians needed to cast away those who would lead them away from dependence upon Christ. They were of Christ, not the old covenant.

For Thought and Reflection

1. Describe the personal nature of Paul's relationship with the Galatians. How had it been changed by the Judaizing teachers?

2. How was Hagar representative of the Old Covenant?

3. How was Sarah representative of the New Covenant?