

Gal. 4:21-5:1, Sarah and Hagar
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A. Setting

1. In the second half:

The characterization of the error moves from abstract to concrete as we progress through the three sections.

- a) 3:1-4:7 (first section) focuses on shift from law to faith, from childhood to sonship; introduces idea of bondage.
- b) 4:8-5:1 (second section) develops idea of bondage, with an impassioned interjection by Paul in 10-21, and introduces the idea of flesh/spirit developed more fully in chs.5-6.
- c) 5:2-6:10 (third section) draws two applications from the flesh/spirit contrast:
 - 1) Circumcision is not needed;
 - 2) The same carnal tendencies that drove the judaizers to demand circumcision also threaten Christian life.

2. Within 4:8-5:1, this is the objective argument, following the subjective introduction (marked by second person pronouns).

3. Overview:

- a) 4:21, the challenge: the OT itself, and the Pentateuch in particular, opposes their position. All three steps in the following development (facts, interpretation, and application) is based on Scripture: 4:22, 27, 30.
- b) 4:22-23, the facts of the case, based on Gen. 15-21.
- c) 4:24-27, the allegorical interpretation, based on Isa. 41-54.
- d) 4:28-5:1, the application, based on Gen. 21.

B. 4:21, The Challenge

"Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?" The Judaizers were trying to impose the OT law on the Galatians, but this very law opposes what they were doing! We must be alert that just because someone can quote Scripture for their position does not mean that it is a Scriptural position! The Judaizers lost the forest for the trees. They twisted one particular portion of the the OT, the Mosaic legislation, in a way that would have been impossible had they kept in mind the broader sweep of promise throughout the OT.

To show the foundation of his position in the OT, Paul follows the same three-step procedure we should use today in Bible study:

1. *Observe* the facts of the text. Avoids the *humanistic* error of ignoring God's revelation.
2. *Interpret* those facts in a way consistent with other Scripture. Avoids the *simplistic* error of treating the Bible mechanically:

"Judas went out and hanged himself. Jesus said, 'Go thou and do likewise. And what thou doest, do quickly.'"

3. Apply what you learn to your own life. Avoids the *scholastic* error, the error of the natural man who beholds his face in a glass and then goes his way.

C. 4:22-23, The Facts of the Case, based on Gen. 15-21.

An example of *observation*, asking, "What does the text say?"

1. The history, Gen. 15-21.
 - a) 15:2, Abram is childless.
 - b) 15:5, God promises him offspring.
 - c) 16:1-5, Hagar conceives by Abram, but Sarah is despised. NB: though this is in keeping with the customs of the time, it is not God's way. This relationship is adulterous, and the tension between Sarah and Hagar is only one indication of that.
 - d) 16:15-16, Ishmael is born.
 - e) 17:15-22, God rejects Ishmael, and insists that Sarah will bear the promised child.
 - f) 18:9-15, this promise is against all reason or human possibility.
 - g) 21:1-5, Isaac is born.

2. These facts highlight two distinctions:

- a) v.22, bond vs. free. Hagar was Sarah's slave; Sarah was a free woman.
- b) v.23, flesh vs. promise.
 - 1) We know "promise" as the ground of faith, just as law is the ground of works, from 3:17-22.
 - 2) "flesh" appears only a few times before this (cf. 3:3), but from this point on, and especially in ch.5-6, it becomes a dominant theme, emphasizing the means by which one responds to the law. The contrast here with "promise" helps establish this meaning of "flesh."
 - 3) Contrasts between "flesh" and "promise" in Abraham's sons:
 - a> Both are well-intentioned! Abram is trying to claim the blessing God has promised him!
 - b> Flesh rationalizes about what God can and can't do; faith rests in the promise and trusts God to work it out.
 - c> Flesh compromises God's law for the sake of society's customs; faith follows what God has said.
- c) Thus we now have a link between faith/promise (discussed in detail in 3:1-4:7), and freedom/bondage (coming under consideration here).

D. 4:24-27, The Allegorical Interpretation, based on Isa. 41-54.

Represents *Interpretation*, asking, "What does the text mean?"

1. The Hermeneutical Principle.

24a is literally, "These things are allegorized." Can have two meanings: either "these things" (the scriptural record of Abraham's sons) are themselves allegorical, or they have been interpreted allegorically by someone.

a) What is an allegory?

- 1) Metaphor: cf. Rev., "without are dogs," not canines but people with the moral character of dogs.
- 2) Allegory: an entire historical narrative that is not intended to be taken literally, but has a hidden meaning.
 - a> Pilgrim's Progress.
 - b> How most moderns take Genesis 1-11.
 - c> How covenant theology takes the prophecies of Israel's restoration throughout the OT.

b) If they are allegorical, that means Moses wrote them to convey this intent. Then their historical truth is of secondary importance, and may not even be there. But the danger of this approach is clear. It discards what the Scripture clearly says, and lets the interpreter make it say anything desired.

c) To say that they have been interpreted allegorically is quite another thing. It is simply to claim that people have seen in them a figurative lesson. And that seems to be Paul's point here, for he cites Isaiah as the basis for this interpretation. That is, the lessons he draws from Sarah and Hagar were already suggested by Isaiah. This is a sound method: drawing parallels between scripture (which does not thereby lose its claim to historicity) and our circumstances. Isaiah did it, and Paul builds on his parallel.

2. The antecedent, v.27: Isa. 54:1. Note the train of references in Isaiah to Abraham and Sarah. Paul picks up just the last of these, but it is the climax in the series, and he seems to have all of them in mind.

a) 41:8

- 1) 1-4, the Lord is sending Cyrus in conquest over the earth as an agent of judgment.
- 2) 5-7, the nations respond by stockpiling their idols, just as we do nuclear warheads.
- 3) 8-10, Israel, on the other hand, the seed of Abraham, trusts in God.

b) 50:10-51:3. Again contrasts the faithful with the unbelieving, but this time brings in Sarah explicitly.

- 1) 50:10 calls for faith (trust) as the principle of finding guidance in a world of darkness.
- 2) 50:11 reports the futility of trusting in one's own wisdom, lighting one's own fire.
- 3) 51:1-3 urges them instead to look to Abraham and Sarah. The contrast with 50:11, in the light of 50:10, is explicitly a

reference to the faith manifested by Abraham and Sarah.

- 4) Added value over ch.41: now Israel is not just the seed of Abraham, but the seed of Abraham and Sarah, and that in respect of their faith. Those who refuse the way of faith and kindle their own fire are distinguished from those who follow Abraham and Sarah.

c) 54:1-8

Here the focus is not on the children but on the mother, Israel, the wife of Yahweh.

- 1) v.1, which Paul quotes, recalls the surpassing blessedness of the desolate over the woman who possesses *the* husband.
- 2) The identity of the two sets of children is suggested from v.3, which contrasts Israel's children with the Gentiles. Note that Israel's children will rule over the Gentiles.
- 3) Who are the two women alluded to in v.1? Seems to be yet another extension of the Abraham/Sarah image. At least, Paul clearly takes it this way. In this case, we now bring in the "married wife," Hagar. (She is a wife; Sarah's desolation was clear from the mockery she received from Hagar in Gen. 16.)

d) Thus Isaiah has already established the following points of the image:

- 1) Sarah as mother of the believers (ch.51): faith/works contrast.
- 2) Comparison between Sarah's seed and Hagar's (ch.54)
- 3) Rule of Sarah's seed over Hagar's (54:3): freedom/bondage contrast.

3. Paul's development of the imagery, 24-26.

- a) "Two covenants." cf. 3:17: Abraham (continued in the New), and Sinai.
- b) "Gendereth to bondage." Cf. Exod. 21:4. Children of slaves are slaves.
- c) v.25, "this Agar" is clearly reference to her name, not here. Paul is saying that in Arabia, they use the name "Hagar" to refer to Mount Sinai.
- d) "answereth," "lines up with." Paul is setting up a point by point comparison:

Hagar	Sarah
Mosaic Covenant	Abrahamic, New Covenant
Mount Sinai	[Mount Zion]
Present Jerusalem	Jerusalem above
Children in Bondage	Children Free

- e) The last is the point that he wishes to emphasize: the destiny of Abraham's legitimate children, the children of promise, is freedom, not bondage. Back to v.9: why return to

bondage?

E. 4:28-5:1, The Application, based on Gen. 21.

The third step of Bible study: "What does it mean to me?"

Two sorts of conflict arise between believers and unbelievers, conditioned in each case on the contrasts between them. The two contrasts considered originate in 4:22-23. The basic scripture here is Gen. 21.

1. 4:28,29, the flesh/spirit-promise contrast (cf. 4:23)
 - a) We are the spirit/promise side, like Isaac and unlike Ishmael.
 - b) Gen. 21:8-9,
 - 1) Ishmael mocked Isaac.
 - 2) Motive: realized that he could no longer count on being the heir.
 - 3) Recall Gal. 4:17-18. Unbelievers envy us, and it is from this envy that persecution springs.
 - c) Conclusion: We should expect persecution from the flesh side.
2. 4:30,31, the bond/free contrast (cf. 4:22)
 - a) We are the children of the free, not of the slave.
 - b) Gen. 21:10
3. 5:1, Leads to an imperative:
 - a) Christ has made us free. This was the whole point of 4:4-5.
 - b) Stand fast in that liberty. Like a soldier guarding the fort. Don't leave your post!
 - c) Don't take back the yoke of bondage under which you once labored. Don't slip back into thinking that by keeping the law you can satisfy God and earn his favor.

Hymn: "And Can it Be"