

**Date:** 30 Apr 2023

**Scripture Passage:** Galatians 4:21-31

**Title:** Isaac And Ishmael

## Introduction

- Chs. 1-2, Defense of the Gospel; Chs 3-4, Doctrine of the Gospel. Chs 5-6 The demands of the gospel.
- We are proceeding on to the last section of this second part of the episode to the Galatians. Today we are going to cover verse 21-31 and this will complete the second part “The doctrine of the gospel”. And in this part, we come to see that the apostle wants us to see that the doctrine of justification by faith, the doctrine of the gospel that he had been preaching, fits into that broader scheme, which we generally call covenant theology.

It has to do with the covenant that God made with Abraham and his spiritual descendants. It can be traced back early to the Garden of Eden. And here we are providing an introduction. We are unable to go into the details, but in order to understand today's passage, we want to briefly mention that it began in the Garden of Eden when God gave Adam what has been called the Covenant of Works. Before the Fall, Adam was without sin. The covenant was one that was work base. Do's and don'ts. Don't eat of the fruit of good and evil or you will die. He disobeyed God and he brought the whole of the human race into sin, and that has been called the Fall. After the Fall, God gave what is called the Covenant of Grace to Adam and those descendants who would obey, who would trust in the coming savior. Gen 3:15. In the Covenant of Grace, God is going to save by people believing in the promised savior Jesus Christ.

- Salvation is found only in the covenant of grace, not the covenant of works. Judaizers say faith in Jesus Christ is not sufficient. You must also keep the laws of Moses in order to truly be saved. But salvation is by faith and faith alone, not by works. Now we come to today's passage, where Paul wants us to stand back and look at the gospel in this wide perspective of God's plan of salvation for his people all through the centuries. The main thrust of this message is that Salvation is found only in the covenant of grace, not the covenant of works. And let us come to how this teaching is unfolded before us.

## I. The two lines of descent from Abraham (21-24).

- Final knot to tie up Paul's arguments. Desire to be under law ('nomos', 'Torah')? Consider Abraham...Paul is basically saying, you'd like keep the law of Moses so much, but do you know what the law is saying? Do you understand and do you follow what is written? “For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bond woman, the other by a free woman”. Paul is trying to get them to see the big picture. The books of the law must not be looked at narrowly. You mustn't focus only on the dos and don'ts. But look at the historical parts as well. The historical parts do teach doctrine **v23-24 (symbolic)**. Revelation given by prophecy, dreams & visions, types & symbols, but also history of Israel. E.g. 1 Cor. 10:1-5, 11; Heb. 3:16-4:2. So also, here. The apostle is saying that these historical events are symbolic, they carry spiritual lessons. Those historical events were intended by God to reveal His will to us.

Today we would say focus the Bible where the word of God is the complete revelation of God. God does not speak to through dreams and visions anymore. There are no more prophets, no more apostles. We believe that the word of God is complete. It is the sufficient word of God for us until Christ comes again. But in the Old Testament times, God revealed his will in various ways. Through dreams, through visions, through the mouth of the prophets, through the types and symbols. For example, animal sacrifice. The animal pays for my sin and therefore I do not have to pay. It was symbolic of the perfect savior who would come and die on the cross to save his people, namely Jesus Christ. That was why in John 1:29 John the Baptist pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ and cried out “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World”. Jesus Christ is that perfect Lamb of God who died on the cross to save his people.

- The two lines of descent from Abraham has symbolic significance (24). Historic events, but carrying spiritual meaning. So God's will in the OT is revealed through types and symbols. Another way which that God reveals His will is through the unfolding of the history of God's people. Here in v 23 the apostle is saying to us that Abraham had two wives Sarah and Hagar. Sarah was the true wife. She was a free woman, whereas Hagar was a slave. Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael. Ishmael came first. Although Ishmael came first and was older, he was born through Hagar the slave girl. He was not the true son of Abraham. So one was in bondage, the other was free. The two lines of descent from Abraham must be noted because it is a revelation of God's will to us.

Paul is going to apply that to us today. Which line do we belong to? We may determine which line we belong to from whether we have faith in Jesus Christ or not. We come to the second section, v24-27 "The true fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham".

## II. The true fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (24-27).

- The earthly fulfillment in Hagar & Ishmael (24-25). Paul has established that there are 2 lines of descendants from Abraham. All may claim to be the children of Abraham, but which line do you belong to? The promise to Abraham, the promise of the savior, and being a blessing to all the nations. Through which line was it fulfilled? Was it through the line of Hagar or Sarah?

There was the Covenant of Works, there was the Covenant of Grace. God is going to save by people believing in the promised savior Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul is saying these two women, Sarah and Hagar, they represent 2 covenants.

Hagar represented Mount Sinai. On Mount Sinai, God give the law to Moses for the Nation of Israel. If you rely on the keeping of the law, you are actually relying on your self-effort. You are actually relying on your works to be saved. The Jews misunderstood the purpose of the law. They relied on the keeping of the law to be saved. They kept the law of God as a means of salvation. In other words, they look upon it as a covering of works. Do you expect to be saved by keeping the law? You will end up in bondage. And we have studied in previous weeks where we know bondage means bondage to sin. And if you are in bondage to sin, then you will die in your sin. In other words, you are not saved. And this bondage is represented by the Jerusalem at that time. Jerusalem at that time of Paul's writing was under the control of the Romans. The Romans rule over Israel. So the Jews have always understood that Jerusalem was a symbol of the city of God. So Hagar represents Mount Sinai. You try to keep the law that was given at Mount Sinai. You will end up being in bondage just like Jerusalem currently is in bondage under the Romans. Put plainly, you cannot be saved by that method.

- The spiritual fulfillment in Sarah & Isaac (26-27). The Jerusalem above is free, the mother of all who believe in Christ (26). Reference to heaven (Heb. 12:18, 22-24; Rev. 21:9-10). Sarah represented covenant of grace, described by Isaiah 54:1. Jews understood it as ref. to earthly Israel & Jerusalem, but Paul shockingly applies to Christians.

Sarah represents the Jerusalem that is above. Remember that the Old Testament reveal things by types and symbols. Physical things were used to represent spiritual realities. For example, Canaan was used to represent the Kingdom of God. And Jerusalem, the City of God, was intended to represent God's people. So where is God's people? It's not the physical people on this earth. Instead it is all those who believe, who will one day be gathered together, and they will be complete. None will be missing. Together they will constitute the Jerusalem that is above. **Heb. 12:18-21** refers to Mounbt Sinai. **Heb 12:22-24** We have come to faith in Christ. We have in principle entered the Kingdom of God, even though we are still on this earth. And we are heading for our heavenly home, which is the Jerusalem above. The day will come when all of God's people will be gathered safely in heaven, and that is described as the Jerusalem that is above. In contrast to the Jerusalem that

is beneath, which is on this earth. The Jerusalem on earth at that time was meant to point us to a Heavenly Jerusalem. If you were a spiritual minded Jew at that time, you would come to realize that this is not the ultimate rest. Just as the whole land of Canaan did not give them the ultimate rest that they were looking for. Instead, in Heb 3-4 the Jerusalem of this earth was meant to indicate to the more spiritual and heavenly Jerusalem to which we are heading. Just as the land of Canaan will not give you the ultimate rest that you yearn for. The Jerusalem that is on Earth is not the people of God. It is in heaven that all God's people will be gathered. So the Old Testament redeemed people and the New Testament redeemed people together form the complete Heavenly Jerusalem above. None will be missing, every single one of them will be there. And that is where all those who repent from their sins and trust in Jesus Christ are heading.

The apostle Paul argues from the Old Testament that Hagar and Sarah, the two lines of Abraham, represented 2 covenants. Hagar led to Ishmael and to the earthly Jerusalem and to bondage. But from Abraham, we come to Sarah, to Isaac, to the Heavenly Jerusalem, which gives us freedom. And who are those who are free? The apostle ends this section by saying in **verse 27**. This is a quotation from Isaiah 54:1. And this alludes to the time when Sarah was without son. Hagar produced a son, Ishmael, for Abraham, but that was a natural/physical son. But there was a son of promise, the spiritual son. God promised to Abraham that Sarah, his true wife, will give birth to a son. They found it difficult to believe, but God fulfilled his promise. Isaac was born, even though Abraham and Sarah were old. Abraham was going to be a blessing to all the nations through this seed, namely Jesus Christ. All those who believe in Jesus Christ, they receive the blessing of salvation promised by God to Abraham. So we then are the true Israel, the spiritual Israel. We then are the children of Sarah. We are free. We are the ones to receive the blessing pronounced by Isaiah.

### III. The theological implications of covenant theology (28-31).

- The spiritual, intended, fulfillment of promise to Abraham is in the line of Isaac (Gen. 17:18-21). Paul saying that those who trust in Christ are children of promise, like Isaac (28 cf. 3:16). Those who trust in Christ are spiritual seed of Abraham (3:29), therefore an heir of God (4:7). True nature of the two sets of children seen in Ishmael persecuting Isaac (Gen. 21:8-10). So also, now. Non-believers persecute believers. Persecution expected!

**V 28-29.** Just as Hagar and Sarah were intended by God to teach us a deeper spiritual truth - it is a revelation of God concerning the two covenants, either of works or of grace. Of works leading to bondage to sin, or of grace leading to freedom in Christ. So also, the descendants are intended by God to teach us a deeper spiritual truth. Ishmael persecuted Isaac. Likewise, those who do not trust in Jesus Christ will persecute those who trust in Jesus.

We are not talking now about physical descent. We are talking about spiritual blessings that come to faith in Christ. Put another way, we are not talking about Arabs and Jews. The Arabs and Jews are both physical descendants of Abraham. The Arabs are descendants of Ishmael, while Jews are descendants of Isaac. But spiritually speaking, those that are not converted belong to the line of Hagar regardless of whether you are a Jew, or Arab, or Gentiles, or any other race. So all those who do not have faith in Christ, they're always unhappy with the believers. They would always persecute the believers. It has been so since the days of Ishmael and Isaac. And it will continue for all time until Christ comes to judge the world. Don't be surprised if persecution comes to you if you believe in Jesus Christ. **Rom 8:17** "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him." It is a constant warning of the Bible that when you truly trust in Christ for salvation, when you don't accept the ways of Ishmael, the way of keeping to the law, the way of relying on works, the way of earning merits by your own effort, you will suffer. The descendants of Hagar will hate you. They're not the children of God. Expect that.

- Scripture clearly declares, i.e. it is clearly God's will (30). V30 This is quoting from Genesis 21:10. Sarah pronounced to cast out Hagar and Ishmael, and Abraham carried it out. Again the spiritual reference here is that those who are not in Christ will be cast out. "Depart from me for I never knew you". Hagar & Ishmael

cast out, never heir with Isaac (cf. Gen. 21:10). Reference to all who do not trust in Christ, not physical descendants of Hagar & Ishmael. We, who trust in Christ for salvation, not under bondage but are free, i.e. the true children of God. Christianity most “narrow-minded”, though Christians most tolerant & liberal towards others. Are you justified now, or under condemnation? Aligned with Ishmael or Isaac?

**Gen 17:18-21.** My everlasting covenant is with Isaac. It is the clear declaration of God. In Galatians Chapter 4, you see now that Paul was truly inspired by the Holy Spirit declaring God's will. Hagar and Ishmael was used by God as a symbolic gesture to say that, In so far as the blessing of God was concerned, they will not be the inherited. In so far as the blessing of salvation is concerned, all those who do not come to faith in Christ, they are cast out. Regardless whether you are an Arab and a physical descendant of Ishmael, or you are a Jew and a physical descendant of Isaac, or you are any other race in the world, for as long as you don't have faith in Jesus Christ, spiritually speaking you belong to the line of Hagar and Ishmael. You are cast out. You cannot take part in the blessing of The Kingdom of God. All who are to receive the promised blessing of salvation must come through Jesus Christ. That is why the Gospel is proclaimed to all the nations. The command of the Great Commission is that we proclaim the gospel to all alike. Salvation comes from Jesus Christ alone. We must repent and believe in Christ. Otherwise there is no way by which we will be free from the bondage to sin. There's no way by which we can inherit the promise blessing that God gave to Abraham. Eternal blessings come only through that one seed of Abraham, namely Jesus Christ.

There are these two covenants, the Covenant of Works. Adam fell Adam was unable to keep the Covenant of Works. Today, the religions of the world are trying to keep to the Covenant of Works. All human religions teach you to do good. To do this, do that, keep to this law, keep to that law. You are actually relying on your self effort to be save. And this will lead you to bondage in sin. It does not save.

But there are those who hear the gospel if they know that that is true, that they cannot save themselves. And that Jesus Christ is truly the son of God, that he is the promised savior, that when he died on the cross. It was intended that Jesus Christ will be the perfect sacrifice for his people. Christ has died for his people. His blood has been shed for them. He has risen from the dead. He is now waiting for his people in heaven. There's only one way by which we can be set free from sin, that is through faith in Jesus Christ. There's simply no other way.

### **Summary and Application**

- From Abraham came these 2 lines of descendants. God intended this to show to us a deeper spiritual lesson. Namely, there are two covenants. Of works and of grace. Then we see that the actual fulfillment of the covenant promises was through the line of Isaac the fulfillment of promises of God. The covenant blessing comes through the line of Isaac and all those who trust in that seed Jesus Christ. All those who trust in Jesus Christ, they are regarded as the children of God. All Christians are therefore heirs of Abraham.
- Two types of religions in the world, natural & supernatural, trust in works or faith in Christ. The natural religion teaches you to rely on your effort. To earn merits before God. To be safe, by trying to be good. You may have all the good intentions trying to make yourself better, but you will fail because you have a sinful nature which you cannot change. Jeremiah 13:23 “The leopard cannot change its spot, the Ethiopian cannot change its skin.” you are born with a sinful nature. However much you try to cover up your sin, you are still a sinful person. How can you be saved by your own effort? The only way of salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. Simply is no other way. Christ and Christ alone. Therefore, let us seek peace with God through faith In Jesus Christ.
- Seek peace with God through faith in Christ, not in works & self-effort. See John 3:6-7. Trust in Christ who has done everything needful to save us. And when you finally turn to God and call out Father and confess to him your sins expressing to him your desire to trust in Christ, that will be the day that will be the moment that the spirit comes and live in you. And he will transform you, giving you new desires, giving you new abilities

to follow God. It has happened so many down the centuries. And it is happening still and it will happen until Christ comes again. Let today be the day when you no more depend on men, but look at the scriptures. What does it say? It points us to Jesus Christ. Your call upon to follow Christ to. Trust in him. Not in any great Christian man. Not in any church, but to Christ. Come to Jesus Christ. Make up your mind. Let it be the day that you truly come to God for mercy. Trust in Christ and make up your mind to follow him, to obey him. May God deal mercifully with us all.