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# Galatians

**For it is written:**

**"Rejoice, O barren,  
You who do not bear!  
Break forth and shout,  
You who are not in labor!  
For the desolate has many more children  
Than she who has a husband."**

Galatians 4:27

Paul, showing the superlative nature of the New Covenant over the Old, uses the words of the Greek translation of Isaiah 54:1 to continue his analogy between Hagar, the slave of Abraham, and Sarah, his wife. In doing so, he says, "For it is written..." He is claiming that the verse has a fulfillment in the subject he is writing about.

At the time, Isaiah was writing about the restoration of Jerusalem. He prophesied that she would go from desolation to abundance and from a state of barrenness to a state of health and the bearing of children. Her borders would expand, and the city would increase. Paul shows that this was only a picture of the true Jerusalem. The words of Isaiah are more perfectly fulfilled in the coming of Christ.

The world at large was barren. There were no spiritual descendants of Abraham outside of those who came into the covenant line of Israel, such as Rahab and

Ruth. Only those who were under the law, and who were also circumcised in the heart, were counted as true descendants of Abraham.

However, in the coming of Christ, the gates were opened for any and all who would call out to God through Him to become children of God by faith. And so Paul says, "Rejoice O barren." It is the barren Gentile world, without a husband, to whom he is addressing his words. He tells them to rejoice.

He then further explains exactly who he is talking to, "*You* who do not bear!" There were no children of God in the Gentile world. None were born, because none had been redeemed. But the time was coming when they would be. Isaiah's words point us forward to a time when the barren world would "Break forth and shout." There was to be rejoicing in the once barren land, and it would come from those "who are not in labor."

The Jews went through the labor of bondage to the law. Those of Israel who realized the law couldn't save them came to God through faith each year on the Day of Atonement, seeking His mercy. However, the Gentiles never had such labor. Instead, they would go from a state of barrenness to an immediate state of adoption; all because of the work of Christ. This is because the true atonement, which the Day of Atonement only pictured, is found in Him.

From the barren state of the Gentiles, here called "the desolate," will come an enormous amount of offspring. The comparison is made in the final words -

"For the desolate has many more children  
Than she who has a husband."

There is an article in front of "husband" in the Greek. It says "THE husband." This is speaking of those under the law who had been married to God at Sinai. Children of God were born through this arrangement, but the Gentiles would have many

more through faith in Christ. The emphasis from the article would make it read, "She who has THE husband of which the other is destitute."

The comparison is made in a way as to show the superlative nature of what would occur through the work of Christ. It should be noted that although it is Sarah who actually had a husband, it is not speaking of her in this citation as "she who has a husband." The picture is that of Sarah being long barren, but now restored to the favor of Abraham by the bearing of Isaac, the son of promise.

The normal course of a woman with a husband was to have children. This did not occur in Sarah's case. Instead, Hagar is the one who had a child. It is she who is equated with the Old Covenant. Through God's marriage to Israel, children were born. But through the marriage of the church to Christ, many more were born. This is the sense of what Paul is relaying to the Galatians. As this is so, he is demonstrating the superabundant nature of the work of Christ in comparison to the law.

Life application: Why would anyone devolve from receiving the grace of Christ to adhering to works of the law? It is a step (a giant one) in the wrong direction. Let us never be so perverse as to think that we can do more to merit God's favor than Christ did!

**Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.** Galatians 4:28

Paul's words here show the full force of what has occurred in us because of the work of Jesus. Ishmael was born to Abraham without a promise. Abraham simply went into Hagar, she conceived, and he was born. The process of his birth followed the normal order of things. However, Isaac was born of a promise. The Lord said that Abraham would have a son, even when it seemed it would never occur. Later, He again told Abraham the time of the year that it would occur. This was after the birth of Ishmael, showing that Ishmael was not the son of promise. And just as the Lord promised, Isaac was born.

In the same way, those who were made sons through the law occurred in the way that the law indicated. A covenant was made, it was sealed in blood, and it came into effect. If one followed the precepts of the law, then son-ship was assured. However, the prophets spoke of a time when the Messiah would come. He would be a King on His throne, He would have an eternal priesthood, and those who came to Him by faith would be considered children of God. This was all promised in advance. With the coming of Christ, the result of believing in His work is the reception of the Spirit and adoption into God's family.

Paul says here that "...we, brethren, as Isaac *was*, are children of promise." This is rather marvelous to consider. God said that this would occur; and here we are, the result of that marvelous promise! We are then likened to Isaac because of the way in which our son-ship came about.

As a side note, some manuscripts say "we," others say "you." If "we" is correct, then Paul is making a general statement about anyone who has been born of the Spirit through faith in Christ Jesus. If "you" is correct, then he is making a statement of emphasis that the Galatians are, in fact, children of promise. They then would be in contradistinction to what the false Judaizers taught. Rather than children of promise, they were attempting to get them under the law. Either way, the Galatians are included in the concept of being "children of promise."

Life application: If we have been born of God, can we somehow become more fully "children of God" by observing the law? It is ridiculous to consider. Hold fast to the grace of Christ. Give up on deeds of the law.

**But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.* Galatians 4:29**

In the previous verse, Paul noted that those of the church are the children of promise, thus equating us to Isaac. Now he continues with the analogy. He says that just "as he was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born according to the spirit...*" This is a direct reference to Genesis 21:9 -

"And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing." Genesis 21:9

The word used in Genesis 21 as "scoffing" means something rather light and not injurious, such as "to jeer at" or "to mock." Paul's word here in the Greek conveys the idea of aggressive pursuit, such as a hunter pursuing a catch. This doesn't mean that Paul has over-exaggerated the account. Rather, when a small child demonstrates a mocking attitude towards an even smaller child, it shows a streak of harmful intent. Sarah noticed this and it upset her greatly.

Isaac was the son of promise and Ishmael "persecuted him." Paul then makes the full analogy by stating, "...even so *it is* now." The son of promise, meaning the church, was being bullied around by the son born according to the flesh, meaning those under the law. They had their traditions and their long history, thinking these things were more important than the Spirit which was granted to those of the church by mere faith in Christ. The term Spirit here refers to the full term found in Ephesians 1, "the Holy Spirit of Promise" -

"In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,<sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." Ephesians 1:13, 14

Paul's words are intended to show the Galatians exactly what was occurring with the Judaizers. They were actually persecuting the church through their false teachings.

Life application: Every verse of Galatians continues to be a warning to the church to not fall into the trap of turning to the law, in any form, for justification. We are to rely solely on the grace of Jesus Christ, being obedient to the prescriptions of the hand of Paul. Put away your legalism! Turn to Christ! Be pleasing to God through what He has done!

**Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." Galatians 4:30**

Paul, still continuing with his analogy between Hagar/Ishmael and Sarah/Isaac, returns to Scripture to show what New Testament faith in Christ should do with adherence to Old Covenant doctrine. As he asks, "...what does Scripture say?" He purposes that the Galatians make a sound decision based on the very words which pointed them to Christ in the first place. And its words, based on the analogy he has derived from it, tell them to "Cast out the bondwoman and her son."

This is a quote from Genesis 21:10. These words come from the mouth of Sarah when speaking to Abraham, but Paul ascribes them to the divine Source of Scripture. Like all words recorded in the Bible, the Holy Spirit chose them from among countless words spoken by people throughout their lives. These are words actually uttered by them, but they hold special bearing on the process of redemption and so they are also those words which are used by God for us to understand His purposes for us.

Sarah had told Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael; Paul is asking us to cast away doctrine which applied to the Law of Moses. It should be noted that he is not telling them to cast away the Old Testament. How could someone know what he was talking about unless they had the words of the Old Testament to refer to? Rather, he has equated Hagar/Ishmael with the doctrine of the Law of Moses; doctrine which is now obsolete and annulled.

Continuing on, he explains the reason why, using words still spoken by Sarah. He paraphrases the words for our understanding, but the intent remains -

"...for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman."

The "son of the bondwoman" includes all who hold to works of the Law of Moses for their justification before God. The "son of the free woman" includes those who have trusted Jesus Christ alone for their right standing with Him. The contrast could not be made any clearer. The Galatians had been duped into heresy by the Judaizers. The Law could never save, it never did save, and it was to be cast away. How is it that some people can't simply pick up this book from Paul's hand and accept it at face value?

Life application: In his analogy, Paul says to "cast away" the law as a means of obtaining justification. If you are clinging to the law to impress God, you are failing to do so. God is pleased with the finished work of His Son. For us, our trusting in that is what pleases Him.

**So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.**

Galatians 4:31

Paul's conclusion on this matter is decided with the words, "So then." He has used an allegorical interpretation of Scripture to make a point about the superiority of the grace of Christ over deeds of the law. He has extended that interpretation to include the idea that the law is to be "cast out." The "So then" that he writes is not just a statement concerning the allegory and its interpretation though. It is a statement that the entire idea he has been speaking about in this chapter, which includes the allegory, is decided. This final conclusion says, "...we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free."

Those in the New Testament economy are free sons of God through adoption. On the other hand, those who are under the law (or who still hold to the law, even though it is annulled in Christ), are not free, but in bondage. The law highlights sin; sin is bondage; therefore, the bondage of those under the law is sin. Paul's words are to be taken as a testimony that we are not to insert the law into our attempt to please God. The only result of this is to show ourselves as being bound by sin; we highlight this in His presence. Instead, we are to show that we are free from sin through the work of Christ.

The use of the allegory can be summed up in the following contrasts -

The bondwoman, Hagar contrasts the freewoman, Sarah.

The son of the bondwoman, Ishmael contrasts the son of the freewoman, Isaac.

The natural birth of the flesh contrasts the spiritual birth of the promise.

Mount Sinai contrast with Mount Zion.

The Law contrasts with the Promise.

The earthly Jerusalem contrasts with the heavenly Jerusalem.

Bondage (the law) contrasts with freedom (grace in Christ).

The law is bearing few offspring (via the grace of the Day of Atonement) contrasts with grace producing multitudes.

Those under the law persecute those who are under grace.

The law is to be cast out contrasts the inheritance of those in Christ.

Life application: Paul's contrasts are intended to show us the utter folly of pursuing deeds of the law in order to be justified. Don't display utter folly! Trust Christ alone.