

## Cast out the Bondwoman & Her Son

**Text:** Gen. 21:8-13; Gal. 4:21-31

### Introduction:

1. In this message we come to another key event in the life of Abraham with the division that takes place between his two wives and two sons which results in the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael.
2. The Book of Galatians (4:21-31) draws on this account in Genesis to teach an important lesson concerning law vs. grace. The Apostle Paul follows the development of the two branches of Abraham's family; one branch through Hagar and the other through Sarah. Paul was particularly interested in the spiritual principles that characterized and governed these two lines of Abraham's descendants. In the allegory, the Holy Spirit testifies that these two family lines are associated with two covenants; the Descendants of Hagar are associated with the Mosaic Covenant (the covenant of works) and the descendants of Isaac are associated with the Abrahamic Covenant (the Covenant of Promise). Please remember that the Abrahamic covenant includes a blessing on a vast multitude of Gentiles who appropriate the promise of salvation by faith in Christ, who is the Seed (Gen. 12:3, 15:5).
3. In the account we note two mothers and two sons. There are lessons to learn from the two sons and from the two mothers so we will consider both pairs under two headings and some of the spiritual lessons they contain.

### I. **ISHMAEL & ISAAC: THE FLESH VS. THE SPIRIT (VS. 8-9)**

#### A. **The Character of the Two Sons**

Let us briefly remind ourselves of the origin of the two boys.

1. **Ishmael** was the product of Abraham and Sarah's own energies, the best they could produce without God. He was the product of their own works rather than the product of God's power in response to faith. Ishmael therefore represents the flesh.
2. **Isaac** was the product of faith and was something only God could do. It was wholly of God. Abraham and Sarah could not contribute anything to it as they were both in a state of 'deadness'. They could contribute no works of their own to produce Isaac. The only thing they were to do was exercise faith in God's promises and trust God to do the work in them and through them. Isaac therefore represents the Spirit.

#### B. **The Conflict between the Two Sons (Vs. 8-9)**

1. The timing of the conflict (Vs. 8).
  - a. The arrival of Isaac. We have no record of any trouble from Ishmael for the first 13 years of his life before Isaac arrived. In fact, he is barely mentioned between Genesis 16 and 21. Isaac represents the new nature. The flesh is stirred up with the impartation of the new nature. The Ishmael nature reacts to the Isaac nature. Illustration: One Christian brother said he didn't realize he had such a bad temper until he got saved.

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- i. We note that Ishmael is not changed or reformed. Ishmael's nature cannot be altered. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. In like manner, salvation is not the reforming of the flesh but the impartation of new life as represented in Isaac.
- ii. C.H. Mackintosh notes, "Isaac proved, in principle, to be to the household of Abraham was the implantation of the new nature is in the soul of a sinner. It was not Ishmael changed, but it was Isaac born. The son of the bond-woman could never be anything else but that...Regeneration is not the change of the old nature, but the introduction of a new; it is the implantation of the nature or life of the Second Adam, by the operation of the Holy Ghost. This introduction of the new nature does not alter, in the slightest degree, the true, essential character of the old. This latter continues what it was, and is made, in no respect, better; yea, rather, there is the full display of its evil character in opposition to the new element. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other." He goes on to point out, "The birth of Isaac did not improve Ishmael, but only brought out his real opposition to the child of promise. What was the remedy? To make Ishmael better? By no means, but "cast out this bondwoman and her son..."
- iii. A.W. Pink writes, "It was the birth of Isaac which revealed the true character of Ishmael. We know practically nothing of Ishmael's life before the birth of Isaac, but as soon as this child of promise made his appearance the real nature of Hagar's son was made manifest. He may have been very quiet and orderly before, but as soon as the child of God's quickening-power came on the scene, Ishmael showed what he was by persecuting and mocking him. Here again the type holds good. It is not until the believer receives the new nature that he discovers the real character of the old. It is not until we are born again we learn what a horrible and vile thing the flesh is."
- iv. The discovery of the flesh is not evidence you are not born again. "The truth is that the recognition of the true character of the flesh and a corresponding abhorrence of it, is one of the plainest evidences of our regeneration, for the unregenerate man is blind to the vileness of the flesh. The fact that I have within me a conflict between the natural and the spiritual is the proof there are two natures present, and that I find the Ishmael-nature "persecuting" the Isaac-nature is only to be expected. That the Ishmael-

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nature appears to me to be growing worse only goes to prove that I now have capacity to see its real character, just as the real character of Ishmael was not revealed until Isaac was born.” (Pink)

- b. The maturing of Isaac. We note with interest that while Isaac was still in infancy, Ishmael appears to have taken a low profile but when he “grew and was weaned”, he began to assert himself. This teaches us some important principals:
  - i. The believer needs to move from infancy to maturity. There is nothing wrong with infancy. A newborn babe needs milk for that phase of his development. 1 Peter 2:2 says, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grown thereby:” There is however something wrong with a state of prolonged infancy. This is the problem with the carnal Christian described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. The problem with the carnal Christian is not that he was once an infant. The problem with the carnal Christian is that he should have and could have grown beyond infancy to greater maturity but has chosen not to. Moving to meat does not mean you never drink milk again. An adult still benefits from a glass of milk as a part of his diet but an adult reliant only on milk will be a very sick and weak adult.
  - ii. There comes a time when every believer needs to “grow and be weaned”. That doesn’t mean that we ever get to the place where we are self-sufficient and independent, with no need for any ministry from others. But it does mean that you mature and develop the capacity to eat the meat of the Word as well as drink the milk of the Word.
  - iii. The flesh life particularly begins to assert itself as the believer begins to mature beyond the fresh flush of infancy. Don’t be surprised at the internal struggle when you seek to take steps forward in Christian maturity.
2. The Manifestation of the Conflict (Vs. 9)
  - a. Ishmael mocked Isaac. Galatians uses the word persecuted. This represents the fierce battle the believer experiences between the flesh and the Spirit.
  - b. Galatians 5:16-17 “*This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”
  - c. The only instrument strong enough to deal with the Ishmael nature (the flesh) within us is the cross of Christ, applied by the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20, Rom. 6:6, 8:13). The cross of Christ is the instrument to “cast out Ishmael” in a practical way in our lives.

## II. HAGAR AND SARAH: LAW VS. GRACE (VS. 10-13)

### A. Hagar – Sinai, the Law and bondage (Gal. 4:24-25)

Understanding the facts about Hagar will help us better understand the relationship between Law and grace in the Christian life. Note the five facts about Hagar that will help us to better understand the law:<sup>1</sup>

1. **Hagar was Abraham's second wife.** She was added alongside Sarah. Likewise, the Law was "added" alongside God's already existing promises to expose sin and lead the sinner to Christ (Gal. 3:19, 24-25). God did not start with Law; He started with grace.
  - a. Gal. 3:19 "Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was **added** because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator."
  - b. Gal. 3:24-25 "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."
2. **Hagar was a servant.** The law was God's servant (schoolmaster or child tutor) to keep the infant nation of Israel under control and prepare them for the coming of the Redeemer (Gal. 3:19, 24-25). The Law was given to reveal sin (Rom. 3:20) but not to redeem us from sin. Grace does not serve Law; it is Law that serves grace! The Law reveals our need for grace, and grace saves us completely apart from the works of the Law (Rom. 3:20, 28).
  - a. Romans 3:19-20 "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin."
  - b. Romans 3:28 "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."
3. **Hagar was never supposed to bear a child.** The Law cannot give life (Gal. 3:21). All the law can do is condemn me. Like a mirror, it can show me how unclean I am but it cannot cleanse me.
4. **Hagar gave birth to a slave.** If you decide to live under the Law, then you become a child of Hagar, a slave; for the Law produces bondage and not freedom. The first major doctrinal battle the church had to fight was on this very issue.
5. **Hagar was cast out.** There was no compromise. She was cast out permanently and took Ishmael with her. You cannot live under both the systems of law and grace. You cannot have Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac together. This is true in relation to both salvation and sanctification.
  - a. In relation to Salvation. Reliance upon law works must be cast out for one to be saved. No one can be saved by a mixture of law and grace. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone to the glory of God alone.
    - i. Romans 11:6 "And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Wiersbe's commentary on Genesis.

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- works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”
- ii. Eph. 2:8-9 – “For by grace are ye saved through faith...”
  - iii. Titus 3:5 – “Not by works of righteousness which we have done...”
  - iv. The only function the law has in relation to your salvation is to show you how sinful you are that you might then run to Christ who alone has the power to cleanse and save you (See Gal. 3:24-25).
  - v. Abraham’s struggle to part with Ishmael (Gen. 21:11) is representative of the struggle so many have to come to terms with the fact all their religious works and efforts cannot contribute anything to their salvation.
- b. In relation to Sanctification. The believer must “cast out” any reliance on a legal system for sanctification. We live by the power of the Heavenly Jerusalem above, not by the thunderings of Mount Sinai below. Instead of subduing the flesh, the Law arouses the flesh (Rom. 7:7-12) because the “strength of sin is the Law” (1 Cor. 15:56). Believers are not sanctified by living under a legal framework. They are sanctified by living by grace through faith as the life of Christ works in them. It is the life of Christ, not the law of Moses that makes the believer Christlike. Like Abraham, believer’s struggle to come to terms with letting go of their Ishmaels, representing the best of their own efforts in the strength of the natural man.

### B. Sarah – Jerusalem above, grace and freedom (Gal. 4:26-31)

1. Jerusalem above – this is clearly a reference to heaven. Hebrews also speaks of Mount Sinai vs. Mount Zion.
  - a. Hebrews 12:18,22 “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,”
  - b. Hebrews 12:22 “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,”
  - c. You need to be born from above. You need the Sarah birth, not the Hagar birth! All Hagar can produce is a slave and all the law can do is enslave you.
2. Grace – Isaac was produced by grace through faith. There was nothing Abraham and Sarah could do to produce Isaac.
3. Freedom – Sarah represents Jerusalem above and therefore true freedom. Note the emphasis on the word ‘free’ in Galatians 4.
  - a. Gal. 4:26 “But Jerusalem which is above is **free**, which is the mother of us all.”
  - b. Gal. 4:31 “So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the **free**.”
  - c. Question: The question/objection that naturally comes up at this point is “if we are not under the law does that mean we can just do whatever we want and sin?” The Word of God deals plainly with that objection.

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- i. The Apostle Paul deals with that very objection in Romans 6. “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Rom. 6:14-16)
  - ii. Our liberty is not to be used as an occasion for the flesh. Galatian 5:13 “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”
  - iii. Grace influences us in the direction of holiness, not worldliness. Titus 2:11-13 “For **the grace of God** that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;”
- d. There are three words in relation to sanctification you need to be familiar with as a believer. They are legalism, license and liberty.
- i. **Legalism** – this is a legal system of sanctification. We might call this sanctification by prescription; Do A + B + C etc. and you will become a mature Christian. The result will be the same. The prescription method tempts the believer to self-effort and thereby forfeits the free workings of the Holy Spirit through faith.
  - ii. **License** – this is often what is promoted as Christian liberty in this Laodicean age. The Christian who swings over to license thinks that God’s grace means he can indulge the flesh, be worldly and live a sloppy and careless Christian life. It is this very wrong interpretation of grace that the Apostle Paul tackles head on in Romans 6 as well as in his other Epistles. In reality, license is not freedom at all but a new kind of bondage. Bondage to the sinful appetites of the flesh.
  - iii. **Liberty** – this is the place of true freedom. Liberty means freedom from sin and bondage to an abundant life in Christ. “It means the freedom to be and to do all that God has for us in Jesus Christ.” (Wiersbe) This life is not lawless! Far from it! In fact, under Christ the standard is higher (take the sermon on the Mount as an example) but there is a big difference. The law demands but gives no power to obey. Christ gives us not just the command but the power to obey! One author put it this way, “Do this and live, the law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands. A better word the Gospel brings. It bids me fly and gives me wings.” Someone wisely commented, “No man

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in this world attains to freedom from any slavery except by entrance into some higher servitude” (Phillips Brooks)

### **Conclusion:**

1. Are you living under a law system, trying to earn your salvation? This is bondage. You need the Sarah birth (from heaven above by grace through faith), not the Hagar birth (bondage and slavery).
2. What system are you living under as a believer? Is it the power of the heavenly life above working in you and through you or self-effort under a legal system?