

# GALATIANS 7

## Children of Promise

*"The essence of Christianity is the miracle of new birth. The hallmark of the Isaac-types is that we have been converted, changed, transformed at the center of our lives, so that we desire to rest in God's sovereign grace. We desire to become as little children and receive the power and wisdom and holiness from our all-sufficient Father. We hate the remaining tendencies in us to be proud and to trust in ourselves or other people instead of God. Our delight is in the law of the Lord, and our choicest food is to do his will in reliance on his power. This is what it means to be born according to the Spirit. This is what it means to say I no longer live but Christ lives in me. His passion becomes our passion. Therefore, Isaac-types have the freedom of desire. We don't labor slavishly under the burden of having to do what we don't want to do. We are free to do what we love to do and to do it forever in perfect joy. For God has caused us to be born again by the Spirit of his Son, and is shaping our desires according to his will."*<sup>1</sup>

Last week we discussed our identity as sons and daughters of God, our authority as co-heirs with Christ, and our seal of adoption, the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, chapters five and six will pick these themes back up in detail and bring the letter to a close. The last ten verses in chapter four; however, seem to suddenly dive back into the historical sweep of redemption, the main theme of chapter three. It is almost as if Paul is interjecting an afterthought once he already moved forward with the personal implications of the cross.

Why does he do this? There are a variety of thoughts and many scholars find this passage of the New Testament difficult and controversial (it presupposes knowledge of the OT, while also making use of allegory), but whatever the case, it was important for Paul to round out this argument completely and address this particular story. It seems the narrative of Hagar and Sarah was used by the false teachers as a familiar and persuasive claim as to why Gentile believers had to take on Jewish practices to be saved. "...the Judiazers claim that only those who belonged physically to the family of Abraham had any share in the promise God made to him. To put it more starkly, the descendants of Isaac were the Jews; and those of Ishmael, the Gentiles. At Mount Sinai, the Jews had received the enlightenment of the law while the Gentiles remained in the darkness of sin, alienated from the promises of God and the commonwealth of Israel."<sup>2</sup> In response to these claims, Paul dives back in time, and goes backwards to Abraham, to complete the 2,000 year journey initiated by God's grace he began in chapter three.

The ten verses are broken up in three sections. He gives the historical background of the Sarah/Hagar story, the allegorical meaning, and then the personal application of it all. Paul begins by addressing these verses to those who are still not convinced that the cross is enough and that one must practice "law" for salvation. He mentions the differences between the circumstances surrounding the birth of each of the sons of Hagar and Sarah. Ishmael's birth was the product of the "flesh" because it came from Abraham and Sarah's self-reliance and

### Pre-Article Questions:

1. How did God encourage and speak to your hearts during prayer partners last week?
2. Are you a "fix-it-yourself" person? Why? Has there been a time when "fixing" something yourself did not go as planned?
3. How do we as humans tend to approach God in a similar way when it comes to our own brokenness or that of our friends and families?

1. Piper, John. Hagar and Slavery VS Sarah and Freedom. May 22, 1983.

2. George, 334.

ingenuity to obtain a son. Isaac's birth was not of the "flesh" because it was supernatural. It was impossible for a woman of Sarah's age to conceive and give birth.

As Paul uses verses 24-27 in a figurative/allegorical manner (allegory is defined as a figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another); understand he is not advocating a departure from the truths or events of these passages of scripture in their literal sense.<sup>3</sup> "What he called allegory might be better termed typology: a narrative from Old Testament history interpreted in terms of new covenant realities."<sup>4</sup> Paul sees these new covenant realities directly foreshadowed and played out in the powerful and emotional story of Sarah and Hagar and will use the truth to oppose those who still desire to be under the law and to counter the view of this passage taught by the Judaizers.

Galatians 3:29 states, "If you are in Christ, you are Abraham's offspring." You cannot belong to Abraham (in a spiritual sense) unless you belong to Christ. Paul points to the fact that as heirs of the new covenant, we are the children of the promise, the promise that goes all the way back to Genesis when God spoke to the serpent saying, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."<sup>5</sup> Isaac was the child of promise. Moses was a child of promise (and brought in the covenant of the law), and Jesus was a child of promise. Jesus came to crush the head of the enemy, that all of God's promises; past, present, and future, might be fulfilled. The true heirs of God are Abraham's children by spiritual descent through Christ. Like Isaac, these children are free, citizens of heaven, heirs of the promise. "The Ishmaels of this world trust in themselves that they are righteous, the Isaacs trust only in God through Jesus Christ. The Ishmaels are in bondage, because this is what self-reliance always leads to; the Isaacs enjoy freedom, because it is through faith in Christ that men are free."<sup>6</sup>

Sons and daughters of God are free. They are Isaacs. They will experience persecution like he did, but they will also receive spiritual blessing on this earth, the inheritance of their Father, and the life that lasts forever, in the world to come.

### *Article Question:*

1. What initial thoughts or ideas stuck out to you from the article this week depicting the differences between Isaac and Ishmael?

### *Galatians 4:21-31, NIV*

21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. 23 His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. 24 These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written: "Be glad, barren woman, you who never bore a child; shout for joy and cry aloud, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." 28 Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.

3. [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

5. Genesis 3:15

4. George, 340.

6. Stott, 129.

29 At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. 30 But what does Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." 31 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

### *Genesis 16, ESV*

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. 2 And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. 4 And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. 5 And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!" 6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. 7 The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." 9 The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." 10 The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." 11 And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction. 12 He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." 13 So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." 14 Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. 15 And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

### *Genesis 17:15-21, ESV*

15 And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" 19 God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. 20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. 21 But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."

*Genesis 21:1-14, ESV*

The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. 2 And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." 7 And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." 8 And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. 9 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. 10 So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." 11 And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. 13 And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

*Study Questions:*

1. Would anyone be willing to give a brief recap of what took place in this story from the scriptures in Genesis?
2. What do these passages of scripture reveal to us about God as just, loving, and merciful?
3. From verses 24-27, list the words associated with Hagar and then the words associated with Sarah. What do each of these women have in common with the words they are compared to? (Thought: Hagar=flesh, old covenant, Mt. Sinai, Arabia, present Jerusalem, slavery, Hagar=bondage. Sarah=promise, new covenant, Jerusalem that is above (heavenly Jerusalem prophesied about in Revelation), mother, Sarah=freedom)
4. How is this allegory useful and effective for combating the false teachers on their own grounds? (Thought: They used this passage to say only children of Abraham inherit the promise, Paul took this statement a step further and back at them to say, true, but Abraham had many children, it is the mother that counts! Only those in Christ, are the true children of the promise, Christ not Moses, Sarah not Hagar)
5. In what ways does Satan tempt you to step into the, "fix-it" or "do-it yourself" religion that represents Ishmael/bondage? In your study of Galatians 1-4 thus far, what truths from this study are beginning to bring freedom to you?
6. Just like Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so often, it is the church, or those who say they are Christians, that often hurt their "brothers and sisters." We all have experienced this, how has God healed you and used this experience to keep you from sinning against your brothers and sisters in Christ? What are some things God has taught you through this?
7. Verse 29 of Galatians teaches us that those who are in Christ, or born of the Spirit, should expect persecution. How have you experienced persecution from those who do not claim to be believers around you and how has it strengthened your faith?
8. Read Genesis 22:2, Genesis 44:30-31, Deut. 32:10, Zech. 2:8. "...the treatment Isaac got from his father Abraham is the treatment that we must expect from God." These scriptures depict the way the Father feels about us as his children. How does this truth impact your heart tonight?

### *Study Questions:*

10. If you do not know God as this kind of Father tonight, how can we pray for you? If you still feel like you're in the pangs of persecution by those around you, how can we pray for you? If you are struggling with living in the freedom that is already yours and are in bondage to sin tonight, how can we pray for you?

### *Prayer Partner Assignment:*

Meet with your prayer partner this week to read and discuss:

1. Read Romans 6 and answer the following questions:
2. What scripture verses stand out to you initially and why?
3. According to these scriptures, what does it mean to be a "slave to righteousness?"
4. Read Romans 6:17, Genesis 12:1-3, Ezekiel 36:27, Jeremiah 31:33. How do these scriptures help put into perspective the possibility of being a "slave to righteousness?"
5. How has a greater holiness in your life brought more peace, joy, and freedom this semester?
6. Discuss what scriptures from Romans 6 need to be applied to your life this week and why. End your time in prayer for one another.

*Scripture Memory:*  
Galatians 4:28-29