

CHAPTER 4: 1-31

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all. Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them. But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

This section begins with a classic example of "an arbitrary chapter division." Paul was continuing his discussion of Abraham's seed, heirs of the promise of salvation by faith. However, the King James interpreters (and everyone who followed their lead) created a new chapter right smack-dab in the middle of his thought.

Paul was a very consistent theologian. But, to get the true gist of his polemic, we must follow his logical succession of thought. So, in order to do that, we have to define a few specific terms and phrases. Let's begin with a question - Who was Paul referring to when he addressed the people who were "under the law?"

A very particular covenant was established with Israel when Moses brought the Law of God down from Mt. Sinai. The Judaizers were attempting to impose components of that very law on the Gentile church in Galatia. The Sinaitic Law was Paul's focus throughout this letter, arguing that it should never be imposed on any believer, Jew or Gentile. The Old Covenant - specifically the Law Covenant from Sinai - was done away with and replaced by the New Covenant of salvation by grace through faith. However, Gentile nations were never included in, or under obligation to, the Mosaic Covenant. It was Israel's covenant.

Granted, Gentiles were under a moral obligation to live righteously in accordance with their conscience and the general revelation of God -

"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." (Romans 2:14-16)

However, Paul's focus in the Galatian letter is specifically the Sinaitic Law, which the Judaizers were attempting to impose on the Gentiles. Paul's argument against such oppression was that the Gentiles were never under Moses to begin with and that their justification before God was accomplished by faith.

When Paul referred to people who were once "under the law," he could not have been referring to Gentiles. He was referring specifically to Israel. In fact, throughout this section of the Galatian letter, he (being a Benjamite Jew) placed himself within that burdened group, using the designation "we." "We," "our," and "us" must refer to the Israelites who, along with Paul, were locked up under the law. That is why he constructed the contrast with "ye" - as in "ye Gentiles" - who were the recipients of this letter. That contrast is very helpful in understanding Paul's logic. Follow along -

"But, the Scripture hath concluded all [Jew and Gentile] under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But, before faith came, we [Israelites] were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our [Israel's] schoolmaster to bring us [Israelites] unto Christ, that we [believing Israelites] might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we [believing Israelites] are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye [Galatian Gentiles, who were excluded from both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenant] are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. [Even though you are not the historic people of God, you are included in the New Covenant!] For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ [The Jewish Messiah - Abraham's particular "seed"]. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And, if ye be Christ's, then are ye [even though you are Gentiles] Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. [The promise made to the natural heirs, Israel.] Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father." (Gal. 3:22 - 4:2)

Some theologians play a sort of "shell game" with those verses. Knowing that the law was specifically Israel's covenant, they teach that the law drives the Gentile church to Christ. But, that's just confusing. Gentiles cannot be driven to the Messiah by means of a covenant of works they are not obligated to endure. They were grafted into a covenant that was not naturally theirs (Rom. 11:24).

Okay, now that we know the players, let's ask another question - What was the purpose of the law?

This has been the subject of much debate and no small amount of speculation. But, Paul was careful to answer that question. We've already seen in this letter that the law was "added" to Israel because of their sin (Gal. 3:19). In his letter to the Romans, Paul expanded that theology, saying that the law made sin appear all the more sinful (Rom. 7:13).

But, here Paul concluded that the purpose of the law was to guide Israel, like children in the hand of a guardian, to faith in their Messiah. Once they were confronted with their sinful state, the law would drive them to seek an alternative form of redemption that could actually produce a genuine holiness. But, once an Israelite (like Paul, for instance) came to faith, he was no longer under the bondage of that law. The schoolmaster was no longer necessary.

So, we must ask: What would that mean to the Galatian readers? Well, it's the ironclad argument against being shackled with the law! After all, if the purpose of the law was to drive Israel to salvation by faith - which faith the Galatians had already exhibited - then there was no reason to return to that selfsame law! And, the Judaizers who were attempting to persuade the Galatians had clearly not come to that saving faith, or else they themselves would have realized that the purpose of the law had been accomplished in Christ.

As long as we're discussing the purpose of the Mosaic Law, allow me one last comment. The Mosaic Law was not the political document that established Israel as a nation. That's a commonly touted theory, but it is without Biblical precedent. There are no verses that clearly develop that idea. But more importantly, God saw Israel as a nation long before they arrived in the Sinai desert. He saw them as a nation while they were in Egypt (Gen. 46:3). In fact, according to Ezekiel, God even saw them in Egypt as two nations, the northern and southern (Ezek. 23:1-4).

That idea - that Israel as a nation is inseparable from the Mosaic Covenant - is essential to writers who postulate the end of Israel's status as a nation before God. If the Mosaic Law formed national Israel, then Israel was abolished when the law was done away with. But, God established Israel in response to the Abrahamic Promise before the law was "added" because of their sins. That law was for the expressed purpose of guiding them to faith. After faith arrived, the law was done away with. Now, did the whole nation embrace the Christian faith? No, obviously not. But, no part of that equation can be construed to teach God's abandonment of the nation.

Okay, let's move along....

{1-2} - Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

Paul was continuing his "pedagogue" metaphor, explaining the function and purpose of the law. But, he added a new contrast between the "heir" and the "servant."

The natural heirs of the promises made to Abraham were once in a state of immaturity. Even though they were heirs to God's immutable covenant, they had to be put under the hand of "tutors and governors." The word "tutors" is "*epitropos*" in Greek. It means, "a commissioner, domestic manager, guardian." The word "governors" is "*oikonomos*." It means, "a house-distributor (i.e. manager), or an employed overseer." The parallel to "*paidagogos*" - a "child leader" - is apparent. Each of these metaphors refers to the Mosaic Law.

The law acted as guardian over Israel, managing the house, overseeing their activities and leading them like children on behalf of the Father. They were to remain under that hand of guidance until the time appointed by the Father. They may stand to inherit all that the Father has, but until they matured spiritually, Israel was under the law until the precise moment when the New Covenant of faith was established.

In that state of spiritual immaturity, they were no different from a "servant," the Greek "*doulos*," which means, "slave, one in a permanent relationship of servitude to another." That designation is specifically a reference to the heathen, or Gentiles, who served other gods. The contrast will become more obvious (and we'll return to it later) in verse eight - "When ye knew not God, ye [Gentiles of Galatia] did *service* unto them which by nature are no gods." The word "service" in that verse is the Greek "*douleuo*," from "*doulos*." It means, "to act as a slave."

So, the contrast Paul constructed was between the natural heir of the household and the slave who was under the hand of the master of the house. While the heir is a child, both he and the slaves are watched over by governors and tutors. But, one day the heir will become the master of the house. The slave will always be a slave.

While Israel was under the law, there was no difference between them and the heathen. They were both subject to worldly sin and both guilty before God. However, Israel was being led by the hand to their means of redemption. They were the heirs of their Father's fortune.

But, what hope did a slave have? We'll get back to this in verses six and seven.

{3} - Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

To get a handle on Paul's use of the phrase "the elements of the world," we need only to read his letter to the church at Colossia. In it he wrote -

"Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." (Col. 2:20-23)

Paul's point is simple, then. In like manner as the heir apparent, though he will one day be lord of the manor, being kept under the hand of governors and tutors, Israel was under bondage to worldly rudiments - do this, don't do that.

BUT----

{4} - But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

When the clock of earthly time ticked down to the exact moment, God sent His Son into the world, born to a virgin from the tribe of Judah, a descendant of King David. Being a Jew, Jesus was born under the same authority and discipline that Israel was under. But, that was exactly the way God designed it.

Unlike the sinful race of men who shared in Adam's blood, Jesus was born without a fleshly father. He was "made of a woman," but not of any man. As a result, His blood was uncontaminated by sin. And, when the Father determined it was time, the Son was sent into the world to be subject to the rudiments of the law.

Why?

{5} - To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Now, here's where it gets a bit more controversial. But, gee...I've never shied away from controversy in the past, so why start now?

When Paul spoke of "them that were under the law," he clearly meant Israel - the only nation ever under that covenant. In keeping with his law/schoolmaster metaphor - which law was done away with when faith came - Paul concluded that God sent His Son, born under the authority of the law, in order to save "them that were under the law."

To what purpose?

That "we" - we Israelites who were under the law - might receive the adoption of sons of God. Instead of being children, treated as slaves under the rudiments of the world, God sent Christ in order to redeem Israel from the law and raise them to their true sonship.

The English phrase "adoption of sons" may not be the best translation of the Greek word "*huiiothesia*." It is a combination of "*huios*," a son, and "*thesis*," or "a placing." So, the Greek word means, "to place one in the position of a son." Of course, that may happen by means of adopting someone outside the family, but in this context it means to place the son, or heir, in his position or estate.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words recognizes the two different burdens and positions from which Israelites and Gentiles are "adopted." It reads -

"In Galatians 4:5 they are said to receive "the adoption of sons," i.e., sonship bestowed in distinction from a relationship consequent merely upon birth. Here two contrasts are presented. (1) Between the sonship of the believer and the unoriginated Sonship of Christ. And, (2) between the freedom enjoyed by the believer and bondage, whether of Gentile natural condition, or of Israel under the Law." (Page. 32)ⁱ

Again, at the risk of being redundant, Paul could not be saying that God sent Christ into the world to redeem the Gentile church to the exclusion of national Israel (though He certainly did redeem elect Gentiles and add them to the Church!). The recipients of Paul's declaration of redemption can only be those who were actually "under the law" - the selfsame law under which Christ was born. In order to make Gentiles the focus of Paul's statement, we must create a historic theology that proves Gentiles were in the Mosaic covenant. But, again, that's just confusing.

Now, where did Paul get such a theology? From the apostolic record, of course! The gospel writers announced just such a purpose for the Christ child's birth. For instance, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce her impending pregnancy, he said -

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:32-33)

"The house of Jacob" is a term used only of the nation of Israel. In fact, when the name "Jacob" is used instead of "Israel" it is usually to denote their unredeemed,

or unchanged, state - just as Jacob wrestled with the Lord and had his name changed to Israel. So, Jesus' announced ministry and kingdom must include the nation of Israel - "The house of Jacob."

Despite modern theological attempts to diminish Israel's importance to God's ongoing plan of redemption, it is not sufficient to spiritualize the phrase "house of Jacob" to make it refer to the modern, Gentile church. The "house" designation is a specific term that refers to natural descendants, just as the Royal Houses of the English Monarchs do. Any theologian would be hard-pressed to prove from Scripture that the physical lineage of unredeemed Jacob somehow transmogrifies into the redeemed Gentile church.

Secondly, Christ will rule from the throne of David. David was the only God-ordained king to rule over the united houses of Israel and Judah. Jesus must rule over those united houses, in one kingdom, in order for Gabriel's words to be fulfilled. It is not sufficient to say that Jesus ascended to His Heavenly throne and is thereby ruling from David's throne. David never ruled in Heaven. The throne Christ currently occupies is Christ's Throne. When Israel is re-gathered, they will be ruled by David's greater Son, who will rule from David's throne.

Meanwhile, when Mary visited her cousin, Elizabeth, she praised God with these words -

"He [God] hath holpen [helped, assisted] his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever." (Luke 1:54-55)

Is it overly obvious to point out that Mary did have the future Gentile church in mind when she thanked God for helping Israel? When she spoke of Abraham's seed, she was speaking of his physical descendants, of which she was one. Later, when John the Baptist was born, his father, Zacharias was "filled with the Holy Ghost" and prophesied -

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." (Luke 1:68-69)

The Holy Ghost expressly declared that the birth of Christ was Israel's God visiting and redeeming His people. The balance of that passage declared that all the holy prophets had declared Israel's redemption as God's continuing response to the Abrahamic Covenant. John the Baptist would be the prophet of God to declare that salvation would come to Israel by the remission of their sins.

When Jesus was eight days old, his parents took Him to the temple to present Him to the Lord. There was an old man in the temple named Simeon, a "just and devout" man who was "waiting for the consolation of Israel." The Holy Ghost was

upon him and had assured him that he would not die until he had seen the Christ. He took Jesus up in his arms, proclaiming -

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke 2:29-32)

The Holy Spirit again declared that Jesus would save Gentiles, but not to the exclusion of Israel. On the contrary, Jesus was the redeemer, consolation, and glory of Israel! In fact, Jesus identified His own ministry with the words -

"... I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Mat. 15:24)

When He sent his apostles on their first missionary journey, He instructed -

"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Mat. 10:5b-6)

Jesus drew a clear distinction between Gentiles and Israel, and He declared that He was sent specifically to Israel. Again, Jesus was not referring to a future Gentile church when He made those statements.

And, of course, there is Paul's hotly debated statement -

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your [the Gentiles] sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's] sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." (Romans 11:26-29)

Once again, Paul used the specific term "Jacob" to denote Israel in their unregenerate state. However, he was convinced that Isaiah's prophecy was true - God would send Jacob's Deliverer to take away their sins. Paul reasoned that God's election of the nation of Israel was impossible to turn away from - they had the promise given to the beloved forefathers, and it was unthinkable that God would repent of His gifts, promises, election, or calling. Israel is God's elect, beloved people.

By the way, Paul was not referring to the Gentile church in this promise of redemption. He formed the contrast clearly. The salvation of Israel would occur when their blindness was removed. And, they would remain in that state of

partial, or temporary, blindness "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved." (Rom.11:25b-26a)

Okay, okay. I get your drift, Jimbo. That's consistent with your overall view and theological perspective. But, how does that help us in our understanding of the Galatian letter?

Good question! Thanks for dragging me back to the topic!

Verse five began "To redeem them that were under the law." Only Israel was under the law. And, Christ came to redeem them that were under the law. That's why I included verses that supported Paul's contention. And, if Christ was sent into the world to redeem those who were under the law, then the law was incapable of saving Israel. It was added to them to steer them to Christ.

If the Galatian Gentiles would acknowledge that bit of theological history, they would see that it was useless to pursue the law as a means of justification. After all, even Israel - the first and only recipients of the law - could only be redeemed through the finished work of Christ.

Paul continued, "that we might receive the adoption of sons." The "we" in that phrase refers to those who were under the law. Paul was a Jewish Israelite. He was raised under the strict code of the Mosaic Law. But, Christ was born under the law for the purpose of keeping it perfectly, nailing it to His cross, and imputing that perfection to those who had faith in Him. Hence, the law was fulfilled and was of no further use as a teacher, guide, or necessary bondage. The redemption of Israel was purchased by Christ's perfection and, by faith, the early church of Israelite believers graduated into their natural inheritance as sons and daughters.

Okay, great news! Israel has access to redemption by faith! What great news for the heir! But, what about the slaves? What about the Gentile heathen? What hope do they have?

By the grace of God, in keeping with the prophecies concerning Christ, Gentiles were also brought into the New Covenant of salvation by faith. By faith, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, male and female, free and bond. Everyone has access to this adoption. It was promised to Abraham's heirs, but grace has widened the field and reached out to everyone who will receive it. Gentile "slaves" were not redeemed from the Mosaic Law - the covenant they were never any part of. Only Israel can claim that status. But, they are redeemed from their natural, rebellious, ignorant state and their gods that are no gods.

The focus has changed. It is not "either/or." It is no longer "us/them." It is no longer "heirs/servants." It is "heirs AND servants."

So, you slaves ---

{6-7} - And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

"Because YE are sons"! What a marvelous exclamation. Not only are the natural heirs adopted into sonship, but (Paul used the conjunction "and") "YE" elect slaves are also adopted! How? God did it! He put the Holy Spirit into our hearts, causing us to cry out not "Master! Slave-driver," but "Abba – daddy." We approach God not as slaves in the household, but as joint-heirs! We approach as family!

The marvelous beauty of God's grace is that we Gentiles have been brought into a covenant relationship with God that was never ours in the first place. The New Covenant was promised to "the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31, Heb. 8:8), the specific people who were under the Old Covenant. The theology that tries to replace Israel and Judah with the unbiblical phrases "true Israel," or "spiritual Israel" cheapens the unfathomable truth of God reaching out to us despite our position as slaves in the household. (Not to mention the exegetical confusion that occurs when they attempt to explain how the current church has replaced "the house of Judah.")

Not to digress from the point - we slaves are brought into sonship and are made heirs of God's fortune despite our natural position and ourselves. We did not know God, and we were enslaved to gods that were not the true God (v.8). Yet, His mercy reached out to us and brought us into the family. We are able to cry, "Father" to the One who was our Master. We are seated at the family table along with the Father's natural sons and daughters. We share the honor and inheritance that they receive by right of descent.

Amazing.

Grace is a marvelous thing.

{8} - Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

Verses eight and nine form a contrast between "then" and "now." The Old English word "howbeit" has fallen out of use, but it simply means "however" or "but."

"But, then," before the Galatians had any knowledge of the true God, Jehovah, they were in bondage, acting as slaves, to those entities and objects that were no gods at all.

The plain fact of life is that humans end up serving someone. Despite all our philosophical notions of independence and free will, the Bible draws a black or white division. Either we are serving God or we are serving those things we deem to be gods. Either way, we are enslaved to something - our flesh or the Spirit. It is impossible to serve both.

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Mat. 6:24)

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." (Rom 8:5-8)

{9} - But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

Then Paul stated the contrast. "But now" that you know God - oops, wait - I mean now that you are known OF God, you are free from the fleshly slavery and free to serve the living God. That's an important distinction. It's not enough (despite modern evangelical tradition) to profess that we know God and that He is obligated to us on account of our profession. We must, much more importantly, be assured that the omnipotent God in Heaven knows us and that He had us in mind as He was electing His people before the foundations of the world (Eph. 1:4-5).

The freedom that Christ offers is the true freedom that comes from giving up everything that we are and offering ourselves as willing servants to the One who purchased us. Does that sound contradictory?

The Bible is full of such apparent contradictions, or paradoxes. We live by dying. We go up by going down. We are lifted up by humbling ourselves. We get by giving. We save our lives by losing them. And, we only experience true freedom when we take sides with God against ourselves and become bondslaves to Him. Then we can experience the joy and peace that comes from fellowship with our Father without guilt, shame, or fear of condemnation. We are free to serve the

One whom our flesh is incapable of pleasing. And, we are set free from the carnal lusts that previously enslaved us and kept us from our Creator.

So then, concludes Paul, if you were introduced to this state of free access to God, why would you desire the bondage you were once in? Why return to fleshly works that disappear with the using and are of no lasting value in eternity? What sense does it make to forfeit true freedom for continuing bondage?

{10} - Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

The Judaizers were intent on imposing the Old Covenant signs and behavior on the Gentile church. And, sure enough, the Galatian church had begun acting as though they were obligated to the Mosaic Law. For instance -

"Ye observe days..."

This was probably a reference to Sabbath days. Every seventh day, or Saturday, was set aside as holy to God and no servile work could be performed. But, for the Christian, the Sabbath sign is fulfilled when we rest in Christ's finished work (Heb. 4:9-11). To return to Sabbath-keeping, the token sign of the Mosaic Covenant, was to deny Christ's sufficient redemption and make the Galatians responsible to keep the whole law.

"... and months ..."

This is a reference to the "new moons" which were celebrated with sacrifices and the sound of trumpets, marking the beginning of each month. In Numbers 10:10 this observance was called a "memorial to the Lord." As part of the Mosaic Law, it was an absolute requirement. But, when the New Covenant went into effect, no such command was given.

"... and times ..."

"Times" is the Greek word "*kairos*," meaning "season," or particular designated moments in time. God required Israel to observe "feasts" or "set times of the Lord." Three times a year every male Israelite who could travel was required to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem: The Feast of Unleavened Bread (including Passover and First Fruits), the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Atonement (including Trumpets and Tabernacles).

However, Christ perfectly fulfilled the first series of feasts when He died on Passover, lay in the tomb through the days of Unleavened Bread and rose from the grave on the Firstfruit. Fifty days later, the Feast of Weeks was fulfilled when the Spirit of God descended and the church of the New Covenant was born.

The last three, or Fall feasts, are separated from the first four by several months. They also find their spiritual fulfillment in Christ. The first of the Fall feasts was the Feast of Trumpets, fulfilled in Christ's birth. Jesus' birthday, by the way, can be figured thusly:

- 1) Luke 1:26 & 36 tells us that John the Baptist was born six months prior to Christ's birth.
- 2) Luke 1:5 tells us that John's father was an Aaronic priest who served in the temple during the course of Abijah.
- 3) In 1 Chron. 24, we read that King David divided the twenty-four sons of Aaron, through Eleazar and Ithamar, into twenty-four lots. Assuming that the lots were of equal length, the twelve thirty-day Hebrew months would have divided into twenty-four fifteen-day lots. 1 Chron. 24:10 tells us that the eighth lot went to Abijah. The Hebrews had both a civil and sacred year, separated after the Exodus when God instructed Israel that the seventh month - the month of the Passover - would be the first year of their calendar (Ex. 12:2). The service of the priests would be determined by the sacred calendar, so the course of Abijah would have fallen in the second half of the month of Tammuz, corresponding with our late June or early July depending on the year.
- 4) Luke 1:23-24 tells us that John's father went home immediately after his days of ministering in the temple were over and his wife conceived soon after.
- 5) Adding 15 months (the first six months of Elisabeth's pregnancy, plus the nine months in Mary's) from that point brings us to the Hebrew month of Tishri, corresponding to our Sept-Oct.

Now, if Jesus were in fact born in the fall, right around the Feast of Trumpets, that would explain the overflow of people in Jerusalem spilling over into the suburb of Bethlehem, and why there would be no room at the inn. That may also explain why there was a specific edict that everyone had to go home to be taxed. Why wouldn't they have already been at home? Any shrewd politician would have known the traveling habits of the Jews and known that the majority of the nation would view an edict posted in Jerusalem as they passed through.

Okay, I admit the last part is just a bit of speculating. But, I'm convinced of the Autumnal birth of Christ.

Anyway, the Feast of Atonement followed the Feast of Trumpets. Jesus' death for the redemption of His people would have fulfilled that feast, at least in its spiritual sense. All during the Fall feasts, the Israelites lived in "booths" or temporary living spaces in accordance with the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus coming to live and "tabernacle" among us in a tent of human flesh fulfilled that feast.

Now, there is also a school of thought that recognizes how physical and linear Jesus' fulfillment of the first four Spring feasts was. While not denying the spiritual fulfillments mentioned above, the Fall feasts may very well have a similarly ordered and physical fulfillment in Christ's return to Earth.

- 1) The Feast of Trumpets would denote the "harpazo," or catching away of the Church; given Paul's references to trumpets in conjunction with this event (1 Cor. 15:52, 1 Thes. 4:16).
- 2) The Feast of Atonement, the next feast in order, would denote the "*thlipsis megas*," or "Great Tribulation" (Mat. 24:21, Rev. 7:14). That's the time when God pours out His wrath for sin on the inhabitants of Earth, afflicting their souls and making a burned sacrifice.
- 3) The next feast in order, Tabernacles, is the only one of the seven Feasts of the Lord that is found intact, required of every nation, during the Millennial reign of Christ (Zech. 14:16).

So, if they are fulfilled in order, then Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles would perfectly correspond with the Catching Away, Great Tribulation, and Millennial Reign.

Regardless of which interpretation you hold to, or even if you hold to both (as I do), Christ is the fulfillment of the Feast Times of the Lord and they are no longer required of the New Covenant believer.

"... and years ..."

Yearly observances were very important to the Mosaic system. Every seventh year was a Sabbath year and every seventh Sabbath year was followed by the year of Jubilee. But, again, these observances and ordinances were all done away with when the Old Covenant was done away with. And, the Jubilee, when every parcel of land in Israel returned to its God-designated owner, slaves were set free and all debts were cancelled, certainly finds its fulfillment in Christ's redemption of His people and God's New Covenant intention to regather Israel to the land they were promised (Jer. 31:28, Ezek. 28:25).

{ 1 1 } -] am afraid of you, lest] have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

Seeing their affection for such fleshly activity and the rudiments of the law, Paul mourned the condition of the Galatian church, worrying that he may have given all that he had for their benefit, only to see his labor return fruitless. The word he chose was "*phobeo*." It means, "to be terrified or frightened." It is the root word from which we get "phobia." Paul was in fear for the eternal state of the people he had loved and labored over.

{12} - Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.

The brevity of this statement has led to an assortment of interpretations, but I think the context gives us a pretty clear road map to decipher Paul's meaning. First off, he was begging them, beseeching them, to consider his pleading.

"... be as I am ..."

Paul, though he was a purebred, born and raised Jew, lived without the yolk of Moses around his neck; as one who was as free from the "days, and months, and times, and years" as any natural heathen. So, he pled with the Gentiles, "be as I am." After all...

"... for I am as ye are ..."

I am also without obligation to the law. I am free from its claims and curses, just as you are. Neither of us, Jew nor Gentile, once in Christ, is under any motivation from God to bow our backs under the burden our forefathers couldn't carry. So, be like me, because I'm in the same condition you are!

"... ye have not injured me at all."

Your willingness to have your freedom thwarted and to follow the enticing words of the Judaizers has done no damage to my freedom. I remain as free in Christ as I have ever been, despite the fact that I labored to free you and that labor may be in vain. Your newfound bondage has laid no bondage on me.

{13} - Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.

Paul gave us no indication what his particular infirmity of the flesh was. But, he may have decided to remind the Galatians of his preaching under duress as part of his proof that they could not injure him, his testimony, or his dedication to preaching the gospel. After all, even though he had been seized by a physical infirmity he had nevertheless preached it to them!

The infirmity may have had something to do with Paul's vision. That would account for Paul reminding the Galatian church that in their former zealous love for him they would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him (v.15). It would also account for Paul's habit of dictating his letters and taking the time to point out to the Galatians that he had written this particular letter with his own

hand (Gal. 6:11). Perhaps his failing vision was the "thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." (2 Cor. 12:7).

In any case, Paul persevered under his trial and was faithful to bring the words of life to the church.

{14} - *And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.*

Even with his fleshly frailty, the believers loved and embraced Paul, receiving him as a messenger sent to them straight from God. He likened their love for him as the love they had for Christ, Himself. But, their love had waxed cold.

{15} - *Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.*

"So, point blank," said Paul, "What happened? Where is that high regard you had for me? Where is that sense that I was an angelic blessing? What happened to that sacrificial love that would have provided even your precious sight in order to help me spread this gospel?"

{16} - *Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?*

And, that's the rub. Nothing separates people quicker than the truth of Christ. The gospel of free and sovereign grace will upset religious folk who strive to keep their converts in bondage to their personal list of "do's and don'ts".

Paul had labored under physical infirmity to set these Gentiles free and lead them to the blessed truth of Christ's complete redemption. But, once they were swayed from Paul's doctrine to the teaching of the Judaizers, Paul had become the opposition. The man they most loved became the man they most resisted. Legalism will do that to people, you know. The legalist is so bound up in his futile attempt to satisfy his own conscience and convince himself that he has accomplished sufficient righteousness to please God, that he spends his whole life in the misery of endless performance with no sense of security, gratification or peace of mind. And, misery loves company. One thing holds true for all legalists – they are determined to bind everyone they can into the bondage that they are forced to endure. If they're bound up, they want you bound up. Nothing makes a legalist more frustrated and angry than someone who is truly free in

Christ. Nothing irritates a legalist more than someone who, like Paul, has no law or ordinance against them and to whom all things are lawful (1 Cor. 6:12).

{17} - They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them.

This verse reads rather cryptically in the Old English. In fact, even in the Greek it's rather fragmented. But, when coupled with verse 18, Paul's meaning can be pulled out.

"They" refers obviously to the Judaizers, who were actively courting the affection of the Galatian Gentiles. But Paul warned, "They are not sincere when they pay you all this special attention." They had a very particular private agenda brewing just under the surface. "They may eagerly seek you," Paul stated, "but don't fall for their flattery."

"Yea, they would exclude you ..."

What were the Judaizers attempting to exclude the Gentiles from? Not from the law, or even from the Jewish religion. It becomes clear in verse 18 that Paul, himself, was the object from which the Jews were attempting to extricate the Galatians. They wanted to shut the Gentiles off from Paul in order to gain greater influence over them.

"... that ye might affect them."

In other words - the Jews were paying special attention to the Gentile converts in the hope that they could woo them away from Paul and his teaching, and they would, in turn, pay special attention to the Jews.

{18} - But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you.

The Judaizers eagerly sought the Gentiles with the intention that the Gentiles would return their affection. But, Paul's justifiable concern was that their motives were not good. They were seeking to snare the Gentiles and bind them with the heavy burden of the law. That's not something the Galatians should have eagerly sought in return.

But, it wasn't the activity of paying attention and eagerly, affectionately seeking something that was wrong. It was the object of their affection that was in question. It is proper and commendable to seek a good thing. And, once the

good thing - in Paul's case, the gospel of grace - was sought out, it should have remained a constant object of desire, not just something they would seek when Paul was present to adjure and admonish them.

Paul had labored to produce fruit among the Galatians. He had suffered through sickness and hardship to bring them the good news. He bore the pain of their spiritual birth as a mother who suffers labor pangs. But, it wasn't over.

{19} - My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,

Though they were Paul's newborn children in the faith, schooled in the newness of everlasting life through faith in Christ, Paul was once again doubled over in pain, suffering a second time to establish the doctrine of grace in their hearts. Though he loved them as a parent loves their own children, Paul was angered and stern in his correction.

{20} - I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

Paul longed to be with these men and women who were teetering on the brink of destruction. If he could cajole and console them, he could change his approach from stern to kind. If he were there he could persuade them as he had previously persuaded them. If he were in their midst he could counter the Judaizers' errors from their own Scriptures and prove that faith in Christ was the end of the law.

But, he wasn't there. And, being far from them, Paul stood in doubt of their wisdom, their discernment and possibly even their salvation. So, he posed a question.

{21} - Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?

That's the heart of it, really. The only people who could earnestly desire the law as their means of justification before God were those people who had never actually understood the conditions and severity of the law, or the deep-seated implications of their decision. No man in his right mind, who properly comprehended the unbending nature of the law, would ever prefer it to the gift of salvation and righteousness through Christ.

But, the law - the desire to DO something - appeals to our egocentric flesh. The notion that we can willfully achieve personal perfection, or live on such a level of

individual sanctity and holiness that God is obligated to save us, appeals to the vanity of our carnal minds. After all, we're do-it-yourself, takin'-care-of-business, we're-number-one, my-way-or-the-highway, just-do-it, climb-every-mountain-forge-every-stream type of people! Don't get in our way; we've got places to be and things to do! We're self-made-men who rise-to-the-challenge and glory in our ability to win-at-all-cost! Give me my free will and a little time and I'll claw my way to the Heavenly throne room just to prove I can do it!

That's flesh talking.

And, that's what the Judaizers were counting on. They appealed to that very same vanity by paying special attention to the Gentile converts, persuading them to vie for salvation through fleshly effort. But, they weren't telling the whole story. They were offering a truncated, you-can-do-it, no-heavy-lifting type of legalism. They offered parts of the law that could actually be accomplished - like what to eat, keeping days, and circumcision.

Paul, however, knew that the law brought nothing but condemnation and death. If they desired the law, it could only be because they had never understood the law. Nor did they understand that faith and works could not be intermingled.

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But, that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith."
(Gal. 3:10-11)

{22} - For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.

Paul did what Paul does best. He went straight to Scripture. While the Gentiles may or may not have been familiar with this story, Paul chose a piece of Hebrew history that would confound the Judaizers.

God promised Abraham innumerable children when the man was seventy-five and childless (Gen. 12:1-4). Still, he did have a promise from God and he believed it. Isaac was born when Abraham was one hundred years old. During the intervening 25 years, Abraham and Sarah wrestled with God's promise as their ages advanced and the promised child failed to appear.

When Abraham was eighty-six, his wife proposed an alternate plan. Rather than wait for God to fulfill his promise through barren Sarah, why not have Abraham impregnate her Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, and that would be almost like Sarah bearing the kid? Abraham went along with the plan and produced the boy, Ishmael. He was described by an angel of God thusly -

"And he shall be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." (Gen. 16:12)

That "wild man's" descendants, the Ishmaelites, were divided into twelve tribes (Gen. 25:16). They went on to be called Hagarites, Hagarenes, and Arabians (1 Chron. 5:10, Ps. 83:6, Isa. 13:20). They were enemies of Israel and were overcome by Gideon (Judges 8:10-24, 2 Chron. 26:7). However, they later sent gifts to King Solomon and King Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 10:15, 2 Chron. 17:11).

So, Abraham bore a son in his old age and he loved the boy. Nonetheless, thirteen years later God appeared to Abraham and repeated his covenant promises for the fourth time, adding that Sarah would be a mother of nations and kings of people would come from her (Gen. 17:16). She was ninety. Abraham offered Ishmael as the rightful heir, crying -

"... O that Ishmael might live before thee!" (Gen. 17:18)

But, God countered that Sarah would indeed bear Abraham a son, his name would be Isaac, the Hebrew word for "laughter." God declared that He would establish His covenant with Isaac, and his seed after him, for an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:19). As for Ishmael, God promised to bless him, make him fruitful, multiply him exceedingly, and make him a great nation of twelve princes.

But! -

"But, my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year." (Gen. 17:21)

Sure enough, one year later the "child of promise" was born. During the sixteen years that Abraham raised Ishmael, tensions grew between Sarah and Hagar. In fact, no sooner had Hagar become pregnant than she began to despise Sarah. Abraham left the solution up to Sarah, who dealt with her so harshly that Hagar ran into the wilderness. There she was met by an angel of the Lord who advised her to return and submit herself to her mistress (Gen. 16:4-9).

When Isaac was born, Abraham and Sarah rejoiced greatly, and threw a huge feast when the boy was weaned. But, the teenager mocked the child and the extravagance over the new boy. Sarah adjured her husband -

"... Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." (Gen. 21:10)

The request grieved Abraham. But, God spoke to him, saying -

"... Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called." (Gen. 21:12)

So, Abraham rose up early the next day, took bread and water, and sent Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness of Beer-sheba. They never returned to Abraham's tents.

{23} - But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.

These two sons were both the natural children of Abraham. But, one of them was born due to healthy physiological circumstances. Abraham and Hagar were both fertile human beings capable of producing offspring. The other child was born under impossible circumstances. Sarah was long past childbearing age and had been infertile her whole life.

Ishmael was the product of impatient people trying to accomplish God's promises through fleshly means. But, Isaac was the product of God remaining faithful to His own promise. The typological importance of that contrast will be spelled out in the upcoming verses, but suffice it to say that the child born into bondage - the child of a bondwoman - would never share the inheritance of the promised child born into his parents' freedom. That's the significance of God's declaration, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

In fact, that phrase became the linchpin of Paul's theology of election in Romans 9. Despite natural descent, God chose which lineage would fall under his blessing and which would not.

"... For they are not all Israel [the blessed lineage], which are of Israel [the progenitor, Jacob]: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son." (Rom. 9:6b-9)

The promises of Abraham flowed through Isaac, not the firstborn. The firstborn was the child of the flesh, but sovereign God withheld the blessings from him, saving them for the child He intended to bring into the world miraculously. And, when the child of promise arrived, the child of the flesh - the child born into bondage - had to leave and never return.

{24} - Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

A Few Words About Biblical Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the study, or some would say science, of interpreting Scripture. This verse has become the springboard for all sorts of hermeneutical gymnastics, so it's worth sorting out what Paul said, didn't say, and was driving at.

Viewing the physical, historic facts of the Abraham/Sarah/Hagar triangle, Paul saw a larger principle at work. Though Abraham's firstborn should have inherited his father's blessing, Ishmael was sent away with his mother. Before the promised child was even conceived, God instructed Abram, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 21:12, Rom. 9:7, Heb. 11:10). So, at God's own prompting, Abraham sent away the bondswoman and the child born into bondage, giving favor and blessing to the younger son, the child of promise.

Paul concluded that this entire tale was "an allegory." Our English word "allegory" is a transliteration of the Greek term "*allegoreo*." The Greek term appears only in Gal. 4:24. It is formed from "*allos*," other, and "*agoreuo*," to speak in a place of assembly (rooted in "*agora*," the market-place). So, "*allegoreo*" came to mean, "to speak not according to the primary sense of the word, but in a way that the facts of a story were applied to illustrate principles."

W.E. Vine's comments on "*allegoreo*" are especially enlightening. They read -

"The allegorical meaning does not do away with the literal meaning of the narrative. There may be more than one allegorical meaning - though, of course, only one literal meaning. Scripture histories represent or embody spiritual principles, and these are ascertained, not by the play of the imagination, but by the rightful application of the doctrines of Scripture." ⁱⁱ

This is a very important hermeneutic principle. We'll come back to it in a minute.

Paul's use of the term "allegory" is the basis for a method of interpretation called the "Allegorical Method." Sometimes, the Allegorical Method is called the "Spiritualized Reading of Scripture" as opposed to the "Natural Reading" or "Literal Reading" method of Bible interpretation. The Allegorical Method views Scripture as embedded with deeper, secondary, or even primary, meaning. So, it is always necessary to dig below the surface meaning of a passage to uncover the hidden meaning. And, Gal. 4:24 gives the "allegorist" the fishing license to pull those meanings out of every verse.

However, one of the chief failings of the Allegorical, or Spiritualized, Method of interpretation is that there are no ground rules. Any interpreter is free to pull whatever meaning from a verse that suits his fancy at the moment. As long as it sounds spiritually motivated, any interpretation assumes credibility. However, as W.E.Vine pointed out, the principles embodied in Old Testament history are not to be ascertained by playful imaginations, but by the doctrines that are clearly and specifically spelled out in the larger context of Scripture.

Now, in Paul's treatment of Abraham's story, every element that drove Paul to his conclusion was actually present and obvious in the historic account. For instance:

- 1) Abraham actually did have two children by two women.
- 2) One woman was his wife and one was a slave.
- 3) One child actually was born into bondage while the other was born a free man.
- 4) God actually told Abraham to cast off the bondswoman and her son.
- 5) God told Abraham that the blessing and promises would flow through Isaac.
- 6) Ishmael actually was the child of fleshly effort and Isaac actually was the "child of promise."

So, Paul was not in the least bit fanciful when he concluded that this story was allegorical. Clearly, God was spelling out a principle in these people's lives and the larger context of solid, Scriptural doctrine supported his conclusion. Paul's treatment of the story remained completely in line with the literal elements of the story. He was not creative, or even particularly interpretive. Any logical person looking at this story and searching for its meaning would come to essentially the same conclusions Paul came to.

That's important, because far, far, far too much of Bible "interpretation" has used the excuse of "allegory" to create all sorts of speculative and imaginative conclusions that are not obvious from the elements of the text. Paul never introduced such "creative" interpretative methods into his theology. He looked carefully at the facts and drew the conclusion that this story spelled out a clear, obvious principle God was teaching through the lives of these people.

Based on the irrefutable doctrine that the New Covenant had replaced the Old Covenant, he reached back into Abraham's story and drew the parallel - the two wives represented the two covenants.

Lastly, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul when he drew his allegory. He had the God-ordained right and principle at work in his teaching. We do damage to Scripture when we try to mimic Paul's work and begin allegorizing at will. We are on much safer hermeneutical ground when we say what the inspired authors of Scripture

said, but don't add our opinion, creative theology, or spiritualized interpretations to it.

That being said, let's read Paul's interpretation of the allegory.

{25} - For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

Hagar, the woman with whom Abraham attempted to fulfill God's promise through acts of the flesh, was a perfect "type" or "symbol" of Mt. Sinai, where the law of fleshly obedience was handed down. Every Israelite born under that law was required to serve that law in slavish fear. So, Hagar's child typified Israel under the Mosaic Law.

Meanwhile, the Judaizers who held sway over the conscience of the Galatian converts had arrived from Jerusalem, the seat of Mosaic legalism. So, the "Jerusalem which now is" was a reference to the seat of Judaism in Paul's day, which still suffered under the yoke of human effort.

So, if Hagar was synonymous with Paul's contemporary Jerusalem, what did Sarah, the mother of the free child of promise, symbolize?

{26} - But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

Sarah is the place where free children are born, which is "from above."

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again [*"anōthen"* - from above], he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

The seat of freedom is not where the law is preached, according to Paul's allegory, but in the "Jerusalem which is above." And, that place of free grace is the mother of "us all" - the children born of miraculous promise.

"But, as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13)

Now, what was Paul saying and what was Paul not saying? In its context, it is clear that this verse is the completion of Paul's contrast between Hagar/Sarah and law/grace. And, anything beyond that is speculation. This verse has been

yanked from its context and pushed along side verses like Hebrews 12:22 to formulate creative conclusions about everything from Israel's demise and replacement by the Church to a complete negation of everything literal in Scripture in favor of spiritual interpretations. But, and I'll say this repeatedly, Paul did not go that far or reach those conclusions.

And, if he didn't, we shouldn't.

Paul stayed within the boundaries of the obvious elements and doctrine he'd been taught. Paul played by the rules. His parallel was between the seat of bondage and the seat of freedom. Jerusalem was the capital of Israel. So, it's fair to say that Paul was comparing the capital of Mosaic legalism to the capital of Christian freedom by grace.

But, that's all Paul was saying; to go beyond that is to speculate. And, speculation leads to confusion.

{27} - For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

Paul went on to defend his allegory based on a prophetic bit of Scripture. It's Isaiah 54:1 -

"Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD."

Paul used this verse in support of Sarah, the "Jerusalem which is above," the "mother of us all." Sarah was barren her entire life and was a reproach among the women who had fulfilled their wifely duty and given their husbands offspring. Even Hagar, as soon as she had conceived, despised her barren mistress (Gen. 16:4). But, Sarah was to bear the child of promise. She would break forth into singing and cry for joy. She that had never travailed with child would have more children - in fact, nations and kings, more than the sands of sea and the stars in the sky - than the married wives (a Hebrew euphemism for "mothers").

In the end, the desolate woman was promised more children than Hagar, the first to be fruitful for Abraham. Of course, in Isaiah's prophecy, this multitude of children born to the "desolate" woman became the nation of Israel. Isaiah continued -

"For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved

in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee." (Isaiah 54:5-10)

So, the context of Isaiah 54 makes plain that the barren woman who broke into singing was the mother of Israel - Sarah.

But, as concerns Paul's allegory, Hagar was the bondwoman who represented the bondage of the law and Sarah was the free woman, the barren one, who received the child of promise and the innumerable offspring. Hagar was the seat of bondage, "Jerusalem which is now," and Sarah was the seat of freedom, "Jerusalem which is above."

{28} - Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

Isaac was the miraculous child, born of the free woman, born on account of the promise God made to Abraham. And, Paul argued that "we" - the offspring of Abraham who had been born from above and shared the Abrahamic faith - were also the children of promise.

In what way? Well, in accordance to the promise (!) –

"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;..." (Gen. 22:18a)

We have received the promised blessing! But, it's not easy being free.

{29} - But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

Ishmael mocked his brother as soon as he was born and weaned (Gen. 21:9). God's response to that mockery was swift and severe -

{30} - Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

It was God's instruction to cast them out. It was God who determined that the child of the bondwoman would not be heir with His chosen son, Isaac (Gen. 21:10). In fact, God went so far as to call Isaac, "MY son."

But, the conflict has always fumed. Miserable people who are tied up in their legalism are spiteful toward the truly free sons and daughters of God. It just doesn't seem fair to them that they should sweat and toil under their self-appointed bondage, laboring to please God, while the children of promise inherit the promise of eternal life by grace without works. The children of bondage will always persecute the children of the free.

But, the legalists hated Jesus without a cause (John 15:25). Can his disciples expect any less?

"And, ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved." (Mat. 10:22)

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." (John 15:18-20)

So, there's only one thing for any healthy gathering of freeborn saints to do. Throw out the bondwoman and her sons!!! Get the legalism out of your assemblies and live as those who are born from above. There is no getting along with those people and there is no place of compromise or shared inheritance. The legalist cannot share in the Father's promised heritage.

Throw them out, out, out!

Now, as concerns Paul's argument to the Galatians, this was sane advice. He was advocating that the Galatian believers extricate themselves entirely from those men who were still tied up in the Mosaic bondage. If they were indeed "children of the free," then they had no choice but to throw the Judaizers out.

{31} - So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

Completing his allegory, and this chapter, Paul repeated his initial claim. The brethren of Christ are born into the amazing freedom of grace. We are not the children of Hagar, because Hagar's son was exempted from the inheritance. But, we are children of promise. And, the promise of grace is eternal life through Christ, our Lord. We are free from Moses and free from every charge that could be brought against us (Rom. 8:33).

Though we are persecuted by the world and under constant assault from the Pharisees of our day, the children of the free press on toward the goal, throwing off the shackles of fleshly performance, resisting the guilt of ineffective performance, and casting the bondwoman and her son out of our assemblies.

Because we, brethren, are the children of Sarah.

We are the children born from above.

We are the children of promise.

We are the children of the free!

ⁱ Vine, W.E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. (Westwood, N.J: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1952) Pg. 32.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. Pg. 47