

Review Questions (Lesson #12)

Answer T for true, F for false

1. Abraham and Moses lived at about the same time.
2. In the Old Testament, Israel was God's wife.
3. Inheriting the promise God made to Abraham depended upon keeping the Law of Moses.

4. God miraculously enabled Hagar to conceive and give birth to Ishmael.
5. "The Law" included more than just the five books written by Moses.

Give short answers:

1. Why should we be extremely cautious about allegorizing Scripture? _____
2. Hagar is likened to what mountain, what covenant, and what earthly city? _____
3. Though she is not named, what woman is likened to "the Jerusalem that is above"? _____
4. Briefly tell why Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham as a wife: _____
5. How does Sarah have more children than Hagar? _____

Fill in the blanks:

1. God needed no _____ to keep His _____, and _____ was not the promised _____.
2. The _____ itself said it was _____ and predicted its own _____ by the _____.
3. Certainly the _____ would agree that _____, not _____, was the legitimate _____.
4. Paul refers to the _____ of _____ as _____, drawing a parallel between it and the _____ inflicted upon _____ by the _____, including the _____ who harassed _____ from place to place.
5. If the Judaizers truly _____ the _____, consistency would require them to _____ what the _____ said about itself.

Galatians: Guarding the Gospel of Grace

Lesson #12 What the Law Said About Itself (Galatians 4:21-31)

The churches of Galatia were plagued with false teachers who told the brethren they must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses or they could not be saved. Paul has already proven in three ways that they were wrong:

1. The matter was settled when the apostles and elders met at Jerusalem (Lesson #5, see also Acts 15).
2. Returning to the Law was illogical. If the Law could save, why did they obey the gospel? By obeying the gospel, they acknowledged that they were not saved by the Law — so why return to it?
3. Under the Law they had been minor children with the Law as their guardian. In Christ they were full-fledged sons; returning to the guardian was foolish and humiliating.

Now Paul advances another line of reasoning: The Law itself said it was temporary and predicted its own replacement by the gospel. Thus he challenges the Judaizers: "Tell me, you who desire to be under the Law, do you not hear the Law?" (Galatians 4:21). If they truly loved the Law, consistency would require them to accept what the Law said about itself.

"For it is written that Abraham had two sons . . ." (v. 22a). Paul is referring, of course, to the inspired, historical account of Abraham in Genesis. Although Genesis was written by Moses, it records events that occurred long before Moses' birth. Abraham lived and died many centuries before the Law was given through Moses at Sinai, yet Genesis is deemed in Scripture to be part of the Law. Likewise, Scripture written after Sinai but before Christ is also deemed to be part of the Law (see Psalm 82:6 quoted by Jesus in John 10:34 under the designation "Law").

Paul bases his argument on Ishmael, Abraham's son by the bondswoman, Hagar, and Isaac, Abraham's son by his wife, Sarah. Interestingly, Paul mentions Hagar and Isaac by name, but not Ishmael or Sarah. From these four characters, Paul draws an allegory (Galatians 4:24, the word "symbolic" is literally "allegorized"). An allegory is a story in which the characters and actions are used to symbolize other things. Because Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit, we know his applications are correct. We, on the other hand, should use extreme caution in allegorizing Scripture; since we are not inspired, we are prone to make erroneous applications. Following is

a summary of Paul's inspired applications in this allegory:

Hagar	Sarah
Bondswoman	Freewoman
Son – Ishmael	Son – Isaac
According to flesh	Through Promise
Persecuted Isaac	Persecuted by Ishmael
Cast out (not inherit)	Heir
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Mt. Sinai	Mt. Zion (Jerusalem Above)
Bondage	Free
Jerusalem	(Christians)
Fleshly Seed of Abraham	Children of Promise
Persecuted the Church	Persecuted by Jews
Cast Out (Not Inherit)	Spiritual Heirs

At issue here was the same question as in chapter three: “Who are the heirs of the promise God made to Abraham?” The Judaizers were teaching that those who kept the Law were the legitimate heirs. But Paul has already shown that the Law was given centuries after the promises, so fulfillment of the promises could not be dependent on keeping the Law (see lesson #8). Besides, those under the Law were like minor children and slaves. Now Paul enlarges on the idea of being slaves by considering the status of Abraham’s sons. Certainly the Judaizers would have agreed that Isaac, not Ishmael, was the legitimate heir, for the Judaizers were fleshly descendants of Isaac. But Paul shows that by returning to the Law, they were aligning themselves with the slave son, Ishmael, not with Isaac!

God promised to make Abraham’s descendants (his “seed”) into a great nation and give them the land of Canaan. Since his wife, Sarah, was unable to conceive, she devised a scheme to give Abraham a son through whom, she supposed, God would fulfill His promise. She gave her Egyptian maid, Hagar, to Abraham as a secondary wife. Hagar promptly conceived and gave birth to Ishmael (Genesis 16). But God needed no help to keep His promise, and Ishmael was not the promised seed. Several years later, when Sarah was long past child-bearing age (Genesis 18:1), God miraculously enabled her to conceive and give birth to Isaac.

In Paul’s allegory, these two mothers and sons represent two

covenants and the people under them. Hagar is the covenant from Mount Sinai (i.e. the Law of Moses). Her slave son, Ishmael, represents those in bondage under the Law, symbolized by the city of Jerusalem (Galatians 4:24-25). This certainly applied to the Judaizers and their converts. Though Paul does not mention Sarah by name, he obviously has her in mind as the mother of Isaac, the free-born child of promise. Paul refers to her as “the Jerusalem that is above” (v. 26), as opposed to “Jerusalem that now is” (v. 25). Heavenly Jerusalem is “the mother of us all” (v. 26), that is, of all Christians, the spiritual descendants of Abraham by the freewoman, Sarah.

Paul supports his argument by quoting Isaiah 54:1 (Galatians 4:27). Isaiah’s people, Israel, were God’s wife whom He temporarily forsook due to her unfaithfulness. When He restored the Jews from captivity, however, they would be even more productive than before. In his allegory, Paul applies this text to Sarah as the formerly barren woman who now has more children than Hagar. Of course these are spiritual children, and one reason they are so numerous is the inclusion of Gentiles who have become Christians. They are, therefore, “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (3:29). They are, “as Isaac was, children of promise” (4:28).

When Isaac was weaned, Abraham “made a great feast” (Genesis 21:8). By this time, Ishmael was in his mid-to-late teens. “And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian . . . scoffing” (Genesis 21:9). This word is variously translated mocking, playing, and sporting. Whether or not Ishmael was physically abusive is not clear, but the incident was serious enough for Sarah to insist that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away (v. 10). Paul refers to the mistreatment of Isaac as persecution, drawing a parallel between it and the suffering inflicted upon Christians by the Jews, including the Judaizers who harassed Paul from place to place (Galatians 3:29).

Sarah’s demand, “Cast out the bondswoman and her son, for the son of the bondswoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman” is applied by Paul to the Judaizers and anyone else in bondage under the Law. The conclusion is clear: the Judaizers were not heirs of God’s promise to Abraham. Far from securing their salvation, their return to the Law actually forfeited it! Like Ishmael, they were slave children. Paul and others who remained true to the gospel, on the other hand, were “not children of the bondswoman, but of the free” (Galatians 4:31).