

Study: Galatians 4:21-31

Pray for your time together in God's Word.

If you need an icebreaker question, try:

Ask the Group: Have you ever felt an extraordinary weight (either literally or figuratively) lifted off your shoulders?

Ask the Group: What has Paul told us so far about the Galatians connection to Abraham, specifically as it relates to circumcision and faith?

Jesus + Nothing= Everything. Circumcision isn't your righteousness, only faith in Christ and His atonement is, etc. It is not the same covenant Abraham was under, but a new covenant

Read to the Group: Keeping in mind that Paul has already affirmed we are all heirs of Abraham, let's see how Paul uses an analogy from Abraham's life to expand on the theme of law/slavery vs. grace/freedom in Galatians 4:21-31.

I - Two Mothers, Two Brothers - (4:21-25)

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.

Background On Abraham's two sons (Genesis 15:1-4; 16; 17; 21:1-20)

Genesis tells the tale of Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Abraham and his wife Sarah were eager for a child, and God promised Abraham his descendants would be more numerous than the stars in heaven. However, Sarah was barren and unable to bear children, so she sent her handmaiden Hagar to sleep with Abraham. When Hagar became pregnant with Abraham's first child, the two women began to despise each other. Thirteen years later, God returned to remind Abraham of his promise to build his descendants into a great nation. Sarah became pregnant with Isaac, but first God asked all of the men in Abraham's camp to adopt the practice of circumcision. Circumcision acted as a token, or sign, of God's divine promise (Galatians 4:23) to bless Abraham and his descendants.

Questions for Discussion:

Ask the Group: Why is the child of the free woman (Sarah) called a child born through promise?

Possible Answer: Isaac's birth was part of the promise God made to Abraham. It had nothing to do with their condition (barrenness) or human effort—Isaac's birth was God's work. Similarly we have been set free in the promise of Christ

Ask the Group: Paul offers an allegorical interpretation comparing Hagar with Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai is the mountain where the Israelites received the Ten Commandments and the law. Why would Paul draw this connection?

Possible Answer: He's connecting Hagar, a slave, to the law (Mt. Sinai), and by proxy, connecting the law to slavery.

Ask the Group: This section of Galatians is ultimately an analogy describing the law. What is Paul trying to say about Jewish law by comparing it to a child born of a slave?

Possible Answer: Paul has already demonstrated that God sent His Son to redeem those "under the law," being the Jewish people (v. 5) but, by putting themselves "under the law" through circumcision, food laws, and calendar observance, the Galatians are rejecting God's gift and missing the purpose of the law altogether. The law should be pointing them to God, but they are blindly following tradition.

II - Quoting The Prophet - (Galatians 4:26-27)

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."*

Read to the Group: This quotation in v. 27 comes from Isa 54:1. While the verse does not reference the story of Sarah and Hagar, Paul uses it because both Sarah (Gen 11:30) and the city are described as barren.

Isaiah 53:11-54:3

11 After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

- 1 "Sing, barren woman, you who never bore a child;
burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor;
because more are the children of the desolate woman
than of her who has a husband," says the Lord.
- 2 "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide,
do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.
- 3 For you will spread out to the right and to the left;
your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.

Questions for Discussion:

Ask the Group: Now that you've read more of Isaiah, why do you think Paul references Isaiah 54:1?
Possible Answer: Paul wants the Galatians to understand that Christ's life, death, and resurrection is a fulfillment of the promise in Isaiah 54 of a Redeemer for Jerusalem - that God's covenant was completely fulfilled through Christ. Paul is drawing a connection between Sarah and "the above Jerusalem" (ie the redeemed church- the Church after Christ comes back). The same promises are made to Sarah and "the city". They are both promised many descendants.

Barren Women: A barren womb held a deeper meaning in the Old Testament texts. People didn't have children just for companionship and love. A person's children were their livelihood and represented their future security. A woman affirmed her value as a wife by having children and was more worthwhile to her husband than a woman who was barren.

Ask the Group: Why do you feel like the barren woman has reason to sing?
Possible Answer: Isaiah 53 promises security in redemption and salvation through Christ rather than in having children. This promise is made to the city/barren woman. She is promised redemption for her "descendants" through Christ.

Ask the Group: Paul uses Isaiah to connect His covenant with Abraham to Christ. Where do you see Jesus in this passage?
Possible Answer: He's the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 who bears our iniquities, pours out his life unto death, and bears the sins of many. Points to Christ.

III - A Brighter Future - (Galatians 4:28-31)

28 Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. 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.

Questions for Discussion:

Ask the Group: Paul calls us children of promise, how should that change the way we live our lives?

Possible Answer: We should live by faith (like Abraham did through Sarah) and rely on God's grace for our salvation. We should not rely on our own actions for salvation like Abraham tried to do by having a child with Hagar.

Ask the Group: In what ways are you submitting yourself to the slavery of the law?

Ask the Group: Do you ever relate to the barren woman in Isaiah 54:1?

- How can we sing in the midst of our own feelings of insecurity?

Ask the Group: What is our community application of this passage?

Leader's Note: You may choose to create your own application question as a group based on your discussion, or highlight a question from this study.