

Galatians 4

Synopsis

Within the letter Paul references an Old Testament story about Hagar and Sarah. Paul shows how the Old Testament relates to the New Testament. He goes beyond the account as history and mines the spiritual gold within the story. And this is what Scripture is—the account of spiritual truth that transcends history and yet is revealed in history. He shows that we are sons of Sarah—sons of the promise who are meant to be free—so why should we ever desire to be sons meant for slaves (sons of Hagar)? We're meant to be free!

So here's **the win for this week**:

- 1) Understand that since we're free, we *shouldn't want* slavery!
- 2) Inspire students to expel any part of their lives still under the yoke of slavery
- 3) Gain a better understanding of how to read the Old Testament.

The **recommended text** this week is Galatians 4:21-31, where Paul talks about Hagar and Sarah, about being children of freedom not slavery. If the recommended scripture doesn't seem the best option for your group, here are some **alternative scriptures** to focus in on:

- Galatians 4:1-7 → About Jesus coming, us growing out of immaturity
- Galatians 4:8-11 → Choosing slavery after freedom
- Galatians 4:12-20 → Zealousness and truth

Hagar & Sarah: Slave & Free

Paul randomly breaks into Old Testament interpretation in the middle of Galatians. What the heck? Well this point is huge! Paul uses this illustration to demonstrate that Christians are free sons of a promise, but the false teachers of Galatia herd people back into slavery. Law and freedom, Old Testament and New Testament converge here.

Read Galatians 4:21-31

Commentary

The story of Hagar and Sarah comes from Genesis 16 and the surrounding chapters. Abraham is promised that he will have heirs, but because he thought his wife Sarah was too old to get pregnant, he followed common social practice and slept with his maidservant Hagar. They conceived a son, Ishmael. But God came through on his promise to Abraham and Sarah became pregnant with Isaac, who fathered Israel. Ishmael was born of a slave and outside of the promise of God. Isaac was born of a free woman as the promise of God.

Interestingly Paul takes this familiar Old Testament story and draws from it spiritual truth: he sees behind the history to a deeper truth that points to greater things—Jesus, salvation,

freedom, faithfulness. Paul sets for us a model of how to read Scripture. Jesus came and changed everything by his resurrection. The Old Testament is not merely the story of Israel. It's the unfolding of God's plan to enter the world as the person Jesus. Jesus' name is written in every book of the Old Testament, because he changed how we read every page of Scripture. All Scripture testifies to the promises of God being fulfilled in the person of Jesus, and what that means for God's people—Christians.

And the passage's purpose doesn't stop there. Paul says this: the one born outside of the promises, the one born under slavery (Hagar) is the one who looks to Mount Sinai. This mountain is where Moses received the law. Those who look to the law for salvation find only slavery. The promise isn't the law. But those who look to the New Jerusalem ("the Jerusalem that is above"), these are the children of the promise. The free children. He ends by saying that we are not children of slaves, but of the free woman (Gal 4:31)! It is for freedom that Christ has set you free (Gal 5:1)! All of this to reiterate what he's said the entire letter, what he asks in 4:9—now that you know God, why the heck would you turn back to weak and miserable forces?! Why ever go back to slavery?

🔍 Questions

Paul is being undermined by the false teachers as not upholding the Old Testament picture, that he's just people pleasing (Gal 1:10). How does this passage respond to that charge?

What does it mean to take Scripture figuratively? Does this mean it isn't true?

We often think of the Old Testament as a bunch of stories unrelated to Jesus. And a lot of times we have trouble reading the Old Testament. How does Paul model reading the Old Testament?

Jesus isn't specifically mentioned in the Hagar and Sarah story. Does he factor into it at all?

🔍 Application Questions

Paul says at the end of the passage that the sons of the flesh persecute the sons of the promise, and that this was still true when he was writing. Is it still true today?

In the Old Testament, Abraham was commanded to kick out Hagar and Ishmael. Paul references this. How does this apply to the discussion he's having in Galatians?

Paul asks, “Are you not aware of what the law says?” Is a familiarity with the Old Testament important, or even essential, to understanding the Christian life?

How do we balance dealing with false teaching and judging others?

Is it okay to expect others to live a certain way?

Abraham failed to have faith when he slept with Hagar, but God still kept his promises and provided him a son (Isaac). Does that excuse his unfaithfulness? How should this balance how we respond to our own failings?

Accountability

This section deals specifically with false teaching, but there’s a great accountability moment here. Paul’s point at the end is this: If there’s false teaching or practice in your life, kick it out. If appropriate, use this accountability time to address this in your students.

- Where does your teaching come from? Do you listen to culture more than Scripture? Are you spending time with God?
- Do you ask God to “see if there is any offensive way in me” (Psalm 139:24)?
- Is there something that you believe that you need to expel from your life? Have you asked others if they’ve noticed anything false in you that needs to be gotten rid of?
- Are you desiring or expecting others to live as if they’re under the law? Do you condemn more than you forgive?

Resource Toolbox



[Tim Keller on Reading the Old Testament](#)



[John Piper “Hagar & Slavery vs Sarah & Freedom”](#)



[Galatians 4 Commentary](#)