

# Galatians 4:21-27

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/gal/gal-4/galatians-421-27/>

*Paul makes a comparison to the Old Testament. Ishmael represents slavery to rule-following, Isaac represents spiritual freedom and sonship to God.*

In this passage, Paul quotes the Old Testament to show the Galatians that their law-following goes against what the Scriptures teach. *Tell me*, Paul writes, challenging them (and possibly the competing Jewish “authorities” who are leading them astray). *Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?* Paul is inferring that his readers who say they want to follow the Law don’t even know what the Law teaches. (“Law” was typically used by Jews in this manner to refer to the first five books of the Old Testament).

Paul’s example comes from the first book of the Law. *Abraham, who had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman*. The bondwoman is Abraham’s bondservant, Hagar, and the free woman is Sarah, Abraham’s wife. Abraham doubted God’s promise of having children through his wife, so he first had an illegitimate child with his servant girl, Hagar.

*The son of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise*. In this allegory, Paul is drawing a comparison. He cites one of Abraham’s sons, born outside of God’s promise through a scheme of man to make God’s promise happen. The other son, Isaac, was born from Sarah, who Abraham doubted could have a child, since she was past child-bearing age. God miraculously delivered on His promise through Abraham’s actual wife, a free woman, not their slave.

Paul tells his readers that in this allegory *these women are two covenants*. One covenant, *proceeding from Mount Sinai* is *Hagar*, the slave. She represents trying to use earthly schemes that do not put faith in God, like Abraham did not believe God would give him a son through Sarah. *Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children*. Mount Sinai is where Moses received the law. It is a very direct picture of the law. The *present Jerusalem* rejected Jesus. Jesus wept over Jerusalem as a result of its rejection of Him. It rejected Jesus while claiming to embrace the law. Hagar the slave represents slavery to the law, as opposed to freedom in Christ.

The competing Jewish “authorities” are leading the Galatians to follow the law, instead of living by the Spirit. *Hagar, Mount Sinai, the present Jerusalem*, all are symbols of following earthly ways to satisfy the promise of God to bring His righteousness to humanity. *But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother*. Here Paul is referring to the Heavenly court, to God and Christ, and to Christ’s role as savior and king in the life of believers. Christ will eventually return and rule in Jerusalem. The current Jerusalem does not reflect Christ’s kingdom. Nor does following the law, which is spiritual slavery.

Since this allegory involves two mothers from Genesis, it seems appropriate for Paul to mention where spiritual birth comes from for believers in Jesus. It does not come from the *present*

*Jerusalem* and its system of religious rules. Rather, the *Jerusalem above* is *our mother*. Our new birth comes from being declared righteous in the sight of God in heaven through faith in Jesus, through the promise of God. It does not involve any of our deeds, or plans.

Paul quotes from Isaiah 54:1

"Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For more numerous are the children of the desolate, Than of the one who has a husband."

Paul's quote here refers to a *barren woman*, like Sarah was before God granted her a miraculous answer to the promise. In this prophecy, the *barren woman* has more children than the woman with a husband. Perhaps Paul's point here is that the blessings are immensely greater for living by faith in God's promises than anything we can possibly do to manufacture God's blessing.

### **Biblical Text**

**21 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. 23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. 24 This is allegorically speaking, for these *women* are two covenants: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. 25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 27 For it is written,**

**"Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear;**

**Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor;**

**For more numerous are the children of the desolate**

**Than of the one who has a husband."**