

The Allegory of Abraham
Galatians 4:21-31
September 16, 2012

We have seen that the book of Galatians is very similar to the book of Hebrews in that both books teach in the strongest terms that we are not to return to Judaism in any form or fashion. In the book of Hebrews the Jews are explicitly warned not to go back. And in Galatians the Gentile converts are sternly warned not to go back.

The fact of the matter is that Judaism was a temporary, legal system, for temporary purposes, for a temporary people until Christ came. And once Christ came, that old Mosaic system of religion was dismantled.

We don't go to Jerusalem to worship anymore. We don't go to a temple. We don't observe the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week. We don't come to sinful, human priests for mediation with a holy God. We don't bring animal sacrifices to the altar anymore.

Why is that? It is because Christ has come! Christ has come as a better priest. Christ has come as a better sacrifice. Christ has come offering a better Sabbath, that is, an eternal rest. Christ has come with a better circumcision. The Jews circumcised the male foreskin, but Christ circumcises the heart and he cuts the old fleshly heart away and gives a new heart. Christ has come with a better temple, a better mercy seat, a better holy place, a better altar, a better land, a better deliverance.

Now the Mosaic religion, although it was exclusively Jewish, was nevertheless much like all the other pagan religions of the world. The pagan religions all had temples. They all had sacrifices. They all had rites and ceremonies. They all had eating restrictions. They all had their religious days. Most importantly, they all were religious systems which featured works.

Man will try to get to heaven by works every time. This is the nature of man. He thinks that he is capable of doing something to please God. He thinks that his sin is not so bad

after all. He thinks that he can reform his ways and get to heaven. He thinks that there is some ritual that he can perform to make God accept him. This kind of attitude is called legalism and it is the disease that afflicts every man. Legalism says, "I can earn my way to heaven. I can go to church, or I can pay tithes, or I can feed the poor, or I can fast, or I can be circumcised, or I can say a prayer, or I can live a celibate life, or I can be a preacher, or I can live a life of monkhood in a monastery somewhere."

And men have tried it all. But, the gospel of Jesus Christ says that there is nothing that you can do. You are shut up in your own sins. There is no ritual that you can perform to undo your sin.

The Scriptures put it rather bluntly. They say that you are dead. (Eph.2:1,5) There is not a much harsher word that could be used. You are dead. In our vernacular, when we have exhausted all of our options and there is no hope that remains, we say that we are "dead meat."

Example: When I was a kid, my next door neighbor friend talked me into climbing on our roof. So when it got dark, we climbed up on the roof and peeked out over the top of the roof line. Now my parents were entertaining church friends that night and when they pulled in the driveway they happened to see our little heads looking up. Of course they told on us and when Dad came into the back yard and called us down, I knew I was "dead meat."

And you might say that as sinners we are dead meat. We have been caught, dead to rights. We have offended God. We have broken his rules. We are caught dead in our tracks. We are dead wrong. And Paul puts it very bluntly when he says that in our natural condition we are simply dead.

But, you say, "Surely I can do something. There must be something I can do. I don't want to go to hell. I don't want to suffer for all eternity. Surely I can do something to make it right."

No, there is nothing you can do. And you say, "Surely if I correct my behavior so that I am better than my neighbor and

better than most other people that God will accept me.” And the fact is that even if you became the best person on the face of the earth it is too late. You are already dead meat. You are road kill, spiritually speaking. You have been run over by the law of God. You are a carcass lying in the middle of the road and there is nothing you can do.

Let that sink in a minute. You can do nothing! You are a helpless creature in the hands of a mighty God. And you can do nothing about it.

This is why it is absolutely ridiculous to desire to be under the law. The law of God runs you down like a road paver runs over a bug. And yet, man says, “Let me lay down here in front of the law. Let me lay down here in the road and let this monstrous machine run over me.”

And Paul says, “You better not try to serve God under the Law. The Law will run over you mercilessly.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.

Galatians 3:10

So what is the testimony of Galatians? How is a man saved if there is nothing he can do? If a man is already dead meat, what hope is there?

And the answer of Galatians is that there is only hope in the promise of God. There are two covenants mentioned in Galatians. One covenant is the Mosaic Law. And it cannot save anyone.

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident.

Galatians 3:11

But there is a promise of God that does save. This promise was given in a most clear form to Abraham. And Abraham believed the promise and he was saved.

Now these two covenants are further contrasted when we come to our text for this morning. We have a story about

Abraham, his two wives and his two sons. And the first thing that we should note is that this historical event is an allegory.

Which things are an allegory.

Galatians 4:24

An allegory is a fictional story that has a correspondence to real events. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress is intended as an allegory. It is about a fictional character named Christian who is making his way from the city of destruction to a glorious city. And it is much about the pitfalls along the way.

But here in our text, Paul takes real historical events surrounding Abraham and tells us that these things are an allegory. Now we can get into trouble if we try to allegorize everything in the Scriptures. There is not necessarily a hidden meaning to every story in the Bible. But in the case of our text for this morning, we are on safe ground, because Paul tells us that these things are an allegory.

Now this is a great example of the awesome sovereignty of our God. God is so great that He can superintend even historical events, such that they happen exactly as He intends and so that these events will serve as an allegory for future instruction. Now if we intended for our children's lives to serve as an allegory, we simply could not control events in such a way to make the events happen in just such a way. But God is able. All of these events which happened to Abraham were brought to pass by the sovereign power of God. And these events happened in just such a way as to serve as an allegory so that God could teach us spiritual truth.

The Historical Account of Abraham

At age 75, Abraham was just getting started in his walk with God. God called Abram out of his pagan land and gave him a promise. God said, "I am going to make you a mighty nation. I am going to give you many descendants. I am going to bless you and give you a land."

When Abraham was born he was given the name, Abram. Now names in the Old Testament almost always meant something. They were not chosen simply because they sounded

good or were a little different. But they were chosen because of the meaning. And Abram meant “exalted Father.” So apparently, Abraham’s father, Tehran, expected that Abram would have children and that he would be highly respected in the family. In our vernacular, Abram might mean “Big Daddy.” Unfortunately, at the age of 75 Abram was childless. And as Abram roamed through Canaan, people undoubtedly would ask him what his name was and Abram would say, “My name is “Big Daddy.” And they would ask him how many children he had. And Abram would say, “Well none.” And they must have had a good laugh about that.

When Abram was 85, Sarah finally gave up and gave to Abraham her slave girl which they had bought in Egypt. Hagar was her name. And you know the story, Hagar got pregnant. So, it was apparent then that it wasn’t Abraham who was impotent, it was Sarah who was barren. And so, Abram and Hagar had a son whose name was Ishmael. So, at age 86, Abraham becomes the father of one child, Ishmael.

When Abram is 99 years old, God visited him. God said, “It’s time to get to work on your descendants. Abram probably said, “Wait a minute, I already went to work on that and I have a son.” But God said, “No, it is not through Hagar, but through Sarah that the promise will be realized.”

By now, there is an additional problem. Not only is Sarah barren, but Abraham is also dead (impotent). So, Abraham laughed. Abraham laughed because it was laughable to think that he and Sarah could have a child.

So you see, God waited until there was no hope in the flesh. And then he told Abram, “Oh yea, I am changing your name to Abraham (father of a multitude). So Abraham was no longer “Big Daddy” but now he was “Mega Daddy”.

So, miraculously, Sarah and Abraham had a son whose name was Isaac through whom all those gospel promises are to come true. Now one day, Sarah saw Ishmael picking on her little boy. So Sarah went to Abraham and said, “I am not having this. That little brat Ishmael is not going to pick on my son. Kick them out. Kick both Hagar and Ishmael out of the family.

Now Abraham didn't want to do it. But God said "Heed your wife." You see, for the sake of the allegory, Ishmael must be kicked out. They were kicked out so that Ishmael would not receive an inheritance. Abraham left everything to his son Isaac.

The Interpretation of the Allegory

Let's identify the characters in the allegory.

ABRAHAM

HAGAR (ISHMAEL)

Hagar was a bondmaid. (v.22)

Ishmael was born after the flesh.

Hagar represented the Mosaic Covenant.

Hagar and Ishmael represented present day Jerusalem.

Hagar and Ishmael represented the Jews.

The Jews were in bondage.

SARAH (ISAAC)

Sarah was a freewoman (v.22)

Isaac was born by promise.

Sarah represented the A. Cov.

Sarah and I rep'd J above.

Us all

We are free.

Questions

1. Were all of Abraham's descendants saved?

No. Obviously Ishmael was not a child of the promise.

2. Were all of Isaac's descendants saved?

No. Jacob was and Esau was not a child of promise.

3. Were all of Jacob's descendants saved?

No. Joseph was saved. The other brothers are

questionable.

4. According to this allegory, what do Hagar and Ishmael represent?

The Mosaic Covenant; Jerusalem that now is – the Jews

5. According to this allegory, what do Sarah and Isaac represent?

The Abrahamic Covenant. Jerusalem that is above.

6. Was Isaac saved because he was a physical descendant of Abraham? No. he was saved by promise.

7. Who are the true children of Abraham? Gal.3:7