

Galatians
Chapter 4 - Man's Way Enslaves
Breaking Free (vs.21-31)

Galatians 4:21-31: Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. 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. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 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.” And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say?

“CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON,
FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE
WOMAN.” So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

There are times when you have to take a passage and just look at the panoramic view. This is one of those times. As he gives this wonderful example, he actually refers to it as a kind of allegory in the Old Testament. It is an event that actually happened, but as the word is probably making reference more to a parabolic symbol in the sense that God has placed something that actually really happened and is revealing something that is spiritual or a spiritual truth through that. And we're going to see that within this particular passage as we go back to Abraham. One of the reasons why Paul is making reference to Abraham and the Spirit of God is directing him as he is teaching the church is that many of the people in the church were reverting back to a bunch of lists of dos and don'ts, and it doesn't take long before church just becomes more formality than heart. We always have to guard against that. He will ultimately end this letter by saying, “Don't be deceived, God isn't mocked. He knows the difference between flesh and Spirit.” In other words, He knows the

difference between what is put on or what you try to make happen yourself and what is of heart; what is genuine.

(Galatians 6:7) “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

(Galatians 6:8) For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption...”

In other words, there's nothing that you and I can do in our own power and our own strength. All we have to do is admit the truth and we can come to Christ, but you have to admit that you're a sinner; you're not perfect; you can't be perfect; you need help, and we cry for a Savior. So, the flesh is always saying, “I can do this. I can do this. I have a formula. I have something that I can do.” And the Spirit goes, “Why don't you just admit the truth and come to me?” And you begin to realize there's great freedom in that.

If you look in your Bibles to Galatians 5:1, why did Christ come? The text is very clear, to set you free. “To set me free from what?” It's kind of like the Gospel of John in John 8 where many of the Jews were going, “You're saying the truth will set us free, but we're not under bondage.” And Christ goes, “You're under bondage.” Because if, in fact, you're living by a bunch of dos and don'ts rules, you're still living as a child, and his whole point in Galatians 4:1 is,

“Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything,

(Galatians 4:2) but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.

(Galatians 4:3) So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.”

His point is that as a child, you have to be told, “Stop. Don't do that. Do this.” And everything you're doing is not based as much on your heart as it is upon the direction and the fear of your parents or the one who is guardian over you telling you what to do. Hopefully, we mature to the point of being an adult, that is to say, we come to a point in which we actually want to do the right thing. It's kind of embarrassing, although here I am 70, and my mother is still telling me what to do. It's kind of embarrassing when you consider an adult is still having a parent telling them what to do. The point is you should be doing the right thing with your heart by now. Well, as he gives this wonderful picture in Chapter 4 is that when Christ came, and the Spirit of God came within us, we became adults. In Christ we became mature because we began to think in the power of the Spirit rather than a bunch of listed dos and don'ts. How wonderful it is to walk in that; it really is great freedom, because now you're walking in a realm in which you long to be in church, you long to be with the people of church; you long to talk with them, to build one another up. Nobody's telling you to do that. You do that because you love to, and that's walking in the Spirit. Scripture tells us that as long

as you walk in the flesh, of course, those rules and regulations, you'll never really please God. I mean, what could be pleasing to God if you come before the throne of God and He goes, "Did you do what I told you to do?" and you say something like, "Yeah, they made me." Can you imagine that would be pleasing to God? God is looking for us to stand before Him, going, "We love serving You. We love following You. We love because the heart of Your Son is within us." And as we hear the heart of Christ in us, we hear that sense of, "Not my will but Yours be done." And it comes naturally because of the Spirit of God, not because of my natural flesh.

We come in this passage and Paul is concerned because the Galatians are being held in some kind of bondage by man. His main point at the very beginning of this epistle is that our gospel, our message, is not from man, it's from God. So, stop listening to man.

The great text that we oftentimes quote in Galatians 1:10 is, who do you seek to please? If you seek to please man, you wouldn't be a bond-servant of Christ.

His very clear message is,

(Galatians 1:8) "...if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!"

Our gospel is a gospel of God's love; that He saved us, and we received that love, and by virtue of receiving that love, the heart is changed. We change and we repent, not because somebody is threatening us and not because we feel like we have to, but because of the love of God that constrains us to do this, and we now are being led by the Spirit rather than by rules and regulations. Paul desires to set them free from the rules and demands of man, the expectations of men, the acceptance of men. Think about how people live. They're always worried about what everybody else is thinking. That's bondage when you consider that you're always concerned about, "Well, did I upset them, and if I did, what am I going to do about that? How can I change them?" And I've oftentimes told my kids I said, "Kids, you do realize that when you grow up, there are going to be miserable people in this world, and you never can make a miserable person happy. You just can't. They're just not going to be happy." Miserable people are miserable, but people oftentimes live their lives trying to, asking, "Can't we all get along?" No, it's not because you don't want to get along. Scripture says so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men, but there are people that are in turmoil. The wicked are like the tossing sea. It cannot be quiet, and you begin to see the turmoil in the world today. But to think that you would have to live under the expectations, the acceptance and the performance standards of man as he begins to oppress you in that regard, and ultimately it leads to a sense of dissatisfaction from them and dissatisfaction in your own life, but beyond that, disappointment and failure. I've oftentimes had people come up to me saying, "I never could please my father," "I never could please my mother." There are so many people in our lives that if you try to please them, wow, that's a that's a miserable road, isn't it? But they come

and they begin to share this, and I said, "Isn't it wonderful that you only have to please God? Do the right thing before Him but do what you do because you love Him and what a walk that is." Paul is desiring to get them out of this sense of prison, this prison that has held them in this sense of bondage. So, how do you describe prison? How do you talk to Jews that are thinking Law? Well, the Spirit of God lays it upon his heart and the Spirit of God tells Paul, "Tell them about something from the Law that reminds them of the necessity of the Spirit." So, he takes them back to this interesting event of Abraham. Of course, what Jew doesn't want to call Abraham their father? So, he takes them back to Abraham.

One of the great statements, you look back in Chapter 3, and he sets this standard to the Jews in Galatians 3:6,

"Even so Abraham..."

So, how does Abraham think?

"Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

Not the fact that Abraham submitted and obeyed all the Law or was perfect. Of course, we know that Abraham was before the Law. So, that would be kind of difficult for him to be somebody that was submitting to the Law, but beyond that, we also see a man that was wrestling through this thing of trusting God. He didn't always do the right thing, but yet the Jews perceive, "Oh, Abraham's a great guy. Abraham." Well, what makes Abraham a great guy? Well, Scripture actually calls him a friend of God. Now, why would God call a man a friend of God if he wasn't perfect in all the Law? The answer is it wasn't the Law that would make you have this relationship with God. So, Paul's going to give this example in Chapter 4 of going all the way back to Abraham and the fact that, well, he throws us right in the midst of one of the biggest mistakes that Abraham made. Gentlemen, it wasn't listening to his wife. Although that sort of added to it, but what is interesting, I was sharing this in the class earlier, that in this particular context, God does tell Abraham, "Listen to your wife." Now, before he had listened to his wife, and it was bad information. So, don't listen to your wife if she's giving you bad information, but if she's giving you good information, listen to her. I had to defend myself on that, but just wanted to make that clear before I went home.

(Galatians 4:21) "Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?"

"Do you always want to be under the bondage of this law? Do you want people always telling you what is right and wrong? It really is very childish. Is that where you want to be?"

(Galatians 4:22) "For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman."

Well, right away, there's a mistake that Abraham made. Why do you have two wives?

(Galatians 4:23) “But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.”

He's going to parallel back and forth that the law is that which obviously puts you into bondage, but the promise of God is that which frees you. In other words, you're walking by something that God promised you rather than what you performed. If you're walking in performance, that's a pretty oppressive thing, because I've got news for you, there are going to be days that you're not going to be doing too well in the performance category. You're going to have, I would call it, a roller coaster life. You're going to have ups and downs days, but how wonderful it would be to realize that all the blessings that are ours are not based on my performance but based on God's promise. Think about how freeing that is. Did God not promise you that He would never leave you nor forsake you? Think about that one verse from Hebrews 13, “Did I not say I would never leave you nor forsake you?” Now, that's a promise that He made. Now, think about all the times that He deservedly should leave you and forsake you, and yet, but did He not say that He would never leave you nor forsake you? So, ours is based on a promise and this is what Paul's wanting to say. I want to get you into this realm of freedom, and I want you walking by freedom because as long as you're under the law, you're only worried about what everybody else is thinking. You're only worried about putting on a performance or show. You're always worried about what somebody else is going to say, and you're really not caring about the things that you're doing. But the promise of God frees you up to do and to love God freely.

(Galatians 4:23) “But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.”

We're going to see how that plays out because you just can't read something like this and not go to the original passage in the Old Testament for that.

(Galatians 4:24) “This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai...”

We used to have a song that we have sung with the young people that went something like, “Take another lap around Mount Sinai,” and the point was that the Jews couldn't seem to get out of the wilderness because they kept sinning. So, it was like God said, “Ok, let's go around the Law one more time.” It's an interesting picture.

“... one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.

(Galatians 4:25) Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem...”

In other words, Jerusalem is still at a point where they're thinking legalistically, and they're thinking laws.

“... for she is in slavery with her children.”

But God doesn't want His people in slavery. He never wanted them in slavery. He was the one that rescued them out of Egypt, right? So, it was their idea.

(Galatians 4:26) “But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

(Galatians 4:27) 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.”

(Galatians 4:28) And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

(Galatians 4:29) But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

(Galatians 4:30) But what does the Scripture say?

“CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN.”

(Galatians 4:31) So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.”

Well, we kind of have a synopsis of what actually happened in the Old Testament, but it just bears necessity that we have to go back to the particular passage. I would like to have you go back all the way to Genesis 12, at the first calling of Abraham. So, if you go with me into Genesis 12, my hope is that you begin to see the great wisdom of the Spirit of God as He begins to direct us in this wonderful example of the Old Testament, of even in a book of the Law that would convey to us that it's better to walk by Spirit and not by the Law. If you look with me in Genesis 12, you see the initial calling of Abraham, and not only the initial calling, but God's promise. Once again, our faith is based not on works of righteousness, which we have done, (Titus 3) but according to His mercy, He saved us. In other words, because God said He would save us; “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him would not perish.” Why would we not perish? Because “I'm so good”? No, He just died for your sins, but because He said you'll have everlasting life. It's His promise that we bank on. It's the promises of God.

So, Genesis starts off in Chapter 12 in which God calls Abram from his own country, and He calls him into a world in which is not familiar, from the Ur of the Chaldeans. Abraham's just not all there in the sense of he doesn't fully know what it means to walk by faith. This is true with so many of us, “How do you do this thing, walk by faith?” Because we're so used to trying to maneuver and figure out stuff for ourselves.

So, it starts off this way in which God begins with the promise, and this is true in our own lives; when we come to Christ, He begins with a promise, “This is My promise to you.”

(Genesis 12:1) “Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father’s house,
To the land which I will show you.”

And here's the promise,

(Genesis 12:2) “And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;

(Genesis 12:3) And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Now, that's a pretty clear promise. We'll just summarize it, “blessed.” “God's going to bless you, and He's going to bless you not just today, but He's going to bless your progeny, and He's going to bless you into the future. God's going to bless for many years to come. You're going to become a nation and God's going to use them to bless.” And that's the promise.

So, God calls him, and he starts heading down. I'm going to fill in some of the blanks here. Wouldn't you know, that in the process of time, shortly after, by the time he starts getting a little bit further South, a famine hits the land. Now, it's a bizarre thought that God would call you and then immediately cause problems in your life. Nevertheless, this is what begins to happen, and Scripture says in verse 10,

(Genesis 12:10) “Now there was a famine in the land...”

Now, Abraham is not thinking faith, he's thinking flesh. So, he goes, “Ok, so what do I need to do? I need to go down to Egypt because Egypt has the Nile River, and even if it isn't raining, it floods, and you could still survive in Egypt.” That's the go to place. If there's a famine, go to Egypt. They have the Nile. So, what does he do? It says in the passage,

“... so Abram went down to Egypt...”

Now, the text doesn't say, “God told Abraham to go down to Egypt.” It just says, “So Abraham went down.” Here again, that's just the thought. It seems like a good idea at the time. Then, as he starts heading down there, he's looking at his wife and he probably said something like, “Wow, you're looking really great today. Ok, that's going to be a problem because you're going to go down to

Egypt and the Pharaoh is going to look at you and he's going to kill me to get you." I think that's the way it reads in verse 12, right?

(Genesis 12:12) "And when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live."

Ok, so what is he doing? He's reasoning through things. Now, what's interesting is, as we're looking at these different stages, we understand that God has made a fundamental promise, "I will bless you; I'm going to bless your children." He doesn't have any children yet, but "I'm going to bless your children." So, is it possible that the Egyptians could kill him? No, it's impossible because God made a promise that they would be ok. "I'm going to bless you all the way down through the times that are coming. You're good." He's not walking by that truth. He's, in some way, basing his comfort on conditions, on perhaps personal resources. Ultimately, as we come into this particular setting, he now is beginning to base his sense of security on some kind of pragmatic strategy. Not only is he going down to Egypt in his perception of, "This is how I get taken care of," but he now begins to go into deceptive maneuvering, "Ok, so what I'm going to do is, I'm going to pass my wife off as my sister." Now, most of you know the story, and once again, we don't have to go into all the details of the story. Certain people, you tap on the shoulder, and say, "Hey, hey, hey." And they turn around; other people, you have to slap them, and I'm not encouraging to do that, but with the Egyptians you have to send plagues.

So, if you look at the passage, the Egyptian goes, "Ok, I just found out that God doesn't like this," or more specifically, probably in his mind, "the gods don't like this because we have plagues."

So, it reads this way in verse 17,

"But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife."

(Genesis 12:18) Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? ..."

"Why would you lie to me?" That's interesting that you would have the world accusing a believer of lying, but actually, believers sometimes do lie.

(Genesis 12:19) "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? ..."

Then the commander goes, "Get out of here." But it's interesting that in the passage, not only does the Pharaoh want him to leave, but the Pharaoh has already given him sheep and oxen, and donkeys and male and female servants. One of the servants that is given to him is Hagar.

If you go into chapter 13, what's also interesting is all the way through, you begin to see Abraham, and he's kind of working through this whole faith thing. I mean, Abraham did leave his country, but he didn't leave his family. I mean, he's got Lot with him. There's nothing in the text where God says, "You know what, you need to take Lot with you." But he does, and Abraham is working through his

own sense of faith. You know how we think in terms of, "I think God means this," instead of just simply doing what He says?

If you go back to Genesis 12:1,

"Now the LORD said to Abram,
"Go forth from your country,
And from your..."

In case you didn't get it,

"...from your relatives..."

What relatives?

"...from your father's house..." So, He got as specific as he could, and Abraham goes, "Oh, so it means I can take Lot with me."

So, in Genesis 13, you come into an interesting scenario which Abraham is having to deal with his nephew Lot. Now, they all have these herds and everything, and it seems like the result was,

(Genesis 13:7) "And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock..."

So, what has to happen? They actually have to separate. Now, what's interesting about this is that up to this point, we had Abraham thinking in terms of the promise being based on conditions and personal resources. The promise is based on pragmatic strategy, perhaps on deceptive maneuvering. In this particular context, it seems as if he perceives that in some way, the promise of God is based on his own personal, gracious acts of altruism. "I'm going to be selfless and sacrificial. I'm going to be kind to Lot." And he is in the aspect of he turns to Lot, and he goes, "We've got to part ways. You choose. You can have any of the land that you want" and Lot goes out, "I'll take the garden of Eden." Scripture tells us that Sodom and Gomorrah at that time was like the garden of Eden. Now, I've often thought through this, and here again, I don't want to get too many details into this, but the fact that he's wanting to go into Sodom and Gomorrah and ultimately does, and of course it brings great harm to him and his family. If you understand where Ur of the Chaldeans was, at this particular juncture in history, they were really high on moral standards. I know it's hard to believe and think of Babylon in those particular terms, but the Code of Hammurabi was right around the time of Abraham, which were high standards. You read the Code of Hammurabi and it all sounds like the Ten Commandments. Look, we're all related to Ham, Shem and Japheth off the Ark. So, everybody knew who the true God was and what right was, but the point is that had Lot remained there, he would have been in better condition than in Sodom and Gomorrah. Think about that. So, by virtue of Abraham thinking, "I'm going to be a nice guy," and by letting him choose where he wants to go, he puts Lot's life in greater jeopardy, and greater problems ensue because of

this. So, "I'm a nice guy," consideration, self-denial, sacrifice; I think he just needed to listen to God. Just obey Him because we need to walk by faith, not by sight; not by what our flesh says to do. There have been many times where people have in their own flesh done really nice things, but the carnage that comes behind that is just horrific.

If you look in Genesis 14, interesting text and we won't go to the details of this, but the nations from the north are coming down to fight the five kings that are in the Sodom and Gomorrah area. The reason why they're coming down is because the five kings in the Sodom and Gomorrah area decided that they were going to rebel because they're feeling pretty good because there were only four kings from the north. So, "I think maybe we could outnumber them." Well, they come down and they just almost totally wipe them out, and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah are hiding in the tar pits. So, they fundamentally lost the war, and somebody comes up to Abraham and he goes, "Oh, you know they took Lot." And Abraham goes, "Ok, I'm going to go get him." Once again, not something God told him to do, because if you think about it, these were the Chaldeans that came and took him. Where were they going back to? To Ur of the Chaldeans, a better place than Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah will soon burn down. Nevertheless, he goes and saves him. Now, he's going against the four kings of nations. He chases them and wins and actually gets all the people back as well as Lot, with 318 men.

(Genesis 14:14) "When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan."

Think about that. It's amazing. Now, the fundamental truth of the matter is that it wasn't because he had such great warriors. If you drop on down to verse 20, Melchizedek made reference to the fact that, "You won this war because God delivered you." The point isn't because Abraham has done everything right up to this point. In fact, in many regards, he is not; he's tried to work things through his flesh. Nevertheless, God has rescued him. It's been the grace of God all the way through.

You now come to Genesis 15, where Paul will quote this particular passage in Galatians 3. In Genesis 15, God says, "Ok, now, I've already said I'm going to take care of you, and I've always said I'm going to bless you. I'm going to make you a great nation and they're going to be a blessing, but I want to be more specific with you."

(Genesis 15:1) "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision..."

Now, I just want to say this, God desires to work in our life, but sometimes things have to be torn away from us in order for us to listen to Him. Remember how protective he was of Lot? Remember how it was all about Lot and how ultimately, they have to separate? If you back up into Genesis 13:14, as God is talking about Lot and that he settled in Genesis 13:12,

“Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom.

(Genesis 13:13) Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD.

(Genesis 13:14) The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him...”

When did God start talking to him? After. Now up to this point, He had talked to him at different stages, but the point was, “You need to get Lot out of here and you and I can then talk where we need to be.”

So, you come to Genesis 15, and God turns to Abraham, and He goes, “You don't need to be afraid. You saw what just happened in this battle. I rescued you.” His point is,

“...I am a shield to you;

Your reward shall be very great.”

Now, Abrams thinking in this in this regard, “If I'm going to be great and I don't have kids, how can I be great? How can I be a nation?”

(Genesis 15:2) “Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?””

Now, his thought is that the promise of God must be based on “perhaps the resources that I have, because if in fact I don't have certain resources, how in the world could the promises of God ever be fulfilled?” So, he's thinking, “Ok, I have a servant in my house and maybe it's through that servant that I'll kind of adopt him as my own and that will be the nation since I'm childless.” It's kind of Abraham's way of going to God, “You didn't make it to where I could have a kid.”

The passage then goes on and says,

(Genesis 15:3) “And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.”

(Genesis 15:4) Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.”

And you can't get any clearer than that.

Now, in this chapter, the great verse that Paul quotes from Galatians 3 is in verse 6,

(Galatians 15:6) “Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

Now, what's interesting is once again, he believes that what God said was true, but how all that's going to come into being, he's still going to wrestle with; because the flesh keeps getting in there and it deprives us of freedom. Every time that we go in this state in which we're trying to work out

how God's going to do this, we literally step out of freedom, and we go into bondage. You begin to worry, "Ok, how God's going to make this happen, I don't know. It's not working out the way I thought it was going to happen." And you began to go into the worry and anxiety zone.

You come down to Genesis 16, and this is the passage that he's making reference to in Chapter 16, but I want you to see the progression or in some ways the digression of Abraham. At this juncture, Sarah, his wife, comes to him. Look, when Abraham is first called, he's 75 years old, he's now in his 80s, and his wife's going, "I don't think we're going to have kids. I mean, I know that God said that we're going to have kids, but I don't think we're going to have kids."

So, it reads this way,

(Genesis 16:1) "Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid..."

I wonder where she got that from. That was another one of those, "We're going to make this happen" moments.

"...whose name was Hagar.

(Genesis 16:2) So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai."

Once again, in this particular setting, he shouldn't have done, but they both were trying to figure this out. Once again, he caves into this. She'll have this child about a year later, and Abraham at the time will be 86 years old when they have Ishmael. It says that at the end, verse 16, in case you want to know if I was just pulling the number out. But they have this child, Ishmael. Scripture seems to infer that his name is given because it literally means "God has listened. He's heard you cry. He's heard what you said." So, in the text, we begin to read, and the thought is, "Well, ok, at least we worked it out where we could have a nation and be great. So, it must be through Ishmael." But the only problem is Sarah's not happy because it's not her child. It's not of her womb, and she's upset. Not only this, but probably what makes things worse is Hagar is almost flaunting it, and this just makes Sarah madder.

If you look in Genesis 16:4, the result is,

"He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight."

So, we're not seeing harmony here, right? We're not seeing good things happen as a result of this. See, the only problem with you trying to make things happen in your own flesh, is it never brings good results. You're always going to be faced with things called disappointment, frustration,

disharmony, division, strife. Even if it seems like it's a really, really good decision and you're really being selfless and sacrificial, if it's not something God has orchestrated, it's not going to be good.

So, you follow this through, and God hears, they have this child, but now, 13 years later,

(Genesis 17:1) “Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him,

“I am God Almighty;

Walk before Me, and be blameless.”

(Genesis 17:2) “I will establish My covenant...”

I'll put it another way, “I will establish My promise. I will.” “Don't you need some help God?”

“Nope.”

(Genesis 17:4) “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you...”

These are guarantees.

(Genesis 17:7) “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants...”

“I will. Not you, I will.” God has not only revealed through this journey that man, by his own effort, cannot produce righteousness, as Paul will so aptly put it in Galatians, “by the works of the flesh, no flesh would be justified.” You can't do right. You can't be perfect. You're going to fail. You're going to think in terms of your own wisdom, and it's going to be bad. So, not only is God proving that man can't produce righteousness acceptable to God in any way, but what man does produce seems to be an unfavorable result. If you look all the way around, what has Abraham produced by virtue of his own decisions? Well, he's produced separation, division, degradation, shame, regret and hostility. Those are the good points. So, it's conveying that you don't want to walk by your flesh. Abraham is learning this, but the lesson is hard.

So, you're looking at this and he's still thinking, “So, how is this going to happen?” And of course, God reveals Himself to him again.

(Genesis 17:15) “Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.”

(Genesis 17:16) “I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

(Genesis 17:17) Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed...”

We now have the name of the son, Isaac, “you laughed.” That's his name. The word itself can be used in a plethora of ways, but more specifically on the whole, it has a connotation of mockery; of making sport. It wasn't that he was in any way, trying to make fun of God, but it had that sense of,

“Yeah, right.” “You're being disrespectful.” “No, I'm not being disrespectful.” “Wow. Sure.” So, he laughs, and of course, he says, “I'm 100 years old here, when I'm going to have a kid. Are you sure this is going to happen?”

(“... “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?””

(Genesis 17:18) And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before You!”

(Genesis 17:19) But God said, “No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac (“you laughed”) ...”

It's an interesting word because it almost sounds like that sense of mockery; a scorn of sorts. Then he ends in verse 21,

“But My covenant I will establish with Isaac...”

“With laughter; with your mockery.” An interesting phrase.

Now you go into Genesis 18, and Sarah's made privy to it, and what do you think she does?

(Genesis 18:12) “Sarah laughed...”

So, we're sure on the name. It's going to be Isaac.

It is Genesis 21 that we come to, in which the Lord took note of Sarah.

(Genesis 21:1) “Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised.”

Now, the promise was not based on anything Abraham and Sarah could do, because 90 years old, really? You're not going to have a kid. It was all the promise of God, but God says, “I promised you, and here it is.” And He made good on His promise. Well, what happens is of course, within a few years, Isaac is seen by Ishmael as somebody he doesn't want around because Ishmael, in his mind, was first born, and they begin to, strangely enough, mock or make fun of Isaac.

(Genesis 21:6) “Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.”

(Genesis 21:7) And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

(Genesis 21:8) The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

(Genesis 21:9) Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking...”

“*Ṣāḥaḥ*,” the same word as “Isaac” - making fun of; laughing.

(Genesis 21:10) “Therefore she said to Abraham, “Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.””

Well, that's what's quoted in Galatians.

(Genesis 21:11) “The matter distressed Abraham...”

Of course, the division had to happen, because why? Because a slave, the law, could not have the same position as the child. The problem was, it's interesting in the text, Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham, and she says, “Have the child. It will be my child.” She never thought of Ishmael as her child. She doesn't say it's her son, she says he's Hagar's son, and her son is Isaac. The point of the passage is that there's an attachment that Sarah has with the heart to her son. She'll never have an attachment to somebody that she fabricated by virtue of jumping through her fleshly hoops. Our perception is, “If I just get my way and I can just produce the results that I want, then I'm going to be happy.” And God says when you've produced something out of the flesh, of the flesh you reap corruption. You'll never be happy. It will never add fulfillment. It will never work out because the only thing that's going to come out of this is frustration and disappointment. You're going to come to a point, and you're going to go, “Why did I even do this? I loathe the decision that I made.” I mean, how many times have we looked back in our past and go, “I wish I'd never made that decision.”

So, it's an interesting text, but I want you to understand one of the things that God is saying that sometimes gets missed is that God wanted this child named “laughter” because He says, “And so My promise is going to come through laughter.” But if you understand what the text is saying, it's “My promise is going to come through your mocking.” That's a very interesting point.

So, another passage is quoted in this Galatians text from the Old Testament, and it's Isaiah 54. If you turn there with me, I want you to see how this comes into play.

(Isaiah 54:1) “Shout for joy, O barren one...”

Who was the “barren one”? Well, Sarah, all those years up to 90 years old. She didn't have a child.

There are times in our lives where we say to ourselves, “Why is it everybody else has and I don't?” If you look in Scripture, in almost every case where a certain individual was asked to wait, they were given greater blessings. Whether it's Sarah in this particular passage or it's Hannah in another passage, or it's Ruth in another passage, or Elizabeth in the New Testament, at an old age will have a child and his name will be John the Baptist. All the way through, you begin to realize that if God is making you wait, He has better things. One of the reasons why He's making you wait is because He's helping you get disenchanted by the things of the world; by performance. If you've ever been in the world and you go, “Why can't I run fast like those guys in the Olympics?” And “Why can't I

really swim?” And you may not have the same kind of abilities, then God goes, “You better thank Me for that, because it is in that that you ultimately have to turn to Me and you say, ‘If any good's going to happen, it's going to have to happen through You, because I'm not going to make it happen.’” And God goes, “See, it's a blessing that I didn't give you that.”

So, it then causes, as he says in Isaiah 54, and he quotes in Galatians,

“Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child;
Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud...”

Why? Because “the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman.” Why is that more wonderful? Because God did it, and God revealed to you that His blessings are contingent only upon His promises, and He's the one that fulfills. It's not anything that I do, not any works of righteous that I've done, but you come to that realization, and you go, “I have something to be happy about now.” Now, it's very important that you understand this promise that is given in Chapter 54 follows Chapter 53, and you know what Chapter 53 is about. He was despised and rejected of men, right? He became a lamb to the slaughter. He died for your sins. I mean, the whole gospel is in Chapter 53, and Scripture is telling us, “You know that person you were mocking? You were laughing? Salvation has come through Him.” Have you ever felt oppressed? Have you ever felt like the low man on the totem pole, and you felt like, ‘who am I’? You're in good company, because it's through the mockery that God brings the salvation, and it's through the disappointments that we have that God brings the glory. We begin to realize, “I'm free. The life that I live is in total relationship with God, and what He does for me has nothing to do with my performance. He loves me and He's going to fulfill His promise.” This is what Paul wants the Galatians to do. He wants them to live in the promise of God, not the performance of man.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today, and we ask that You touch our hearts; that we would live in such a state that we would walk by faith and not by sight. Lord, that You would so change our hearts that we wouldn't care, it wouldn't matter what man thinks or the standards that he places on us, but that we would please You and that we would be walking according to the promises of God. We stand on the promises of God. This is where we stand, and how freeing that is because we know that nothing could separate us from Your promises. Nothing can separate us from Your love.

You take this moment, and just give thanks to God for His indescribable gift, and that He would even take our mocking and turn it around as salvation for us; that He would display a love that would be consistent despite our inability to trust Him the way we should, and that in His great

salvation, He would even change our disposition and cause us to have His heart that would cry out, "Dad, Father, I come to You."