

Paul is continuing to make the case that salvation does not come through the law, but by faith in God's promise through Jesus Christ. He uses the births of Abraham's first two sons to illustrate the difference between two covenants (law and promise), showing us that Ishmael's birth to Hagar represents the bondage of the law while Isaac's birth to Sarah was the result of God's promise.

---

21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? 22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.

**“Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?”** – Paul addresses the next remarks to those who seek to earn their righteousness through obedience to the law. The first 5 books of the OT were collectively referred to as “the law” and Paul will refer to OT scripture to show that the record of Abraham's first two sons contradicts their belief that they can earn their righteousness through obedience to the law. He bluntly asks if the Galatians have ever considered what the scripture says.

**“For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman”** – Genesis records the births of Abraham's two oldest sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was born first to Sarah's handmaid Hagar. Isaac was born some 14 years later to Sarah, Abraham's wife. Paul will use these two sons to illustrate the differences between the two covenants God has made with Israel.

---

23 But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.

**“But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born after the flesh”** – Genesis 16 records the circumstances through which Ishmael was born to Sarah's handmaid Hagar. Everything about Ishmael's conception and birth was natural; there was no miraculous intervention involved. It was also fleshly in the sense that it was the result of the unbelief of both Abraham and Sarah. God had promised that Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens (Gen. 15:5) but since Sarah was childless she wanted Abraham to use Hagar as a surrogate mother to “help” God fulfill His promise.

**“but he of the freewoman was by promise”** – Nothing about Isaac's birth was natural, since both Abraham and Sarah were too old to naturally have children. Isaac's birth was the result of God's promise. **Gen. 17:15-19** *“And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.”*

---

24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

**“Which things are an allegory [illustration; symbolic]: for these are the two covenants”** – Paul is using the symbolism of these two women and the sons born to them to illustrate the difference between two covenants that God has made with Israel. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of these two covenants: **Jer. 31:31-33** *“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”* The broken covenant refers to the old covenant of the law, while God's promise of a new covenant is a beautiful description of the results of the new birth that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

**“the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth [to father or give birth to] to bondage [slavery], which is Agar”** – The first covenant that Paul addresses is the covenant of the law that God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:7-8). He describes it as giving birth to slavery and associates it with Sarah's handmaid, Hagar.

---

25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

**“For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia”** – Paul makes it plain that he is associating Hagar (a slave or “bondwoman”) with the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai, which put Israel into bondage.

**“and answereth to [to march in the same row] Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children”** – The Greek word translated “answereth to” is a military term describing the unity of soldiers marching in the same row of a formation. The idea is that the giving of the law represented by Hagar is marching in lock-step with the current (in Paul's day) earthly Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem, the home of the temple, was the worship center of Judaism and was full of Jews who were serving under the bondage of the law.

---

26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

Paul now turns to the second covenant, represented by the heavenly Jerusalem (“Jerusalem which is above”) and Sarah, the mother of Isaac. God made the promise to Abraham that it would be through Sarah that the heirs of the promises would be born. It is in that sense that Sarah is the “mother of us all” and represents the covenant of promise, which we receive through faith in Jesus Christ.

---

27 For it is written, Rejoice, *thou* barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

Paul quotes Isa. 54:1 to illustrate God's blessings on Sarah through His promises. In that day it was an embarrassment for a woman to be unable to provide children for her husband and it was Sarah's desperation that caused her to want Abraham to have a child through her handmaid Hagar. Paul's quotation illustrates God's ability to bless the barren so that Sarah, in a spiritual sense, now has more children than Hagar (representing the law) could ever have.

---

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

"We" (those who have faith in Christ) have become the spiritual children that came as a result of the promises of God, just as Isaac was. Not only are we the children of Abraham by following his example of faith (**Gal. 3:7** "*Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham*"), but we have also become a fulfillment of God's promise that Sarah would be the mother of Abraham's descendants (Gen. 17:15-19).

---

29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is* now.

**"But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted [to harass; to mistreat] him that was born after the Spirit"** – The phrase "he that was born after the flesh" refers to Ishmael, who mocked Isaac, "him that was born after the Spirit" (**Gen. 21:8-9** "*And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking*").

**"even so it is now"** – Such persecution is not new. Just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac in their day, Ishmael's spiritual descendants, the Jews who prefer living under the law, also persecute those who have been born after the Spirit. They persecuted Jesus and His disciples, as well as those in the early church who professed faith in Jesus Christ.

---

30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

**"Nevertheless what saith the scripture?"** – Paul now calls attention to the scriptural record of what God said to Abraham in response to the situation caused by Ishmael's persecution of Isaac. He may even be saying "Don't take my word for it – let's look at what the scripture says."

**"Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman"** – Paul quotes Gen. 21:10, which tells us that Sarah was displeased when she saw what Ishmael, the son of Hagar, was doing and she demanded that Abraham get rid of Hagar and Ishmael (**Gen. 21:10** "*Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac*"). Abraham was reluctant to do so since Ishmael also was his son, but God told him to listen to Sarah because Ishmael was not the promised heir (**Gen. 21:12** "*And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called*"). Paul's point is that the fact that it was God's will to cast out Hagar and her son demonstrates that the bondage of the law that they represented has also been cast out.

---

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

Paul's conclusion drawn from his illustration in vs. 21-30 is that we who are saved through faith in Christ are not children of the "bondwoman" (Hagar), who represents the bondage of the law (vs. 3, 24). Our salvation did not come as a result of being the "children" of the law. Rather, we were saved through faith in the promises of God, as represented by the "freewoman" (Sarah), who represents the covenant of promise.