

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Third Quarter 2017: *The Gospel in Galatians*

Lesson 10 “The Two Covenants”

Read for this week’s study

Galatians 4:21–31; Genesis 1:28; 2:2, 3; 3:15; 15:1–6; Exodus 6:2–8; 19:3–6.

Memory Text

“But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother” (Galatians 4:26, NIV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Covenant Basics
- III. The Abrahamic Covenant
- IV. Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar
- V. Hagar and Mount Sinai (*Gal. 4:21–31*)
- VI. Ishmael and Isaac Today
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “Many regard Paul’s interpretation of the history of Israel in Galatians 4:21–31 as the most difficult passage in his letter. That’s because it is a highly complex argument that requires a broad knowledge of Old Testament persons and events.” (Sunday’s lesson)
2. What makes this such a difficult passage? 1) We do not know exactly what the Judaizers (Paul’s opponents) were saying. We only listen to one side of the conversation/argument. 2) Most people are not familiar with the details of the story of Abraham, Hagar, Sarah, Isaac & Ishmael as recorded in Genesis 12-21. 3) There is a certain understanding of the covenants and their role that had developed in classical Christianity throughout the centuries [OT=law; NT=grace] and this influences what we “read into” the text. 4) Paul uses a non-standard method of interpretation which is supposed to convince his Judaizing opponents, not to give a recipe to us on how to interpret the Bible. (How far can you take an allegory?)
3. Perhaps the best way to tackle all this is to make sure you understand 1) What happened then [in Genesis 12-21]—the historical facts (Galatians 4:19-23)? 2) What are the spiritual truths (Galatians 4:24-29)? 3) What are the practical blessings (Galatians 4:30-31)?

4. Regarding 1): On the surface the story appears to be nothing more than a tale of family problems. Abraham had two wives, they gave birth to two sons and their relationships can teach us important spiritual lessons – which side is really the slave-family and which is the free?
5. Regarding 2): Once Paul identifies the players on the two sides, the picture is recognizable. Paul has already shown that the law of Moses, given on Sinai, functioned between the time of Moses and the coming of the Messiah by keeping the Israelites enslaved (3:23-4:3). Not because there was something wrong with it, but because immature people with sinful natures applied/used it that way!
6. The twist comes when Paul says: “For Sinai is a mountain in Arabia” (v. 25; or “Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia” as in some manuscripts [KJV]). The law of Moses, given on Mount Sinai now corresponds to the outsiders in the original picture (Ishmael).
7. Because Paul’s opponents claim authority from Jerusalem, Paul presents another twist by talking about ‘the present Jerusalem’ versus ‘the Jerusalem above’. He does it by quoting Isaiah 54:1 addressing the bereft Jerusalem who will produce many children. He shows that those who claim to represent present Jerusalem belong with Ishmael and those who trust God’s promise and not their ‘fleshly’ identity belong to the Isaac-side.
8. Paul’s concluding argument is that Ishmael-people will persecute Isaac-people, but they will eventually be cast out. It is the Isaac-family, not the Ishmael-family who will inherit the promises (which we already know from the end of chapter 3).
9. Paul does not speculate about the fate of the agitators, when or how the casting out will happen, but he will not let them get away with the accusation that he was somehow not telling the Galatians the whole story (“if you want to become proper children of Abraham, you must follow the law and prove it by being circumcised”), or that he does not know or follow the law.
10. Thus Paul and those who believe the gospel he preached cannot be labeled as outsiders, second class Christians/citizens or Abraham’s illegitimate family. Those who believe the gospel are like Isaac – promise-people, the free people of God, who will inherit the whole earth (Romans 4:13).
11. What is it about [certain types of] religious convictions, that lead people to persecute, belittle and hurt other people just because they believe differently? Why is the demonstration at the cross so important (who tortured Jesus)? How can we make sure that our picture of God and behavior precludes any form of persecuting or hurting people (John 16:2-3; Revelation 13)?

The chart of Paul's argument in Galatians 4:21-31:

Hagar

the slave
Ishmael conceived after flesh
Mount Sinai (in Arabia)
Present Jerusalem
In slavery with her children
Jerusalem-based agitators
trusting in fleshly identity
barren legalism
persecutors
will be cast out

Sarah

the free woman (legitimate wife)
Isaac conceived miraculously
Jerusalem above
bereft, but now fruitful
true Christians
trusting in God by the Spirit
transforming grace
persecuted
will inherit the kingdom

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Recommended Listening: The entire series by Graham Maxwell on the book of Galatians is available at <http://pkp.cc/MMGALATIANS66>

But what must have taken the breath of the angels away was his placing of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden, where Satan could approach them. Think what that says about freedom. But he didn't let Satan tempt them more than they were able to bear, so he advised Adam and Eve in their inexperience not to risk a confrontation with their wily foe. He said, "Don't go near the tree." Often we see that tree as a test of obedience. I think it's rather protection. That was to protect them. And Eve showed they weren't ready. She went over to the tree and was deceived by that messenger, that "angel of light," the deceiver. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – Genesis*, recorded October, 1981, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1983:

<http://pkp.cc/1MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

One could stop and wonder how much to be read into each one of these phrases. These were familiar pictures to them. Isn't this a contrast between trying to do things in your own way by human devising? See, Abraham knew a lot about God's intentions and plans, even his promise, and then sought to fulfill them in his own way. And with his wife's advice, he took Hagar, and they had a son, and they said, "God, I hope this is what you had in mind." And God said, "No it

isn't. I wish you'd waited and let me work this out." So wouldn't the contrast be very clear? Again, between trusting God enough to let him do it in his way, and between stepping in and doing it our own way. Which is what the legalist is inclined to do.

Now he contrasts the two covenants. Wouldn't that bring things to their mind that would help them understand this section? One covenant is described as Sinai, compared with the present Jerusalem and its children. And he said, "they're not free; they're in bondage, they're under law, when they ought to be under grace, if only they could accept the truth about our gracious God." So isn't this again faith versus works; the promise of God, against man's efforts? Having the law in one's heart, where one does his thinking; and that's intelligent obedience, and having the law on tables of stone, and not really in the heart. If they had read Jeremiah, they would know about this, wouldn't they? And many other places in the Old Testament. Reading through this time, I kept thinking of the audience listening, and wondering what they could read into this. Now if they were steeped in the Old Testament, this wouldn't be so difficult, would it? It's like reading the book of Revelation. If one has read the preceding sixty-five, the sixty-sixth is not so complicated. Imagine reading Revelation without the others. Heads and horns and horses and trumpets, and all sorts of strange symbols. But if you've read all the other books, you're familiar with these symbols; there's hardly a new one there, in the last book. So I think we would do right here to assume that some members of this audience, especially those with a Jewish background, they knew their Old Testament. And Paul was building on this, like in the choice of this allegory here. And I would assume that for many of them, the message came through clearly. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Galatians, #5, recorded March, 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/5MMGALATIANS66>*

God comes down on Sinai to show himself, to reveal himself to the people. Why do you think he chose to come the way he did, and what does it say about him? Because he comes other times, he comes to Mount Carmel and no one is afraid of him. The children climb up in his lap, and Ellen White adds such colorful details. They were not afraid of him. They used to reach up and stroke his face, she said. In another place she said, "They loved to reach up and kiss that pensive face." They even watched tears roll down his cheeks one day. You're not afraid of somebody who cries like that and speaks so gently. Why didn't he come that way on Mount Sinai? Or in the Sermon on the Mount, what beautiful things he said! Why didn't he stand on Sinai and say, you know, "Blessed are those who realize their spiritual need," and "Blessed are the meek," and so on? And he spoke so softly. Had he spoken softly, would they have even known he was there? He did have to raise his voice, didn't he, with that kind of an audience? And haven't you had that experience yourself?

So in Exodus 19:16, look at the vivid description. And you remember all the background for this if you've had time to re-read this recently:

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God.

They wanted to know what kind of a God he was. They had reason to think he was a weak God, because in those days you measured the strength of your god by victory or defeat on the battlefield. If two nations both prayed for victory on the way to battle, and Nation A beat Nation B, then nation A would assume they had a stronger god. That's the way they figured it out those days, and we'll see a lot of evidence for that coming up. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they felt their God had not been able to look after them. He was a defeated God. All those years the gods of the Egyptians seemed stronger. Then the passage through the Red Sea suggested their God might be stronger than they thought. And how about the ten plagues? We need to come to those in a minute. Now they come to meet God:

And they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. And the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to gaze [they want to see God, and many of them perish]. And also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out upon them." And Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for thou thyself didst charge us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain, and consecrate it.'" And the LORD said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them."

They weren't singing "Nearer, Still Nearer". "Further, Still Further," maybe! Don't come too close? Then look at Exodus 20:18:

Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, and they said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die."

“Speak to me, Lord,” we sometimes say now. They didn’t then! “Don’t let God speak to us lest we die.” They asked for an intercessor, didn’t they? They asked for someone to come between.

Years later, do you remember the words of Jesus just before he died? I believe he was commenting on this very situation that developed after this. “There is no need for me to pray to the Father for you. The Father himself loves you.” Did God want someone to come between? Well, they asked for someone, because they were afraid. “Please, Moses, you speak to God, and then you speak to us.” But did Moses know better? Verse 20: “And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin.”” You see, Moses was a friend. And he could talk face to face with God as a man speaks with his friend. God wishes to have that kind of a relationship with all of us. Do you remember though in John, Jesus said to the disciples, “Up to this time I’ve called you servants and you’ve considered that an honor.” And indeed it is, to be a servant of the Lord. But then Jesus said, “From now on I want to call you my friends. Because a master doesn’t tell his servant what he is going to do, but he does tell his friends.” And then you remember a little later, Jesus said on resurrection Sunday to Mary, not “Go and tell my servants,” nor even “Go and tell my friends,” but “Go and tell my brothers.” He wanted to go a step further. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Exodus, recorded October, 1981, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1983:

<http://pkp.cc/3MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/4MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved in the ark by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a token or pledge, they would never have gone into idolatry, nor been suffered to go down into Egypt; and there would have been no necessity of God’s proclaiming his law from Sinai, and engraving it upon tables of stone, and guarding it by definite directions in the judgments and statutes given to Moses. {1SP 264.2}

Moses wrote these judgments and statutes from the mouth of God while he was with him in the mount. If the people of God had obeyed the principles of the ten commandments, there would have been no need of the specific directions given to Moses, which he wrote in a book, relative to their duty to God and to one another. The definite directions which the Lord gave to Moses in regard to the duty of his people to one another, and to the stranger, are the principles

of the ten commandments simplified and given in a definite manner, that they need not err. {1SP 265.1}

The covenant of grace is not a new truth, for it existed in the mind of God from all eternity. This is why it is called the everlasting covenant. {FLB 77.5}

Through the plan of salvation a larger purpose is to be wrought out even than the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth. Through the revelation of the character of God in Christ, the beneficence of the divine government would be manifested before the universe, the charge of Satan refuted, the nature and result of sin made plain, and the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated. {TMK 366.4}

His word is pledged. The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but His kindness shall not depart from His people, neither shall the covenant of His peace be removed. His voice is heard, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). {TMK 262.4}

Where there is not only a belief in God's Word, but a submission of the will to Him; where the heart is yielded to Him, the affections fixed upon Him, there is faith—faith that works by love, and purifies the soul. Through this faith the heart is renewed in the image of God. {AG 137.5}