

Verse 12 begins with the first command calling the Galatians to action.

***4:12 I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong;***

***4:13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time;***

***4:14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself.***

Paul urges the Galatians to be free from the restrictions of the Mosaic Law, as he is (v. 12a), to learn from his liberty what it means to live a gospel-centered life. It is ironic that Paul who was a Jew has to encourage Gentiles not to live under the law.

Paul was not rebuking the church because he had been mistreated by them. On the contrary, he assures his readers that when he had preached the gospel to them they had done him no wrong (v. 12b). In fact, it was quite the opposite; they had warmly received him in spite of his physical ailments (v. 13; attempts at identifying what it was, are futile).

Some speculate that people of the day may have assumed that someone sent from God would be free from illness; the Galatians, however, were not hindered by Paul's infirmities, but received him and his message as from God, as if he were an angel or Christ Himself.

***4:15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.***

***4:16 So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?***

When Paul visited the Galatians and preached the gospel to them, they received his word, and experienced the joy of salvation and the work of the Spirit (Gal. 3:1-5). So Paul asks, "Where then is that sense of blessing you had?"

"Since the Judaizers had wormed their way into the Galatian churches, the joy of the forgiveness of sin had given way to the despair and hopelessness of legalism. Those enslaved to the 'basic principles' and legalism cannot know the joy of a right-standing before God, since you never know where you stand with God, as right-standing is no longer based upon the merits of Christ, but upon the impossibility of perfect obedience to the law of God" (Riddlebarger).

The expression, "you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me" probably means that the Galatians were willing to do anything for Paul. Therefore, the change of events is astonishing. The Galatians had once believed Paul's gospel, warmly embraced him as a spiritual father, and demonstrated great hospitality toward him. Paul is asking, "How is it that I, who was once the recipient of your warmest love, am now considered your enemy? Did I become your enemy for telling you the truth?" The implication is that the Galatians did not like what Paul was saying to them even though he was speaking truthfully. Perhaps they didn't like to be told they were in error; they didn't like their

spirituality to be questioned; they didn't like to have their behavior challenged. And because of that they separated themselves from him.

**4:17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them.**

**4:18 But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.**

Though the Judaizers had shown great interest in the Galatians and were zealously seeking to win them over to their side, their zealotness was not something to be commended. The NIV paraphrases this in a reasonably helpful way. It says, "They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them." The Judaizers wanted to win converts, but to do so for themselves. They wanted to shut the Galatians off from Paul so that they would seek them; their motivation was to build their own egos. Galatians 6:13 sheds light on a works-based salvation when it says, "For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but *they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh.*" The theology the Judaizers propagated was rooted in pride; it urged people to depend partly on God and partly on their own efforts. If human accomplishments are viewed as meriting favor with God, success with Gentiles being circumcised would become a reason to boast.

"Paul is utterly bewildered. How could these people who he has led to Christ now turn from Christ and follow these deceivers who want to lead the Galatians back into slavery? Jesus Christ had died to set the Galatians free. But the Judaizers were doing their best to convince these people that slavery to the law and 'the basic principles of the world,' was somehow better than freedom in Christ" (Riddlebarger).

Verse 18 is too vague to know definitively what Paul is saying.

(1) Paul may be saying, "I confess that I also am jealous of you, but with a totally different design: and I do so as much when I am absent as when I am present, because I do not seek my own advantage" (Calvin).

(2) Or, Paul may be saying that "it is good when someone seeks after you if it is for a good purpose (Moo, 288) - that is true even when I am not there." That is, Paul could be saying that he would have been fine had others come and built the Galatians up in Christ. But the Judaizers' reason for seeking the Galatians was NOT good. Their doctrine was an attack on the gospel.

**4:19 my children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—**

**4:20 but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.**

In verse 19 Paul pictures himself as a woman in labor, but then changes the image in the middle of the sentence making the Galatians the ones who are pregnant with Christ being formed in them.

The sentence is odd, but it is understandable.

Paul's labor pains are mentioned to convey his intense affection. When he had first preached the gospel to the Galatians, he had endured struggles and pains on their account, like a mother giving birth. Now that the Galatians were being tempted to abandon the gospel, he had to endure the same labor-like pain on their behalf all over again.

To paraphrase Fung:

Faced now with the Galatians' defection from the true gospel to the counterfeit offered by the heretics, Paul experiences the pangs of labor all over again—the sharp pains including those of perplexity (v. 20b), apprehension (v. 11), indignation (cf. 2 Cor. 11:29), and all the painful efforts required to reclaim the Galatians for the truth.

“Until Christ is formed in you” states the time when Paul's labor pangs will cease and the purpose for which he is enduring them. In the original language, the verb “formed” refers to the process whereby the fetus develops into an infant; Paul's desire is to see Christ thus “formed” in his converts (Fung, 202-203).

To have Christ formed in us means to have the character, mind, feelings, actions, and words of Christ become our own character, mind, feelings, actions, and words. “This idea of ‘forming Christ’ in them as a fetus is formed in a mother's womb, is in many ways very similar to Paul's statement in Colossians 3:10, where he writes that ‘we are to put on the new self, which is being renewed in the image (*eikon*) of its creator’ and in Ephesians 4:24 where he writes, ‘put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.’ Thus when Paul is speaking of Christ being formed in them, he is speaking in terms of sanctification and the ‘new man,’ as the Galatians are slowly being ‘morphed,’ into Christ, as they are freed from obedience to the law as the basis for their right standing before God, and slavery to the basic principles as a way of life” (Riddlebarger).

Paul “would be glad to find that matters were better with them than he feared, and that he might have occasion to commend them, instead of thus reproofing and chiding them” (v. 20, Henry).

**4:21 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?**

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

**4:23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.**

In these verses, the apostle illustrates the difference between believers who rested in Christ only and those who trusted in the law, by a comparison taken from the story of Isaac and Ishmael in Genesis 16 and 21. The illustration returns to the theme of being sons of Abraham (3:7 ff), sons of the promise.

The Judaizers had based the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise upon obedience to the Law of Moses. They believed that while “God's promise was given to Abraham and his offspring . . . the obligations of the offspring were clearly revealed in the law; hence, to receive the spiritual blessing, it was necessary

to fulfill the demands of the law” (Fung, 220). In other words, they taught that the promise does not come to God’s people through faith alone, but through obedience to the Law.

As Jobes says, “Historically understood, Genesis 21 taught that the circumcised Jews are indeed the children of promise descending from Abraham through Isaac. This historical understanding played into the hand of Paul’s opponents in Galatia. These opponents were apparently arguing that if the Christians of Galatia claimed to be children of Abraham by faith and therefore heirs of God’s promise to Abraham, then they should identify with Abraham’s descendants by being circumcised, as Abraham himself had been after coming to faith in God.”

“If the Judaizers were correct about this, this means that the reception of the promise is contingent upon the human obedience to law and means that what was central under the old covenant—circumcision, obedience to the law of Moses, keeping dietary laws, following the Jewish calendar, revering the temple, and placing the earthly Jerusalem at the center of the religious life of God’s people—remains central even after the coming of Christ. This amounts to a complete reversal of redemptive history, a return to the bondage of slavery, and a denial that the redemptive work of Christ is sufficient to save. It is another gospel “(Riddlebarger).

Abraham had two sons; Ishmael was born to Hagar, the handmaid of Abraham’s wife. The other, Isaac, was born to Sarah, the free woman (Gen. 16-21). The son born by the slave woman was born “according to the flesh,” that is, by means of natural procreation. In contrast, Sarah’s son was born because of God’s promise to Abraham by means of a unique act of God. “As Genesis 17:17 makes clear, natural procreation and the fulfillment of the promise seemed impossible since Abraham was at least one hundred and Sarah at least ninety. The birth of Isaac, while the product of natural procreation, nevertheless, came about by supernatural means, namely the restoration of Sarah and Abraham’s ability to bear children” (Riddlebarger). As verse 29 says, Isaac was “was born according to the Spirit.” He was conceived as the direct result of the working of God.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that though Ishmael was Abraham’s son, his status was determined by the status of his mother; she was a slave so he was a slave as well. This meant that Ishmael was not Abraham’s heir. This was analogous to the Judaizers’ status with God; though they were *physical* descendants of Isaac, their slavery to the Law demonstrated that they were spiritual children of Hagar. They were thus excluded from the inheritance.

***4:24 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.***

Verse 24 says that Paul sees an allegory in these events. That is, he sees a lesson from the OT that he wants the Galatians to learn. “Paul certainly does not mean that Moses wrote the history for the purpose of being turned into an allegory, but points out in what way the history may be made to answer the present subject” (Calvin).

Paul uses the two women to represent two covenants. Sarah represents the Abrahamic Covenant, the covenant of promise that is entered into by faith. Sarah was a free woman and so her children are free as well. Hagar, the slave, represents the Sinaitic Covenant (the Law of Moses given to him by God at Mount Sinai) whose children are born into slavery. Paul's point is that if you want to live under the Old Covenant then you will end up like Ishmael, a slave that is rejected by God, excluded from being a participator in the promise.

But Paul wants to take his allegory a step further . . .

***4:25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.***

***4:26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.***

"Paul sees a correspondence between Hagar and Mount Sinai, and then draws a connection between Hagar and Jerusalem of his day, since he sees the Jews of his day enslaved under the law" (Schreiner, 301).

In verse 26 Paul contrasts the present Jerusalem in verse 25 with the "Jerusalem above." The "present Jerusalem" refers to the Jerusalem of Paul's day and the inhabitants there (the Jews). The heavenly Jerusalem is the city that awaits believers (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 3:12). In Revelation 21:2 and 10 it signifies the dwelling of God among His people.

Not only were the Judaizers enslaved to the Law and living like children of the slave woman, the rest of the Jews were doing so as well; Christianity had not liberated any of them. However, the mother of believers is the New Jerusalem, which like Sarah, is free. Thus, Paul sees the promised realities of the age to come being experienced even now. The future realities "symbolized by the Jerusalem above are giving birth to people who share in its freedom from the Law and from sin" (Moo, 305).

***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."***

In verse 27 Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1 to support his argument that Gentile believers are children of the Jerusalem above.

Within the historical setting of Isaiah's lifetime, it was a colloquial idiom to personify the capital city of an ethnic population as a female . . . The population represented by that city was referred to as the "children" (or often the "daughter") of the mother-city. During times of war when a nation was conquered, its capital overrun and its peoples exiled, the city was considered to be a barren woman rejected by her husband (or a barren widow). By reason of having no husband and no son, the barren woman herself was considered as good as dead. Thus the plight of the barren woman portrayed the worst situation a people could find themselves in. To continue in exile under foreign subjugation did indeed mean death to a national and ethnic identity. This was precisely the historical situation of Jerusalem to which Isaiah spoke his proclamation of 54:1.

The idiom of female personification was used by Yahweh's prophets to describe the relationship between him and the nation of Israel. The prophet Hosea refers to the land of Israel, and by metonymy to its people, as the adulterous wife of Yahweh (Hos 2:1). Through the prophet Isaiah, Yahweh announces that he will reject Jerusalem because of her spiritual adultery and she will become barren. Isaiah merges and transforms the two concepts of Sarah, the barren matriarch of Israel and the female personification of the city of her descendants, Jerusalem.

The plight of the barren and rejected Jerusalem is described in Isa 64:10: "The city of your holiness has become desolate, Zion has become as a wilderness, Jerusalem, a curse." According to Isaiah, Jerusalem is cursed because of the sins of the people which the city, by metonymy, represents. The nation of Israel had forsaken its covenant with the Lord.

However, unlike many ancient peoples who were conquered and exiled, never again to regain their national identity, Isaiah also brings good news to barren Jerusalem. Isa 54:1 is the climactic pronouncement of all of Isaiah's prophetic promise concerning Jerusalem's future. In Isaiah 54, the prophet proclaims the good news to the barren woman, Jerusalem, that though she be as good as dead, she will yet live with her many children.

Isaiah secures the certainty of this promise that the Jews will not die out as a people, and that they will again inhabit Jerusalem, on the fact that what the God of Israel did in the past for Sarah (and Rebekah and Rachel), he will do in the future for barren Jerusalem (Isa 51:2).

God's omnipotence is demonstrated to his people by the miraculous birth of a child to a barren woman. By identifying the barren woman with the city of Jerusalem and her miraculously giving birth with a life-giving reprieve from death, Isaiah's proclamation further provides for Paul's subsequent use of this theme.

Isaiah's transformation of the story of Israel's childless matriarchs, beginning with Abraham and Sarah, provides a canonical basis for at least three points with which Paul later resonates. Isaiah's proclamation (1) provides an interpretation of Sarah's motherhood that can be taken to have wider reference than to the nation of Israel; (2) merges the concepts of matriarchal barrenness and the feminine personification of capital cities to produce female images of two Jerusalems, a barren, cursed Jerusalem and a rejoicing Jerusalem; and (3) introduces the concept of a miraculous birth to a barren woman as a demonstration of God's power to deliver a nation of people from death.

The analogy that Isaiah establishes between Sarah and Jerusalem extends to, and transforms the sense of, the covenant, the seed, and the inheritance.

(Jobes, Jerusalem, Our Mother: Metalepsis and Intertextuality in Galatians 4:21-31; Westminster Theological Journal 55 (1993) 299-320).

Just as God in the Book of Isaiah had promised the Jews that Jerusalem would have offspring again, so Paul sees a connection between the New Jerusalem and the spiritual birth that believers enjoy. The earthly Jerusalem was dead to the things of God; it was spiritually barren. However, in the spiritual Jerusalem, children were being born. The promise of Isaiah had come to pass in an even greater way than the original promise suggested.

The link between this and the preceding context is that though Sarah is the mother of faith, she was barren and beyond the age of having children when Isaac, the child of promise was born.

***4:28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.***

***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.***

Paul returns to the analogy made earlier between Abraham's sons. Believers are the children of Isaac, the children of promise, for they have received the promise given to him by faith.

Furthermore, just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so the Judaizers were persecuting the church in Galatia.

***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."***

***4:31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.***

Genesis 21:10 is the OT reference that Paul is referring to in verse 30. In the historical context Ishmael ridiculed Isaac so Sarah, in anger, told Abraham to cast Hagar and Ishmael out of the household which he did under the direction of God. Outwardly, Ishmael was a son. Inwardly, he was a rejected slave.

In 4:21 Paul had asked the Galatians, "You who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?" If they do, they would cast out the bondwoman (the law with its slavery) and become heirs as children of Sarah. Or to state it positively, they were to remain as children of the covenant of promise and not subject themselves to the Law.

***5:1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.***

The purpose of salvation is set forth in this verse. Christ has come to set those in bondage free. Once people have been freed from the Law they are to stand in their freedom and enjoy the privileges of being heirs of the promise.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we are Sarah's children. We are the children of promise, children not born in the "ordinary way." For we have been called to faith in Christ through the word, and born in a supernatural way—through the sovereign electing grace of God—not by means of natural generation and the racial identity of our mother. In Christ we are justified, given the gift of the Holy Spirit, become heirs to the promise, adopted into God's family, clothed with Christ

through baptism, and can cry out “Abba, father.” We are children of the promise. We are free. We are citizens of the Jerusalem above.

Does anybody want to go back to Egypt? This is what the Judaizers would have us to do. No, as children of the promise and heirs to the inheritance, let us do as the author of Hebrews (12:22 ff.) exhorts us to do—draw near “to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. [For] you have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant” (Riddlebarger).