

Galatians 4:21–31 — Leader / Learner Guide

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Big Idea and Context

Big idea: Isaac, the child of promise, could never share the inheritance with Ishmael, the child of the flesh. Believers, born by the same kind of promise, must cast out every mixture of law and grace and stand in freedom.

This is Paul's last argument in the doctrinal section. He answers those who want to be under the law by telling a story from the Law itself.

- **4:12–20:** a personal plea from their spiritual parent.
- **4:21–31:** two sons, two covenants, two Jerusalems.
- **5:1–12:** stand fast in that liberty.

Bondwoman or Free — Three Anchor Verses

Verse	What it says	Teaching point
4:23	Born according to the flesh ... through promise	Ishmael was man's scheme; Isaac was God's miracle, after 25 years of waiting.
4:28	We, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise	Our new birth was as much a miracle as Isaac's — promise, not performance.
4:30	Cast out the bondwoman and her son	No mixing. You can't keep favorite parts of the law and blend them with grace.

The two columns: left — Ishmael, Hagar, flesh, Sinai, earthly Jerusalem, bondage. Right — Isaac, Sarah, Spirit, promise, Zion, heavenly Jerusalem, freedom.

Rest and work: under law you work six days, then rest. Under grace you rest first, then work — working from the blessing, not for it.

Teaching Flow

1. **The Argument (21).** You want to be under the law — but do you hear what it says?
2. **The Allegory (22–27).** Two sons; two systems (flesh and promise, Rom 4:19–22); two symbols — Sinai and the earthly Jerusalem in bondage, the Jerusalem above that is free (Heb 12:18–24; Isa 54:1).
3. **The Application (28–31).** We are children of promise; candidates for persecution — historically, religiously, and spiritually (5:17); not to compromise with the flesh; called to liberty.

Clarify While Teaching

- **Abraham's ages:** Scripture gives 75 (call), 86 (Ishmael's birth, Gen 16:16), 99, and 100. The ages 82 and 87 are estimates; Ishmael was born when Abraham was 86.
- **"Allegory":** Paul treats real history as an illustration. He is not saying Genesis is only a story.
- **Legalism today:** naming Baptists and Presbyterians is illustrative. The point is any group's added rules, including our own.

Discussion and Close

1. Where are you tempted to "help God out" the way Abraham did with Hagar?
2. The real battle is "in here" (5:17). Which quieter sins — envy, jealousy, contention — do you need the Spirit's help with?
3. Are you working for God's blessing or from it? What would change if you rested first?

Close: Point ahead to 5:1–12: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free." Two columns, and only one a believer can stand in.

Full study: [Paul's Old Testament Story — Galatians 4:21–31](#) · Source: Dr. C. Norman Sellers, [SellersBibleInstitute.com](#)