

## Part 27 Strength from the Heavenly Jerusalem(4:27-5:1)

- **Abraham & Hagar**

- **Abraham & Sarah**

God's promise of holiness, inheritance, spiritual fulfilment, is not to be fulfilled by the self-centred impatience of the flesh. We have to persist in trusting God until God miraculously fulfils His promises. The story of Abraham and Hagar illustrates impatience and unbelief. It illustrates turning to the Mosaic law (which in itself shows impatience and unbelief). But the story of Abraham and Sarah illustrates the miraculous fulfilment of God's promises. Hagar reminded Paul of what was happening in earthly Jerusalem a few hundred miles away from Galatia. But Sarah reminds us of the **heavenly** Jerusalem, the place from which God sends us the Holy Spirit and all His heavenly resources. *'The Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother'*.<sup>1</sup> We have been born from above. The throne-room of God has brought us new birth.

<sup>1</sup> 4:26

**The Barren Woman of Isaiah 54**

Now Paul introduces another quotation – from Isaiah 54:1.

*'For it is written,*

*"Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;*

*break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labour! For the children of the desolate one will be more*

*than those of the one who has a husband.'"*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 4:27

- **Entirely desolate**

Isaiah also used the picture of a barren woman as an illustration of spiritual power. In Isaiah's words the picture of Sarah is actually exaggerated. This woman is barren, has never borne a child, has never been in labour and is entirely desolate, being without a husband. The picture is even **worse** than the Sarah of history (who did have a husband and must have been in labour when she bore Isaac!). The woman of Isaiah 54 bears many children by sheer miracle! The people of God are born from a woman above – the heavenly Jerusalem. The power that brings them into being as God's people is a sheer miracle, like the birth of Isaac. But then Paul is making the point that we are to go on living in this way. We must not go back to law. We must not try to get God's promise fulfilled by the flesh, by turning to Hagar, by listen to false teachers like those who were living in first century Jerusalem.

- **Many children by a sheer miracle**

- **Don't turn back – Go on!**

- **Churches 'Headquarters' must be Jerusalem**

Paul's teaching about Jerusalem is to be noted here. Originally earthly-Jerusalem was a centre of evangelism. But then persecution came and believers left Jerusalem. Slowly the city became more and more conservative. Now (around AD 49), false teachers are claiming that all Christians must be law-keeping, Jerusalem-based Christians. Paul was being criticized because (i) he did not keep the Mosaic law, and (ii) he was not getting his instructions from earthly-Jerusalem, but told his converts to look to the heavenly Jerusalem. (Eventually the Romans would invade Jerusalem and Jesus had left instructions: 'those inside the city must leave it'.<sup>1</sup>) For the rest of church-history our 'headquarters' must be the heavenly Jerusalem.

<sup>1</sup> Luke 21:21

- **Children of promise**

So, Paul applies his illustration. *'Now you, brothers and sisters, are children of promise, like Isaac'*.<sup>1</sup> The Christian becomes what he or she is not by the power of our human nature but by power from above. Every new birth is a miracle. We are not 'born again' by a long walk down a long route. The Christian life is indeed 'a Way'<sup>2</sup>, but we are 'justified' and 'born again' before we start the journey. Only those 'justified' and 'born again' are on the way at all! We Christians have been miraculously saved, without anything of human power contributing to our salvation. And we go on living the same way, looking for miraculous strength for the promises of God to be fulfilled.

<sup>1</sup> 4:28

<sup>2</sup> Acts 9:2

- **Persecution to be expected**

*We must expect persecution from religious people who see things differently.* Paul says, *'But just as at that time he who was born according to*

<sup>1</sup> 4:29

the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now'. <sup>¶1</sup> Ishmael (born naturally) ill-treated Isaac (born by a miracle). So religious people (using all their will-power to try to keep the law) want to persecute Christians (who look only to the Lord Jesus Christ for the strength of the Holy Spirit, so that they can live the kind of life that goes higher than the Mosaic law!).

**Throw away  
bondage  
and legalism**

**We must throw away bondage and legalism.** Paul takes his illustration a bit further. *'But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not obtain the family-inheritance with the son of the free woman"'*. <sup>¶1</sup> The Christian must get rid of Mosaic legalism. He is not saved by his 'good works'. He does not grow by putting himself under the Mosaic legislation. Even the ten commandments are too low for him. His inheritance comes by following the Lord Jesus Christ and obeying the Holy Spirit. He 'fulfils' the law by walking in the Holy Spirit.

<sup>¶1</sup> 4:30

**Enjoy our  
freedom**

**We must insist on enjoying our freedom.** Paul's conclusion is: *'So, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. ¶1 Christ set us free, to enjoy our freedom! Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.'* <sup>¶2</sup> What sort of freedom is Paul thinking of? (i) It is freedom from guilt. Paul has said that the Christian is 'justified'. (ii) It is freedom from the dominion of the kingdom of darkness. The Christian has died to the law. He has died to sin and is in a position where he lives to God. (iii) It is freedom from the complexity of the Mosaic law. It is the freedom of being 'under grace', of being a happy 'slave' of righteousness.

<sup>¶1</sup> 4:31

<sup>¶2</sup> 5:1

From –

- **guilt**
- **the dominion of darkness**
- **the law**

To –

- **Be righteous**
- **Pray for our enemies**
- **Walk in love amidst complicated circumstances**
- **Be sanctified**

The ability to be righteous is freedom! The Christian must use this freedom. He must walk in bold confidence that God will never condemn him eternally. He looks to the Holy Spirit for daily guidance. He or she will find that the Holy Spirit leads us into things that are never mentioned in the Mosaic law. We will pray for our enemies. We will maintain a good conscience in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes we shall face complicated situations. It will do us no good to ask 'What is the law?' We shall often have to look to the Holy Spirit to walk the pathway of love amidst complex circumstances. There must be no going back. We do not seek justification anywhere except in the righteousness of Christ. We do not seek sanctification anywhere except in living upon the faithfulness of Christ. We do not go back to the bondage of the law. Our freedom is owed to the Lord Jesus Christ. It was Christ who set us free, and we are eternally grateful.



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