

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

Paul is fully aware of the two-edged sword called “zeal.” He recognizes that zeal has a very valuable component, when it is established on the truth. But it can also have its devastating effects when it fails to act on the truth and rather is the outpouring of selfish goals. Literally Paul says, “It is good always to be zealous for the good,” in which “zealous for the good” must mean “zealous for the truth,” i.e., that which produces “good.” Most surely Paul witnessed the zeal of the Gentiles when they first received the Gospel, and he does not want in any way to diminish the value of this zeal. But such initial zeal, demonstrated when he first ministered to them (“when I am present with you”) must continue on in his absence. Their zeal must be for the truth, not for simply being his disciples. Or to put it another way, their zeal must be in connection with their faith in Yeshua, not for Paul himself.

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19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Messiah is formed in you—

Paul’s own feelings break through as he interjects this line of passionate zeal himself. He uses the metaphor of birth, after all, salvation of the soul is itself so described by the Master Himself (John 3). This image of parent/child is a familiar one in the Pauline epistles (1Cor 4:14, 17; 2Cor 6:13; 12:14; Phil 2:22; 1Thess 2:11). The fact that Paul takes to himself a female image (birthing a child) may seem strange in our ears, but would not have concerned his original audience who were well versed in midrashic thought. For Paul, all the “labor” he underwent in his first visit to them should have secured their safe “delivery.” Yet it appeared that in fact they had not been fully delivered—that their birth was still in process. The current struggle of soul and mind of the Apostle appears to be nothing less than the extension of his original “labor pains.”

until Messsiah is formed in you (μέχρις οὗ μορφωθῆ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν) — Here Paul teaches us that salvation as a whole is a process, not merely a “moment in time decision.” This is not to deny the importance of a moment in time when the soul first yields to the message of the Gospel and falls repentant before God and His Messiah. But like conception which is the beginning of a birthing process, so initial confession of faith is but the first step in a process of salvation. For Paul, “justification” is that initial point of conception when the soul is born anew. But “sanctification” is the on-going process of this birth imagery, and is as essential as was the initial conception. Thus, “being saved” is a life-long process of transformation, because salvation is not just a “fire escape” but it is a change of life with the final destination being conformity to Messiah.

Paul often speaks this way. In Phil 1:6 he speaks of the work that God has begun in the believer, a work that He will inevitably finish. But the finish-line is eschatological in nature: “until the day of Messiah Yeshua.” Likewise, in Eph 2:19f, Paul utilizes the metaphor of a building, a holy Temple, in which each believer is a part and which is still in the process of being fully built. And in Rom 8:22, our “redemption” awaits the final appearance of Yeshua, and thus our redemption is in the process of being procured.

The idea of the Messiah “being formed in you” is a healthy corrective to the modern easy believe-ism of our day. With the notion that salvation is like a cake mix, one is told that everything necessary is “in the box.” All one needs to do is “mix and bake.” The finished product is available at the front of the

auditorium each and every service! But this message is actually “half-baked!” Or to use Paul’s birthing metaphor, it produces still-borns. People, assured that they are saved by the decision of the moment, go back to their unrighteous way of living at worst, or fail to move on in maturity to the full reality of salvation. One can only postulate such a scenario in light of the fact that Yeshua Himself prophesied regarding the many who, though believing themselves to be “in,” are rebuked as workers of lawlessness and turned away (Matt 7:22f). For Paul, the proof of genuine salvation is the formation of Messiah within the very person who confesses Him.

Thus, conformity to Messiah is the characteristic of one who is being saved. Here again, in our modern world, the problem lies not so much in agreeing with this calling to conformity, but in the definition of Messiah. Our modern “Jesus” hardly matches the promised Messiah of the Tanach nor the Yeshua of the Gospels. Rather than striving to follow in the footsteps of One Who was obedient to Torah as a matter of true righteousness, the modern Jesus has become a “cosmic” remedy for every human discomfort—a means to reaching our selfish ends. In the affluent countries of our world, Jesus is the means to wealth and happiness, while in many third-world countries, Jesus is an icon of the Roman Catholic church, a kind of talisman to ward off the demons of fallen societies. Rarely is He portrayed as the Jewish Messiah, calling both Israel and all who would join themselves to her, to worship God as He has directed. And so the spread of Christianity, while accomplishing many good and noble things, has seemed often to fail miserably in establishing a true conformity to the risen Messiah.

But this message of Paul may also be a needful corrective to some of the lacks in our own Torah movement. Enamored by the beauty of Judaism and the depth of traditions available to the Torah community, some have lost sight of the centrality of Yeshua. Any of our efforts to recover the water of Torah that springs from the ancient truths of the Scriptures are short-sighted if in these efforts we are not constantly calling ourselves to conformity to the Messiah and the manner in which He obeyed the Father. As Paul wrote to the Romans,

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:29)

Paul’s concern was that the Spirit of Christ might have such full sway in their lives, and they should become so like Christ in character, that they would be able to share in the fullness and freedom of life ‘in the flesh’ (2:20) which Christ himself had enjoyed—not least in regard to the law.⁴⁹

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

Paul’s personal appeal concludes with this open-hearted expression of friendship to his brothers and sisters in the Lord. He is sure that his words, pointed as they are, have been misunderstood or wrongly received. Surely his “tone of voice” in the letter is different than if he were able to sit, face to face, and make his appeal. He is no doubt fearful his words will be misrep-

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49 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 241.

resented by the Influencers without any recourse on his part to make explanation, or for the believers there to see his sincere spirit through facial and body gestures.

The fact that Paul ends by admitting his perplexity is almost a kind of apology. He still can't figure it out, why they could have so easily been turned against him and his teaching. But in admitting that he was perplexed, Paul also shows that he holds out hope that he might be wrong, and that even before they received his letter, they may have come to their senses.

21 Tell me, you who want to be under Torah, do you not listen to the Torah?

Paul returns now to the more formal presentation of his polemic. Having made an impassioned appeal based upon his personal relationship with the Galatians, he comes back to the issue of the two covenants which formed the beginning of this section in chapter three. Employing a midrash based upon the Abraham narrative, Paul illustrates the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants as modeled by Sarah and Hagar respectively. This allows a contrast of “promise” with “flesh,” and fits his overall argument which pits faith against proselyte conversion (“works of the Torah”) as the means of obtaining righteousness before God.

In this opening verse of the section, Paul uses a bit of sarcasm: those who want to be “under Torah” have apparently failed to listen to the very teaching of the Torah⁵⁰ (or at least failed to listen to the Torah as Paul thinks they should have). Here, “under the Torah” (ὑπὸ νόμου) must be equivalent to “undergoing rabbinic conversion.” He speaks, therefore, to those who have indicated that they are ready to become proselytes according to the message of the Influencers. It would seem that in this verse, “under the Torah” is used not of the Torah generally, nor of the condemnation of the Torah specifically, but of the notion that observance of Torah (in this case, Oral Torah) is the required entrance into the covenant. Paul, however, is convinced that the Torah actually does not support the perspective of the Influencers. If they rely upon proselyte conversion as giving them right standing before God, however, they will indeed come “under the (condemnation of) of the Torah.

In typical fashion for Paul, he goes back to an exegesis of the Torah to discover its intended meaning and the proper application to the current issue. Using the idea of “listen to the Torah” recalls the Hebrew concept of “hearing” as “obeying.”

22–23 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.

It is written – a typical way of introducing a quote from the Tanach (even though this is not a direct quote but a Pauline explanation based upon the text). But it more than just a conventional quote formula. Paul emphasizes the written text over against the *halachah* being taught by the Influencers, based as it was on Oral Torah.

Paul sets up the midrash by focusing attention on Abraham's two sons,

50 Some Greek manuscripts have “read” rather than “listened,” but this most likely reflects a scribal change to accommodate the current practice of reading Torah in the Synagogue. In the Torah's initial giving, it was read to the people.

Ishmael and Isaac, and their respective mothers, Hagar and Sarah. Sarah is described as a “free woman,” while Hagar is characterized as a “bondwoman.” In addition to the contrast of bond and free, the son of Hagar is produced by the “flesh” (Abraham’s own efforts) while Isaac comes through the promise (cf. Gen 15:16; 21:2). In this way, “flesh” corresponds to “works of the Torah” (i.e., that covenant status is based upon one’s flesh = ethnicity, and in particular, the cutting of the flesh in circumcision) while “promise” corresponds to “faith” (i.e., that covenant status is through faith in Yeshua).

It is probable that the Influencers used the Abrahamic narrative as substantiation for their own position. After all, one of the primary issues of the narrative is that of Abraham’s son. Who is the promised son through whom the covenant will be established? At one point (Gen 17) Abraham requests of God that Ishmael fulfill that special role, but God refuses Ishmael and gives the promise of Isaac. It would not have been lost on the Influencers that the covenant sign of circumcision is given at this precise point in the narrative. It would have been easy, then, to link circumcision with being a covenant son. If the Gentiles want to be sons of Abraham, they, like Isaac, must be circumcised. Thus, the Influencers are casting the Gentiles as playing the part of Ishmael, while they are fulfilling the role of Isaac. In such a scenario, who wouldn’t want to become like Isaac!?

It is therefore also probable that Paul attempts here to turn the Influencers’ argument on its head. Ishmael was the product of the fleshly conniving of Abraham and Sarah, while Isaac came by above-human means. Ishmael can therefore represent those who attempt to accomplish the covenant promises in their own strength, while Isaac portrays the sovereign act of God according to His promise which Abraham and Sarah had to trust. In this way, the Influencers turn out to be like Ishmael, and the Gentiles (if they will remain firm in their faith) are like Isaac—sons according to the promise.

24–25 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. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia⁵¹ and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

This is the only time in the Apostolic Scriptures where the Greek term ἀλληγορέω, *allegoreō* is used, though it is used time and again by Paul’s contemporary, Philo. The Greek word literally means “to speak another (way).” That is, you speak one word but intend another. Allegory is a kind of extended simile. Whereas in a simile one notes that one thing shares qualities with another thing (“a” is like “b”), in allegory, one thing represents another thing (“a” represents “b”).

But it is equally possible, in my opinion, that Paul uses the term “allegory” to represent a midrashic approach to this particular section of the Abrahamic narrative. Midrash seeks to find in the text an illustration of a given teaching which the plain reading of the words might not readily

51 The reason for Paul’s addition “which is in Arabia” has drawn a lot of attention from the commentators, but in the end, there is no satisfying reason given as to why Paul would have added this descriptor. See the various views listed by Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 251-52. Actually, the additional “in Arabia” does not seem to add anything specifically to the overall thrust of the allegory.

suggest. What is more, midrash has a tendency to build itself on the basis of key words, especially those not commonly used. In this instance, the key terms for Paul are “flesh” and “promise.” It is not so much that Paul believes this allegory to be the primary or even “hidden” meaning of the text, but that the text gives a good, theological *illustration* of his own main point. In other words, Paul is using the Abraham narrative to illustrate his current argument.

He uses for his illustration the two women of the narrative: Sarah and Hagar, though Sarah is never named. These two women, in Paul’s midrash, represent the two covenants already mentioned, namely, the Abrahamic and the Mosaic. The Mosaic covenant proceeds from Mt. Sinai and is represented by Hagar. By implication (and made more specific in vv. 26–28), the covenant made with Abraham is represented by Sarah.

Now it is obvious that in Paul’s midrash, he is making a very pointed remark regarding issues of identity. No one of Jewish heritage would appreciate being called the offspring of Hagar! And in fact, while a promise is given to Ishmael (Gen 16:9ff, which can hardly be described in terms of “blessing”), there is no covenant made with Hagar or with her son Ishmael. Thus, from the outset of the midrash, while Paul specifically mentions two covenants, he actually still has only one covenant primarily in mind, the Abrahamic covenant. His purpose is to show how the true descendants of Abraham are to be reckoned, not to contrast the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. He has already shown that the Mosaic covenant in no way sets aside the Abrahamic, nor does it add conditions to it which render it changed or nullified (3:15). In his using the two women (Sarah and Hagar), Paul wishes to focus attention on the manner in which the descendants of Abraham are reckoned. Isaac, the son of promise, is reckoned as the true heir, while Ishmael, the son of the flesh has no inheritance from Abraham and is therefore not reckoned as a true heir.

Thus, the Sarah/Hagar, Isaac/Ishmael scenario is a perfect illustration of Paul’s point. Those who base their covenant membership (“genuine descendants of Abraham”) upon their “flesh” are like Ishmael; those who base their covenant membership upon the promise (“faith”) are like Isaac. One has no claim to inheritance while the other is the true heir. One is eventually expelled from the family, while to the other one the covenant is renewed.

Paul therefore equates the “present Jerusalem” with Hagar, herself a “bond-woman,” (=slave) who produced a son, Ishmael, who was born therefore into this same status of slavery. The “present Jerusalem” identifies the current or prevailing theology of the primary Judaism of Paul’s day, namely, that covenant membership was based upon “the flesh,” that is, upon membership in the covenant people of Israel through birth or proselyte ritual. But such a theology did not produce “free children” (perhaps Paul has Gentiles proselytes specifically in mind here) but children in slavery. Once again it should be emphasized that freedom in Paul’s mind is always bound up with faith in the Messiah. Freedom means that one is both able and willing to obey Torah as God has given it, and this is possible only by those who have the indwelling Spirit (who have the Torah written on the heart). Those who attempt to gain covenant relationship with God through ethnic markers (=the flesh) are actually in bondage, for though they purpose to obey Torah, they have neglected the very goal of the Torah (Rom 10:4), that is, Yeshua.

In distinction to the son (Ishmael) of the bondwoman (Hagar), the son (Isaac) of the free woman (Sarah) comes by divine appointment—through the miraculous means secured by God’s promise. The son of the free woman, then, is born free, that is, born as the true covenant member and recipient of the

covenant promises.

As one would expect, the typical interpretation of this section by the historic Christian Church has been to find a contrast between the “old covenant” and the “new covenant,” between law and grace. But Paul is not teaching us that the Torah given as covenant at Sinai produces slaves. What he is teaching us is that the Torah, utilized as a means to obtain covenant status, produces slaves, even as the attempts of Abraham and Sarah to produce the promised offspring through Hagar produces Ishmael. But the Torah was never given to Israel as a means to make covenant members. It was given to those who were already covenant members through redemption from Egypt, and as a revelation of the safeguards and standards given to covenant members in terms of their relationship with the covenant Maker, God Himself. It is when the Torah is misused that it produces slaves.

In the allegory put forward by Paul, there is no indication that the desire of Abraham and Sarah for a covenant son was wrong—they were looking for the manner in which the covenant promises would be passed to the next generation. Where they failed was the method they utilized as a means to obtain the promised son—they took matters into their own hands rather than trusting in the divine promise to produce the appointed son. In the same way, Paul does not disparage the Torah, but he speaks against the improper use of the Torah by the Influencers, as a means for Gentiles to enter the covenant.

Why is Sinai singled out as illustrative of the current error of the Influencers? The obvious answer is that the Influencers interpreted the Sinai narrative to teach that all who stood at Sinai automatically became covenant members (Ex. 23:32; 24:7-8; 34:10, 27-28). For them, acceptance of the Torah at Sinai was equal to covenant membership, and the same would obtain for the Gentiles: if they were to become covenant members, they too would have to “stand at Sinai” and receive the yoke of the commandments as defined and administrated by the Oral Torah of the Sages.

But such theology (as Paul has already shown in chapter 3) neglects the covenant made with Abraham! Surely the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had already called the descendants of Abraham His chosen, covenant people. Sinai was not the beginning of the covenant relationship with God for Israel. It was the continuation of a covenant already established. If one comes to Sinai without first participating in the faith of Abraham, the Sinai experience inevitably produces spiritual slavery. Paul knew this from his personal experience, for the Torah was well-known to him before coming to faith in Yeshua. Yet in his pre-faith reading of Torah the Messiah was veiled. As such, the Torah did not produce true freedom of soul and heart to obey God, for the Torah remained as letters on stone rather than as that which is written on the heart (2Cor 3).

26–27 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 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 contrast to the “present Jerusalem” is “the Jerusalem above.” Paul borrows from the Apocalyptic literature of his day when he speaks of “the Jerusalem above.” Note 2Baruch 4:2-5:

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