

New Covenant Theology



Brief Review

- For the last few weeks, we have been looking at New Testament passages that teach that the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant. So far we have looked at:
 - **Hebrews 8:6-13** which tells us that the fact that God promised Israel a new covenant in Jer. 31:31-34 shows us that the old covenant had a problem and therefore needed to be replaced with a covenant that was superior to it.
 - **2 Corinthians 3:1-11** which tells us that the glory of the New Covenant is so superior to that of the Old Covenant, the Old Covenant has no glory in comparison.
 - **Galatians 4:21-31** which we began looking at last week shows the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old through the use of an allegory.

The New Covenant is Superior

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

- The Galatians were being tempted to go along with the Judaizers and put themselves under the Old Covenant Law of Moses.
- So Paul says (paraphrasing): “Since you’re so anxious to be under the Law, let me point out to you what the Law has to say” – and then Paul proceeds to cite a story from the book of Genesis (one of the five books of the Law) to make his point.

The New Covenant is Superior

Galatians 4:22-23 - *For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.*

- Paul is referring here Abraham's first two sons: Ishmael and Isaac.
- Neither of them is named here (though Isaac is named later – see **verse 4:28**)

The New Covenant is Superior

Galatians 4:22-23 - *For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.*

- Paul highlights **two differences** between Abraham's two sons. They differed in:
 - The **kind of mother** they had:
 - Ishmael was the son of a “*slave woman*” (Hagar – see **vs. 24-25**)
 - Isaac was the son of a “*free woman*” (Sarah – not explicitly mentioned, but implied)
 - The **circumstances of their birth**:
 - Ishmael was “*born according to the flesh*”: that is, there was no miracle involved in his birth.
 - Isaac was “*born through promise*” – that is, a birth that God had promised which came about through miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit (see **verse 29** cf. **Romans 9:8ff**)

The New Covenant is Superior

Galatians 4:24-26 - *Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. ²⁵ Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.*

- Paul tells us that these two mothers and their children can be used allegorically (i.e. figuratively) to show the contrast between “*two covenants*”:
 - **The Covenant Given at “Mount Sinai”** (i.e. the Old Covenant)
 - whose practices the false teachers were attempting to use to enslave the Galatians to a false gospel.
 - **The New Covenant** – whose members have all been born of “*the Spirit*” (see **verse 29**) and are therefore free.

The New Covenant is Superior

Galatians 4:24-26 - *Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. ²⁵ Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.*

- Paul then continues his contrast of the two covenants through the metaphorical use of **two cities**:
 - The “*present Jerusalem*” – the physical city of Jerusalem which was the center of Judaism in Paul’s day
 - The “*Jerusalem above*” – the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Hebrews 12:18-24; Rev 3:12; 21:2,10)

The New Jerusalem

Notice how the writer of Hebrews makes a similar comparison using the heavenly Jerusalem to draw a contrast between the Old Covenant given at Mount Sinai and the New Covenant that is symbolized by the heavenly Mount Zion:

Hebrews 12:18-24 - *For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned."²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

The New Covenant is Superior

Galatians 4:27 - *For it is written [in Isaiah 54:1]: “Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.”*

- This quotation from Isaiah picks up the idea of motherhood which was introduced in the preceding verse.
- When Isaiah penned these words, the Jews were about to go into exile at the hands of the Babylonians.
- Isaiah was prophesying concerning the future restoration of the city of Jerusalem that will take place after the Exile.
- The imagery employed is that of a barren woman (Israel) who is grieving now (because of the coming exile), but who eventually (after the exile is over) will become fruitful in the bearing of children – even beyond the women around her who are now bearing children to their husbands.

The New Covenant is Superior

Galatians 4:27 - *For it is written [in Isaiah 54:1]: “Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.”*

- In our present passage, the “*barren woman*” corresponds to Sarah, who had no child until late in her life.
- The woman “*who has a husband*” corresponds to Hagar.
- The point of the quotation is that Sarah, though barren most of her life, finally became (through Isaac) the mother of more children than Hagar.
- Applied spiritually, it means that the New Covenant Christian community (symbolized by Sarah) in Paul’s day was small and did not have the size and strength that Old Covenant Judaism (symbolized by Hagar) had.
- But the New Covenant community was destined for greater fruitfulness and glory in the future.

The New Covenant is Superior

Galatians 4:28-30 - *Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. ³⁰ But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."*

- Now we who are “*brothers*” (New Covenant Christians) are like Isaac because we belong to a covenant that is a fulfillment of a “*promise*” made to Abraham and we have experienced (spiritual) birth through the miraculous power of God, the Holy Spirit.

The New Covenant is Superior

Galatians 4:28-30 - *Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. ³⁰ But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."*

- And just as Ishmael, “*the son born in the ordinary way*”, persecuted Isaac, “*the son born by the power of the Spirit*” – so in Paul’s day the natural born sons of Abraham (Old Covenant Jews) persecuted the spiritual sons of Abraham (New Covenant Christians).

The New Covenant is Superior

Galatians 4:28-30 - *Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. ³⁰ But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."*

- And therefore just as Abraham was told by his wife (and God) to "*Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son*", so the Galatians must part company with the Judiazers who are seeking to bring them under the slavery of the Old Covenant Law, because the Judiazers will never share in the freedom in Christ inherent in the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is Superior

Galatians 4:28-30 - *So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.*

- In this final statement, Paul sums up the entire paragraph:
 - We who are the people of faith do not belong to a covenant that is in bondage to the Law
 - We belong to a covenant that is free from that Law and the burden and condemnation that it brings.

The New Covenant is Superior to the Old Covenant



Questions

- What are some things that we covered today in Galatians 4:21-31 that didn't make much sense to you when we read the passage last week, but now make sense to you?
- How does the imagery that Paul uses in this passage make you feel about being a member of the New Covenant?