

**PERSONAL STUDY****Abraham in Galatians**

*And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you. – Galatians 3:29*

What we've been studying so far in this course has included multiple references to Abraham. Paul takes things even further at the end of chapter 4 when he talks about Abraham's wives and sons, and what it all means for us. When the New Testament talks about or quotes the Old Testament, it's always a good idea to pause and look back at the original story or verses to give us context and reference points to understand the connection.

So take some time to read part of Abraham's story for yourself. Use the *Inductive Study Method* to help guide your reading. Below you will find the passages to read and the *Inductive Study Method* prompts. Be sure to grab some blank paper to write down your notes as you read.

**Genesis passages to read:**

Genesis 12:1-3 – The Call of Abram

Genesis 15:1-7 – The Lord's Covenant Promise to Abram

Genesis 16:1-16 – The Birth of Ishmael

Genesis 17:1-9; 17:15-22; 18:1-15 – Abram is Named Abraham; Sarai is Named Sarah; A Son Is Promised to Sarah

Genesis 21:1-7 – The Birth of Isaac

**Inductive Study Method:**

Observation: *Who? When? Where? Why? What does it say? What do I notice?*

Interpretation: *What are the key themes or truths? What is the writer's intended meaning? What is the context? What questions do I have?*

Application: *How do I apply it? What does this mean for me?*

**Read Galatians 4:21-31**

Now that you've familiarized yourself with Abraham's story in Genesis read through Paul's words about Abraham, his children, and his wives.

How did familiarizing yourself with the passages in Genesis add to your understanding of this Galatians passage?

**So, what does it mean for us?**

What are we supposed to take away from all of this? Sometimes it can be hard to boil things down to a central idea or theme when you're studying complex passages. That's when it's good to call in reinforcements. In his commentary on Galatians, John Stott lays things out in a way that will help us catch the main point of this passage:

*This double descent from Abraham, the false and the true, the false being literal and physical, the true being figurative and spiritual, Paul sees illustrated in Abraham's two sons, Ismael and Isaac. Both had Abraham as their father, but there were two important differences between them.*

*The first difference is that they were born of different mothers. Ismael's mother Hagar was a slave woman, Abraham's servant. Isaac's mother Sarah was a free woman, Abraham's wife. And each boy took after his mother, so Ismael was born into slavery, but Isaac into freedom.*

*The second difference is that they were born in different ways. Not, of course, that the biological processes of conception and birth were different, but that different circumstances gave rise to their birth. Isaac was not born according to nature, both rather against nature. His father was a hundred years old and his mother, who had been barren, was over ninety. This is how it is put in Hebrews 11:11: 'By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.' Notice the word 'promised.' Ismael was born according to nature, but Isaac against nature, supernaturally, through an exceptional promise of God.*

*These two differences between Abraham's sons, that Ismael was born a slave according to nature, while Isaac was born free according to promise, Paul recognizes as 'an allegory.' Everyone is a slave by nature, until in the fulfillment of God's promise he is set free. So everyone is either an Ismael or an Isaac, either still what he is by nature, a slave, or by the grace of God set free...*

*This, then, is the allegory. Abraham had two sons, Ismael and Isaac, born of two mothers, Hagar and Sarah, who represent two covenants and two Jerusalems. Hagar the slave stands for the old covenant, and her son Ismael symbolizes the church of the earthy Jerusalem. Sarah the free woman stands for the new covenant, and her son Isaac symbolizes the church of the heavenly Jerusalem. Although superficially similar, because both were sons of Abraham, the two boys were fundamentally different. In the same way, Paul is arguing, it is not enough to claim Abraham as our father. The crucial question concerns who our mother is. If it is Hagar, we are like Ismael, but if it is Sarah, we are like Isaac.*

**Prayer Time**

The best way to wrap up a lengthy or intense time of studying God's Word is by spending some time in prayer. (It's also a great way to start, by the way.) So take some time now to talk with God about what you're learning. Ask Him to continue to provide you clarity as you study His Word. Share with God your gratitude for Christ's work that made you His free child.