

## Justified by the Faith of Messiah – Part 3

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The video version is available at: <https://youtu.be/hw3pNSiYJKY>

The scripture reading is Galatians 4:1-31

As we continue through Paul's words in his letter to the Galatians, Paul begins to wrap up his argument that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised to receive salvation. Paul has argued that it is not circumcision that justifies a person, but that justification comes by the faith of Yeshua. In fact, both Jew and Gentile receive salvation through that same faith. Paul centered his argument on God's promise to Abraham, not His promise to Moses, that God would bless the nations through Abraham. Paul concluded this portion of his argument at the end of chapter 3.

Galatians 3:28-29 NKJV 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Paul, now, uses a new metaphor to explain how both Jew and Gentile receive the promised inheritance through the faith of Yeshua. As we examine this metaphor, it's important to keep it in the context of Paul's very elaborate and intricate case for justification by the faith of Yeshua.

Paul uses his statement that Jew and Gentile alike are heirs according to God's promise to Abraham to segue into a new metaphor. This metaphor is that heirs are like slaves, under bondage, separated from their true identity.

Galatians 4:1-3 NKJV 1 Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, 2 but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

The heir is under bondage because he is not of an age to receive his inheritance. The slave is under bondage because he has been sold away from whatever birthright or inheritance he may have been eligible to receive. The traditional understanding is the "we" in verse three refers just to the Jewish people; that they were under bondage when they were children. Two questions arise from this. When were the Jewish people children? And what are the elements of the world? The Greek word translated as "elements" is number 4747 Stoy-khi'-on, meaning something orderly in arrangement, serial, element, principle or rudiment. Peter uses the word stoy-khi-on to refer to the basic building blocks of the world.

2 Peter 3:10 NKJV 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

The Greek work translated as "world" in Galatians 4:3 is number 2889, cosmos, meaning orderly arrangement, decoration, by implication the world. These "elements of the world" are the sequential, serial, or rudimentary principles of the world. Paul uses the word "cosmos" to indicate the physical world or that which is in contrast to the eternal. In the gospels, the word "cosmos" is used to indicate the physical world and that Yeshua came into "cosmos" to save the "cosmos". Paul's use of the term "elements of the word" probably refers to a Greek term or idiom that was familiar to the Galatians. We, two thousand years later, are trying to recreate this usage and understanding that Paul's contemporaries would have understood.

The traditional understanding of “children under the bondage of the elements of the world” is that the Jewish people were children until the coming of Messiah and the elements of the world were the Torah commandments given under Moses. Let’s see if that fits the events leading up to Mt. Sinai and God’s covenant with Israel. When God ratified his covenant with Abraham as recorded in Genesis fifteen, God stated that Abraham’s descendants would go into slavery.

Genesis 15:13 NKJV 13 Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.

While in bondage in Egypt serving as slaves under Pharaoh, the children of Israel cried out to God.

Exodus 2:23-25 NKJV 23b Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. 24 So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.

God responded to their cries and sent Moses to deliver them out of the hand of Pharaoh and take them into their inheritance.

Exodus 3:7-8 NKJV 7 And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. 8 "So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.

The bondage that the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were under was not that of Torah; it was slavery in Egypt. The words of Torah are not words of bondage, but words of life.

Deuteronomy 4:1 NKJV 1 "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you.

The Psalmist describes a righteous man as one who loves and follows Torah.

Psalms 1:2-3 NKJV 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

The “we” in Galatians 4:3 doesn’t sound like it fits just the children of Israel, and the Torah does not sound like it fits the definition of the elements of the world. Also, the word “cosmos” is never used exclusively in connection with the Jewish people or the covenant at Mt. Sinai.

Other commentators have suggested that the elements of the world refer to the paganism that the children of Israel kept falling into especially while they were in Egypt. This is a better fit as Paul goes on to exhort the Galatians not to turn back to their futile religious practices.

Galatians 4:9-11 NKJV 9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

In Colossians, Paul groups the elements or basic principles of the world with the philosophies of man.

Colossians 2:8 NKJV 8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Once again, the provisions of the Torah given by God are not at all the same as the traditions of men! It seems in this usage that the elements of the world are the combined wisdom and philosophy of men that are essentially a deceit. This would encompass the practices of paganism such as that of the Roman imperial cult as well as the any rituals of Judaism practiced through rote and not through the heart. Can the mere practice of the observation of the God's appointed times lead to salvation? Paul says no. Observances of God's feast days are no better than observance of pagan feasts if they are done through the wrong motives and if the observer's life doesn't match up with the practice or ritual. The prophet Amos agrees saying that God hates observances and sacrifices that are performed for the wrong reasons.

Amos 5:21-24 NKJV 21 "I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies. 22 Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. 23 Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. 24 But let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream.

Amos is not instructing the Jewish people to stop observing the feast days of the LORD or to stop bringing sacrifices. He is saying that those observances are pleasing to God only in the broader context of carrying out the statutes of God of treating others with righteousness and justice.

Nor is Paul telling the Galatians not to observe God's appointed times; rather he is telling them not to trade the empty pagan ritual observances with an empty observance of God's appointed times. Merely trading one observance for another will not bring salvation!

Paul, then, reminds the Galatians of his time among them. He is apparently addressing a rift in their relationship probably caused by the Judaizers.

Galatians 4:12-15 NKJV 12 Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all. 13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. 14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. 15 What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.

In what way did Paul become like the Gentiles? We have already established that Paul continued to practice Judaism his entire life. However, Paul also practiced full fellowship with the Gentiles. By doing so, he became separated from the practices he grew up with under his teaching as a Pharisee. Members of the sects of the Pharisees would not even enter the home of a Gentile because of the possibility that they would become ritually unclean. This was true even of the homes of the God-fearing Gentiles who practiced the whole Torah but did not convert to Judaism. Paul became like the Galatians in that he behaved more like a God-fearer than a Pharisee. Paul exhorts the Galatians to become like him in their practices reminding them of the close relationship they had when he was with them.

Paul goes on to warn the Galatians about the motives of the Judaizers.

Galatians 4:17-20 NKJV 17 They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. 18 But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only

when I am present with you. 19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, 20 I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

Paul, after reminding the Galatians of his time with them and of the gospel he preached, addresses those Galatians who want to convert to Judaism.

Galatians 4:21 NKJV 21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?

He is specifically addressing Gentiles who are considering becoming Jewish. The metaphor that follows is, then, about the choice for the Gentiles.

Galatians 4:22-26 NKJV 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar-- 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children-- 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

Remember, we receive justification through the promised seed of Abraham. Paul is contrasting the covenant with Abraham with the covenant at Mt. Sinai. He is not contrasting the Covenant at Mt. Sinai with the covenant instituted by Yeshua's blood. Paul's entire argument has been based on the covenant with Abraham. Sarah and Isaac represent the promise that through Abraham all nations will be blessed. Isaiah encourages the Israelites to look to the covenant with Abraham for deliverance.

Isaiah 51:1-2 NKJV 1 "Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, You who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, And to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. 2 Look to Abraham your father, And to Sarah who bore you; For I called him alone, And blessed him and increased him."

Those who seek to receive justification through the flesh are looking toward circumcision and the Torah for justification. By doing so, they are bypassing the promise to Abraham and looking at their own acts to save them. They are not looking to Abraham and Sarah. Although Ishmael was circumcised and a son of Abraham, he was not the one to whom the promise was given. D. Thomas Lancaster explains about those seeking salvation through conversion to Judaism in his book [The Holy Epistle to the Galatians](#):

Paul compared those converts to Ishmael, the son of Hagar because there was nothing miraculous about the way that they entered the family of Abraham. They became sons of Abraham by physical means. In another passage, he called it the circumcision of the flesh and the circumcision made by hands, according to the flesh.<sup>1</sup>

Paul cites as the proof text of his argument another passage in Isaiah.

Galatians 4:27 NKJV 27 For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband."

In this passage that Paul cited, found in Isaiah 54, Isaiah is addressing the city of Jerusalem who finds that she has more children than she knew about. The Jewish sages connect this passage in Isaiah to Sarah. Like Sarah, Jerusalem's tent is enlarged, and, like Abraham, the nations are blessed.

Isaiah 54:1-3 NKJV 1 "Sing, O barren, You who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, You who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate Than the children of the married woman," says the LORD. 2 "Enlarge the place of your tent, And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, And strengthen your stakes. 3 For you shall expand to the right and to the left, And your descendants will inherit the nations, And make the desolate cities inhabited.

When Isaac took Rebecca as his bride, he took her into the tent of Sarah to continue the promise that the seed will be borne of Abraham through his wife Sarah.

Paul continues with his metaphor of Ishmael and Isaac by reminding them that Ishmael taunted Isaac.

Galatians 4:29-31 NKJV 29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

The scripture doesn't record what Ishmael taunted Isaac about. However, the Jewish Targum and Talmudic writings explain that it was about circumcision. Lancaster quotes Genesis Rabbah 55:4:

Ishmael said to Isaac, "I am more beloved than you because I was circumcised at the age of thirteen." Isaac retorted, "I am more beloved than you because I was circumcised at eight days." Ishmael taunted, "That makes me more beloved. At the age of thirteen, I could have protested the procedure, but I did not... I am more beloved than you because I was circumcised at the age of thirteen, but you were circumcised as a baby and had no choice in the matter."<sup>ii</sup>

Those Gentile converts who took on circumcision as an adult criticized those Gentiles who became sons of Abraham through the promise! They taunted those who didn't become circumcised saying they were better. Paul rests his case for the argument that the Gentiles did not need to become circumcised in order to receive salvation. Gentiles don't enter into the kingdom of God through the covenant at Mt. Sinai, requiring circumcision; they enter through the covenant promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him. Circumcision was given to Abraham to set aside his descendants that they would know that the promise to all nations is through the seed of Abraham. Paul says in his letter to the Romans in chapter 9, 3 through 5:

Romans 9:3-5 NKJV 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Yeshua, the seed promised to Abraham came through Abraham's line. Paul spread the good news that because of Yeshua's coming salvation is available to all who believe both Jew and Gentile. It is not through circumcision or adherence to the law because no one can even perfectly keep the law outwardly let alone inwardly. Yet, God, in His mercy and goodness, chose to bring salvation to Israel and the nations through the promised seed of Abraham. Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised, receive salvation through the faith of Yeshua and our belief that He is the one sent by God.

Study Questions:

1. In Paul's metaphor of the heir and the slave, he stated that the heir was like the slave. How are we like both the heir and the slave before the coming of Messiah?

2. When were the children of Israel under bondage to the “elements of the world?” Were or are Gentiles also under bondage to the “elements of the world?”
3. What are the “weak and beggarly elements that Paul asserted that the Galatians were returning to in Galatians 4:9?”
4. Paul contrasts his own behavior while with the Galatians with the behavior of the Judaizers. How do their behaviors compare? What is Paul’s goal in making this comparison?
5. Paul based his entire argument that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised on the covenant promises God made to Abraham. How does the metaphor of Sarah and Hagar fit into Paul’s argument? Does this change the way you view the New Covenant?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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<sup>i</sup> Lancaster, D. Thomas. [The Holy Epistle to the Galatians](#). First Fruits of Zion. ©2001. Page 223.

<sup>ii</sup> Lancaster, D. Thomas. [The Holy Epistle to the Galatians](#). First Fruits of Zion. ©2001. Page 229.