Blessings to you in the name of our Saviour Jesus

*In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.*

Hebrews 5:7

On the eve of His crucifixion, our Saviour Jesus cried out to God while in the Garden of Gethsemane. His soul was in agony. He sweated out drops of blood. He knew what He faced: He faced the fierce wrath of God and that involved being separated from His Father. Just as physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body, spiritual death is the separation of the spirit from God. Jesus faced both.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus turned to the One who was able to save Him from death. And at first, we might think that God did not save Him; for He experienced separation from His Father and died on the cross. But His Father did save Him: Jesus’ separation ended once the penalty of sin had been paid; and God released Him from the grip of death, resurrecting Him to eternal, bodily life.

We must note the last section of this verse: Jesus was heard because of His piety. Jesus is the only one this can apply to. No other human-being has lived or will live their life in the perfect piety that God the Father requires. The only reason we can be heard by the Father is because of the perfect piety of Jesus, who paid the price of our sins.

How precious is our Lord Jesus. We are heard because of His piety; we are saved because of His sacrifice; and the Father will look upon us because we are covered in His righteousness.

In Christ’s love

John

10-30-22

Galatians 4:21-31

Our God is truly an awesome God. He used a seemingly random (and sinful) occurrence between two women that took place about 600 years before Moses and 2000 years before Christ, and by the Holy Spirit enabled the apostle Paul to use what happened to explain the difference between the Mosaic covenant and the New covenant in Christ. What happened between Sarah and Hagar was still relevant to the church in Galatia after 2000 years; and it is still relevant to us today.

Once the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to how the Bible is completely held together and interwoven in spite of having been written over a period of 1500 years, it becomes obvious that this is the word of God. It is also amazing to watch how the Lord orchestrated things to take place in the physical world, so that we could gain an understanding of the spiritual world. Here, Paul demonstrates one of those lessons to the church of Galatia. We reap the benefits of the original account in Genesis and Paul’s exposition to the Galatians.

First, let me give a little background on the Galatian church and Paul’s letter to them. Galatia was a Roman province that was located in what in now the nation of Turkey. It was kind of a long narrow province that was in the center of the area of Asia minor, and ran north and south. Most of the cities that Paul visited on his first missionary journey were in Galatia. He also visited some of the churches there on his second and third missionary journeys.

The letter is written “*to the churches of Galatia*.” There were several church bodies in the province; at least one in each city that Paul visited. This letter would have been circulated around to all the individual church bodies and read to the congregations. Additionally, this letter was written by Paul shortly after his first missionary journey where he had established churches and appointed elders to oversee the flock. The account of this journey is recorded in Acts 13 and 14.

Satan and evil do not take breaks or slack off. He will try to hinder the spread of the Gospel; if that fails, he will try to confuse Christians so that they are ineffective for the work of the Kingdom. As soon as Paul had gone back to Syrian Antioch, satan attacked; some men came to the Galatian churches with a false Gospel.

These men were Jews who had understood Jesus as Messiah, but lacked the understanding that He was the fulfillment of the Law. They believed that all the Law of Moses had to be maintained in order to receive salvation. We would recognize this today as a false Gospel requiring Christ plus works. The men who were bringing the false teaching into the Galatian church are called Judaizers. The wanted to make Gentiles who turned to Christ follow all the Law of Moses; to basically make them Jews.

This letter is not against Jews in general. It is against those few who were spreading false teaching that Paul must deal with. The Judaizers may have simply lacked understanding or they may have been malicious in their intent; either way, they were misleading the new Christians in Galatia.

Again, it is the same today. There are many false teachers in the world and they have access to large numbers of people. Some are simply confused themselves; many are doing it for personal gain. Either way, we must study our Bibles so that we are not mislead; and so that we can help others to steer clear of them.

These Judaizers came to the Galatian churches shortly after Paul had been there and established them. They taught that Paul had been incomplete in his teaching and that in order to be saved, the Christians also had to follow all the laws that Moses had set forth. No doubt, they had some very compelling arguments from the Torah, or the Law; the first five books of our Bible. Paul got word of what was happening. Many of these new Galatian Christians were at least confused; and many were convinced that they had to start following all the holy days, circumcision, and dietary restrictions of the Mosaic covenant.

Paul’s letter is an argument that the Galatians are being mislead by the Judaizers and that they need to cling to the promise of salvation through Christ alone. Surely the Judaizers will hear this letter, so Paul makes a case from the same resource they are using: the Torah. The book of Genesis is considered part of the Law. It was written by Moses and has the foundations for the covenant of Moses and, of course, the foundation for the later new covenant in Jesus Christ.

In verse 21, Paul tries to let them know of the gravity of following the Law. *Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?* He is asking them if they have seriously considered all that the Law requires. He is asking them if it makes sense to live by the Law after all they have learned about the perfectly atoning sacrifice of Jesus. And he is also asking if they have not recognized that all the Law points to Christ.

Paul goes right to the weapon the Judaizers are using against him, and turns it back on them. Paul goes to the Torah. He gives a brief summery of what happened for the sake of the Gentiles who are less familiar with Genesis, but also to set up the key elements for his argument. Abraham had been promised several things, including children, land, and being a blessing to all the nations.

We know from Genesis that Abraham has two sons. One is by Hagar. Hagar is a slave, or bondwoman. She bore to Abraham a son named Ishmael. Abraham’s true wife was named Sarah. She was a free woman; she was not bound to Abraham or anyone else by slavery. She also bore Abraham a son who was named Isaac. Sarah was 90 years old when Isaac was born.

Paul makes a point of Ishmael being born according to the flesh, or in the ordinary way. Hagar was in her child bearing years. She and Abraham had relations and she became pregnant without any supernatural intervention. Although God had promised Abraham a son, there was nothing special about this boy.

On the other hand, the son of Sarah was the direct result of God fulfilling a promise. At 90 years old, it was impossible for her to conceive. Yet she did. This did require the intervention of God. This was proof that God was all-powerful and able to bring about whatever He promised. The conception of Isaac still occurred by natural means, but it could only be by an act of God that her aged body could be with child.

In verse 24, Paul uses a term that we must be very careful with. He says, “*This is allegorically speaking*” or your translation might use the word “figuratively”. Allegory has been used as a means to interpret the Bible both in Judaism and in the church. As often happens with human-beings, once we get off track, it usually goes to extremes. Attempts have been made to make the whole Bible allegory. The teaching is that the Bible does not record actual events, but that all the stories are meant to represent something else. Some will try to use this verse from Paul as justification for doing this.

Paul is guided by the Holy Spirit in his writing. In this case, the apostle can use Sarah and Hagar as allegory in order to make his case. He makes no indication that the account in Genesis is not true. The account of Sarah and Hagar is actual history, not something made up to represent something else. Again, while allegory may be useful in interpreting the Bible, we must be very careful that the allegory interprets Scripture according to Scripture, not according to preconceived notions on our part.

The women represent two different covenants. Hagar represents the covenant of Moses; the Law that was given at Mount Sanai. Sarah represents the new covenant; the one that comes through faith in Jesus.

Paul refers to the children of Hagar as being slaves. In that time, both in Abraham’s time and the time Paul was writing, any child born to a slave was automatically a slave. The people understood that.

Now, the Law was given through Moses by grace. God gave revelation of Himself to His chosen people. They didn’t deserve to have the honor of knowing God in the way that He let Himself be known. But, trying to achieve salvation by the works of the Law led to slavery. Slavery to the Law.

Paul had also made an important point earlier in this letter. In chapter 3, verse 10 he wrote, ‘*For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.”*’ Even though the Law of Moses is made up of many laws, plural, it is referred to as “The Law of Moses”, singular. So, every part of the Law is integral; to break one law is to break the whole thing. Since we are all sinners, we cannot keep the whole law. Therefore, we are cursed under it.

Paul is making it clear that to try to achieve salvation by following the Law results in slavery and being cursed. Certainly, when properly understood, the people of Galatia wouldn’t want anything to do with this.

Now Paul states that the Old Covenant also applies to the current Jerusalem located in Israel. For the most part, the city still tried to follow all the ceremonial, civil, and moral laws given by Moses. This is before the destruction of the temple that took place in 70 AD. So, the practicing Jews are bound by slavery and under a curse because they are unable to keep the Law. Paul will come back to the significance of this.

On the contrary, there is another Jerusalem. He refers to it as “*the Jerusalem above*”. The concept of a heavenly Jerusalem shows up in both the Old and the New Testaments. For example, the prophet Ezekiel records a vision in chapters 40 through 48 of seeing a new Jerusalem in heaven. And most of us are familiar with Revelation 21:2, “*And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.*”

Paul mixes his allegory with metaphor; he combines Sarah, with the new covenant, with the Jerusalem above. Sarah was the mother of the child of promise, Isaac. This was the child God promised to Abraham through whom all the nations would be blessed. That blessing came through Jesus Christ, the new covenant, whom Paul had preached to the Galatians. Jesus was the ultimate child of promise; the one who would be a blessing to all nations. His birth was also impossible; His birth could only be brought about by God.

The covenant in Jesus releases us from the slavery and the curse of the Law. All who accept Jesus as Saviour come under Sarah, the new covenant, and she becomes our mother; because by that new covenant we are spiritually born again. We are citizens of the Jerusalem above; the heavenly Jerusalem.

Paul quotes from Isaiah 54:1, showing how it applies to Sarah and the promise of blessing through her offspring. Although Sarah was barren throughout most of her life, she rejoiced when she found out that she was with child. Through the promised child Isaac, she became the mother of a vast multitude of people in the natural physical world. But she also became the mother of an even greater number of spiritual offspring; through Isaac, but then through Jesus.

In verse 28, Paul gently reminds the Christians in Galatia that they are children of promise. Their salvation comes strictly from faith in Jesus Christ. They are free from the Law as the means to righteousness. They are spiritually reborn through Jesus Christ and have become children of God.

Verses 29 and 30 refer to a section of Genesis we haven’t gotten to yet, but I think most of us are aware of what happened. Isaac was born when Ishmael was about 15 years old. Some times later, Sarah saw Ishmael mocking her son Isaac. Sarah had had enough and demanded that Abraham send him and his mother away. God told Abraham it was time, and he sent them away.

Paul pointed out that the one born of the flesh persecuted the one born of the spirit. In the analogy, those who were under the Old Covenant persecuted those under the New. This is what was happening to the Galatians: they were under the new covenant and they were being misled, or persecuted, by those under the old.

Paul quotes from Genesis 21 to show that those who adhere to the old Covenant will not inherit the promises that are given to those who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. Again he reminds them that they are children of the promise; they are free in Christ. They will receive the inheritance of the Promised Land that is above. The Judaizers, the persecutors, will not.

Certainly these things can apply to us. There are many in the world who are born only in the flesh; they live carnally and remain spiritually dead in their sin. These will never receive the inheritance of eternal life. And they will persecute us. But we who are true followers of Jesus Christ have been spiritually reborn and are alive and are heirs to eternal life. We must never forget this. We are children of promise.

Prayer

We are before You, Lord, in deep gratitude, that You have made a way for our salvation in Your only begotten Son, Jesus, who is the Christ. The covenant You made through Moses with Your chosen people Israel, shows Your holiness; Your absolute perfection of character. It shows that we must have that same perfection in order to be in Your presence; in order to be associated with You.

Time has shown, beyond any doubt, that we are incapable of following Your perfect Law. We are incapable of being in Your holy presence. To try to stand before You would be our destruction. But You have blessed us by the Holy Spirit and have given us the understanding that by our own works and efforts we are eternally lost. That is a blessing because we come to understand that we must turn to You.

Blessed Lord, You have extended to us the means of salvation. You have given us the means by which we might be saved. You have provided the perfection we are required to have through Jesus. We praise You that You look upon His perfection instead of our sinfulness. We thank You that You have counted His righteousness as ours. You are holy and just; You are kind and merciful. You are our God, and we are Your people.

We worship You in the name of Jesus

Amen