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January 4th: Jeremiah 3 & Galatians 4

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Alastair Roberts

Judah, return to the Lord! Do not turn back to slavery.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Jeremiah chapter 3. If a man divorces his wife and she goes from him, and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her? Would not that land be greatly polluted? You have played the whore with many lovers, and would you return to me, declares the Lord? Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see. Where have you not been ravished? By the waysides you have sat awaiting lovers, like an Arab in the wilderness. You have polluted the land with your vile whoredom.

Therefore the showers have been withheld, and the spring rain has not come. Yet you have the forehead of a whore. You refuse to be ashamed.

Have you not just now called to me? My father, you are the friend of my youth. Will he be angry forever? Will he be indignant to the end? Behold, you have spoken, but you have done all the evil that you could. The Lord said to me in the days of King Josiah, Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel? How she went up on every high hill and

under every green tree, and there played the whore? And I thought, After she has done all this, she will return to me.

But she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore.

Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. Yet for all this, her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, declares the Lord. And the Lord said to me, Faithless Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.

Go and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, Return, faithless Israel, declares the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the Lord. I will not be angry forever, only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the Lord your God, and scattered your favors among foreigners under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed my voice, declares the Lord.

Return, O faithless children, declares the Lord, for I am your master. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.

And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the Lord, they shall no more say, The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed. It shall not be made again.

At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem. And they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north, to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage.

I said, How I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me my father, and would not turn from following me. Surely as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord.

A voice on the bare heights is heard, the weeping and pleading of Israel's sons, because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the Lord their God. Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness. Behold, we come to you, for you are the Lord our God.

Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains. Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. But from our youth the shameful thing has devoured all for which our fathers laboured, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters.

Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonour cover us. For we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God. Jeremiah chapter 2 introduced marital imagery, hearkening back to a honeymoon period where Israel followed him in the wilderness.

The Lord condemns Israel for their forgetfulness and their unfaithfulness. Judah is addicted to their promiscuous pursuit of idols. The Lord sought covenant love from them, but they scandalously abandoned him, the fountain of living waters, for broken cisterns that they had dug, and for the waters of Egypt and Assyria, from whom they hoped for security against the rising threat of Babylon in the north.

Here in chapter 3 the marriage metaphor will be explored further and the prophecy will move to the question of repentance and return to the Lord. The marriage metaphor, first introduced positively with reference to a time when Israel willingly followed the Lord, curdled as chapter 2 told of Israel's many adulteries. Having heard of Israel and Judah's adulteries, chapter 3 begins with divorce.

Deuteronomy chapter 24 verses 1-4 gives a law concerning divorce. When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes, because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, and puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her, and writes her a certificate of divorce, and puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. Presenting such a situation, where a man had divorced his wife and become another man's wife, the Lord asks whether restoration of the original relationship would be possible.

Even in the unlikely scenario where a man and a woman desired to restore their relationship after extreme betrayal and infidelity, the law would have struck the way. Israel had multiplied her lovers and betrayed the Lord time and again. Presented with the analogy, it is clear that Judah's return and the restoration of the bond would be out of the question.

The union would be irrevocably severed. The whole land has been polluted by their unfaithfulness. Like an unfaithful wife who had pursued her affairs in every room and on every piece of furniture of the family home, the entire land that the Lord had given to His people was defiled by their adultery, poisoned by their persistent idolatry.

Like a stranger's underwear found under the sofa, or hidden letters detailing trysts discovered in open drawers, throughout the land there are sites where Judah has forsaken the Lord, worshipping gods of wood and stone. Could a wife who had been as

brazenly adulterous and had been rejected by her husband return to him? Emphatically not. If this is the case for such a wife, how much more for Judah? We might ask whether the Lord had in fact divorced Judah.

It does not seem that He had, although commentators disagree on the question. The analogy highlights the extreme jeopardy in which Judah stands and the immense mercy that they are presuming upon. The analogy of divorce is also present in Isaiah 50 verse 1 which rejects the idea that the Lord had divorced His people or sold them into slavery as if to His creditors.

Thus says the Lord, Where is your mother's certificate of divorce, with which I sent her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away. The book of Hosea notably develops the metaphor of the promiscuously adulterous wife who was taken back by her husband, symbolising the Lord's restoration of His relationship with His wayward people. The land of Israel, in contrast to Egypt, depended heavily upon the rain for its irrigation.

One of the curses of the covenant was the stopping of rain, perhaps most famously experienced in the drought of Elijah. Amos chapter 4 verse 7-8 speaks of such a judgement too. I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest.

I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city. One field would have rain, and the field on which it did not rain would wither. So two or three cities would wander to another city to drink water, and would not be satisfied.

Yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. The Lord has withheld the rain, yet Judah has not returned to Him. Ironically, they are worshipping fertility symbols on dry hilltops in a parched land, having rejected the fountain of living waters.

They are like a stubborn whore who will refuse to acknowledge any sin and who is beyond shame. Now they seem presumptuously to be turning their faces to the Lord, believing that He is a soft touch. With flattering and fine sounding words, they think that they can win a reprieve from judgement, even while they are willfully persisting in their sin.

While limits for the dating of other prophecies can be figured out, the allegory of the unfaithful sisters in verses 6-7 is, as Jack Lundbom notes, the only passage in chapters 1-20 with some explicit date attached, occurring sometime during the days of King Josiah. It allegorises the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah as two sisters. Lundbom suggests that we should regard it as a pesha, an interpretative commentary upon the surrounding oracles, as it draws so heavily and extensively from the prophecies around it, from the end of chapter 2 to the beginning of chapter 4. He identifies 17 verses from which the

allegory borrows its expressions.

A similar allegory of two sisters is found in Ezekiel chapter 23, introduced in verses 1-4 of that chapter. The word of the Lord came to me, son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. They played the whore in Egypt, they played the whore in their youth.

There their breasts were pressed and their virgin bosoms handled. Ahola was the name of the older, and Aholaba the name of her sister. They became mine and they bore sons and daughters.

As for their names, Ahola is Samaria, and Aholaba is Jerusalem. The Lord here presents himself in anthropomorphic terms, like a husband watching his wife in her adulteries, pathetically believing that, once she had sunk to a particular point, she would return to him. But she never did.

Eventually, for all of her sins, the Lord sent Israel away, finally, with the decree of divorce, into exile. However, Judah, who had watched all of this, was brazen in her own unfaithfulness, taking her adulteries lightly. While it seemed as if Judah had returned to the Lord during the reforms of the reign of Jezhiah, tragically, this return was more an appearance than in reality.

Hope has not been utterly extinguished though, but Judah's feigned return, all while her heart wandered away from the Lord, made her even worse than her divorced sister Israel. Even despite the rebellion of faithless Israel, the Lord still proclaims his kindness to her, seeking to woo her back if she would only repent. The relationship might be restored, even with divorced Israel, bursting the banks of the analogy, as if the grace of the Lord exceeds both the limits of the law and the extent of the forgiveness that could be expected from any human husband.

If they only openly acknowledged what they had done, and sought forgiveness, they might be recovered, the broken relationship might be repaired. If Judah learned anything from Israel, it should be that, despite all that Israel had done, the mercy and the grace of the Lord was extended to them still, if they would only receive it. Judah may come off worse than Israel on account of their largely feigned return, but the Lord here may explain that an unfeigned return would lead to their restoration.

Like the lost son of the parable, the father's love still yearns for his estranged child in the far country. Addressing his faithless children, Israel and Judah, the Lord calls for them to return, whether from the lands of their exile or addressing unfaithful people in the land, from the waywardness of their hearts. He is their master, their true master, not the false master who assumed that name, Baal.

Any who return, the Lord will eagerly restore to Zion, the numbers of the regathered

remnants steadily increasing. He will establish them in the land, making them fruitful, granting them good rulers and guides. In the days of restoration that would follow this, things would be very different.

The context of these verses need not be presumed to be after the destruction of Jerusalem and the presumed loss of the Ark of the Covenant. The point is that the Ark is eclipsed by Jerusalem itself. However, a date later than the reign of Josiah might make more sense.

Lundbom suggests that the earliest likely date is 597 BC, when the first wave of Judahite exiles left for Babylon. The Ark and the Mercy Seat were temple furniture symbolising the Lord's throne in the heart of the temple in the Holy of Holies. But Jerusalem itself would become the throne of the Lord, the Holy City much as we see in Revelation, where the New Jerusalem takes on the cube-like proportions of the Holy of Holies.

When the days of their restoration arrived, nations from all around would gather to the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem, as Micah and Isaiah had foretold. Micah 4, verses 1-4 It shall also come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established at the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills, and people shall flow to it. And many nations shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks.

Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. At this time Israel and Judah would both return from their exiles in northern countries, and be joined together in possession of the land that the Lord gave to their forebears as an inheritance.

This joining together of the two peoples is also spoken of in Ezekiel 37, verses 15-23. After their return, the Lord would lovingly restore both of them together in his land. The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, take a stick and write on it, for Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him.

Then take another stick and write on it, for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and all the house of Israel associated with him. And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. And when your people say to you, Will you not tell us what you mean by these? Say to them, Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph, that is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel associated with him, and I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they

may be one in my hand.

When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, then say to them, Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king over them all. And they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms.

They shall not defile themselves any more with their idols, and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them, and they shall be my people, and I will be their guard. The passage is full of the pathos of the Lord, yearning for the restoration of His wayward and rebellious sons.

He recalls the way that He first established them in the land, anticipating that, in showing them such great favour and honour, that they would respond with faithfulness, and by reciprocating His love, regarding Him as their Father. However, they were treacherous, like an adulterous wife. In the concluding verses of the chapter, we might see what is a futile lament of Israel's children to their false gods to restore them.

They have forgotten the Lord, and so call out to gods who cannot save them. Then the voice of the Lord calls to them, the Father who longs for their return from their rebellion. If they will but come back to Him, He will heal their faithlessness.

He will address the deep heart condition behind it all, circumcising their hearts, as Deuteronomy chapter 30 verse 6 had promised, overcoming their addiction to idolatry, and restoring their hearts to Him. The verses that follow are the voice of an imagined penitent people, who respond to the invitation of the Lord. As if coming to their senses after a long period of altered consciousness or intoxication, they recognise that they have been trapped in dangerous and destructive delusions all this time.

The true source of salvation is only the Lord their God. The gods to whom they had looked, merely devoured them and all of their labours and possessions. What did they have to show for all of their worship of the Baals, of Asherah, of Molech, and other false gods? The loss of their children to the fire, countless sacrifices devoted to a worse than worthless object, years of their lives squandered and expended in fruitless labour, and the dishonour of exile after it all.

As the horror of what they had pointlessly wasted came upon them, and the immense value of what their rebellion had stolen from them came to their awareness, they mourned it most deeply. A question to consider, where else in scripture might we get some sense of the catastrophic toll of sinful rebellion upon the lives of the people who give themselves to it? Galatians chapter 4. I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child,

is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father! So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid I may have laboured over you in vain. Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.

You did me no wrong. You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.

Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.

I wish I could be present with you now, and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? 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.

Now this may be interpreted allegorically. These women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery.

She is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia. She corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear! Break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labour! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband. Now

you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman. So, brothers, we are not children of the slave, but of the free woman.

Paul has just described the way in which the law served as a guardian, indeed as a jailer, until Christ came, and now in chapter 4 he develops that image further. Verses 1 to 7 of this chapter are largely a recapitulation of the verses that precede them in chapter 3 verses 23 to 29. Now before faith came we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

So then the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come we are no longer under a guardian. For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

It can be illuminating to read these verses alongside chapter 4 verses 1 to 7 and see the parallels between statements such as but now that faith has come and but when the fullness of time had come. There are also parallels between verses 3 to 6 of chapter 4 and chapter 3 verses 13 to 14. Paul gives the illustration of a child who is the heir of a great estate.

As long as the child is a minor though he does not have the management of the estate and can himself be under the supervision of the stewards of his father's estate. This period of subjection involves being under sin in verse 22 of chapter 3, under the law in verse 23 of chapter 3 and enslaved to the elementary principles of the world, verse 3 of this chapter. What the elementary principles of the world are is much debated.

Some have argued that they are rudimentary principles or basic teachings, others that they are elemental spirits. However I think the strongest case is that they refer to the physical elements. Another reference to these elements is found in Colossians chapter 2 verse 8 and 16 to 23.

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to

come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast the head, from which the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to things that all perish as they are used, according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. In Colossians chapter 2, as in verses 8-10 of this chapter, the elementary principles seem to refer to the physical cosmos.

Old covenant religion was religion ruled by, ordered around and focused upon physical elements, upon times and seasons, upon matters of diet, upon various physical rituals such as circumcision and the various sacrifices, etc. These things are not bad in themselves, and properly used, some things like them can still have a place in worship and broader Christian practice. However, they represent a religion under the rule of the natural elements of the physical world, composed of sacrifice, principles of clean and unclean, and calendrical feasts.

In this respect, faithful Jewish religion had a great deal in common with the religion of the pagans. This was religion in the flesh, religion under the guardianship of fleshly elements. Israel had to relate to God in terms of physical sacrifices of specific animals, in terms of a physical building and its furniture, and the like.

This system constructed of the elementary principles guarded and guided Israel in its childhood. However, in the new covenant, there is a move from the shadowy elements to the substance, which is Christ. We don't come under the rule of a physical temple, but we relate to the body of Christ.

We don't have the same physical sacrifices that we perform, but we perform spiritual sacrifices on the basis of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Our worship still involves symbolic mediation, where physical elements can function as effective symbols of the spiritual acts we are performing. But we no longer act in terms of symbolic intermediation, where physical elements stand in the place of the spiritual realities, so that we relate to the physical elements rather than to the spiritual realities more directly.

When the fullness of time came, God sent his Son. The Son is born of a woman. He is human.

He is born as a human being of a human being. He is also the seed of the woman promised way back in Genesis 3.15. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and

between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

He is born under the law, born under the old order of the elementary principles within the sacrificial system, the dietary laws, circumcision, the temple, etc. He redeems those under the law, delivering them from slavery to the guardianship of the law, so that they can enjoy the status and privilege of full sons entering into their inheritance. Just as God sent the Son, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, so that we might relate to him as full sons and heirs.

The period of supervision by the elementary principles was temporary. It ended when the time came for the child to enter into the inheritance. For Gentiles the situation was different.

They too were under the elementary principles, also functioning within societies subordinated to physical and cosmic principles in their sacrificial systems, with their idols, their temples, and all these other things, but they were not as those set apart as the appointed heirs. The way that Paul aligns the status of Gentiles and the status of Old Covenant Jews, both being under the elementary principles of the world, really should be startling to us. It would have been to his first readers.

Paul is shocked that the Galatian Christians, having been delivered from their subjection to the elements as Gentiles and brought into the freedom of Sonship in Christ, would turn back to the subjection to those elements characteristic of Jews. This is like the Son who is no longer a minor, but the heir of all, going back to the stewards as if they were his masters. Or perhaps to be more precise, it's like someone who has been adopted into a family and given the right to enjoy the full run of the inheritance, seeking to come under the rule of stewards that had ruled his fellow heirs before they had entered into their majority.

While the heir is privileged, even when he hasn't entered into the inheritance, if he turns back from entering into his inheritance and continues to subject himself to the guardians, that privilege becomes meaningless. At this point Paul expresses some of the more personal character of his dismay. He reminds the Galatians of the bond that they once shared, speaking of himself as if a mother struggling in childbirth for them.

Paul became as the Gentile Christians of the Galatian churches. He ceased living as a Jew and lived as a Gentile. He speaks about this in 1 Corinthians 9.21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law, not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ, that I might win those outside the law.

He now wants them to become as he is, to live as those who are not under the law. The Gentiles were never under the law in the way that the Jews were, but they should recognize the similarities between the elementary order to which Israel was subject

under the law and that to which they were subject as pagans. When Paul first encountered the Galatians, he was suffering from a physical infirmity, perhaps as a result of some cruel punishment that had been inflicted upon him.

Later in the epistle he speaks of bearing the marks of Jesus in his body, in chapter 6. We might also think of the thorn in the flesh that Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 12. Some have speculated, on the basis of the strange reference to the removal of their eyes in verses 15 and in verse 11 of chapter 6 where Paul refers to the largeness of his writing, that his infirmity might be related to his eyesight, but I think it's most likely that the expression in verse 15 is just proverbial. The Galatian Christians are being led astray by the Judaizers, resulting in a cooling of their affection for Paul.

The Judaizers are zealous to win them over, so that the Galatian churches will be zealous for their Judaizing cause. Paul is perplexed, feeling that he must begin all over again with them. It's like going through the agony of birth again, even after you thought you brought a child to birth.

He concludes the passage with an allegorical argument from Genesis. The law isn't merely the commandments, but it's also the narrative parts of the Pentateuch. Paul's allegory of Sarah and Hagar and their two sons is a strange and confusing argument to many people.

However, examined more closely, it should make more sense to us. There is a strong logic to it. It involves a series of contrasts between two sets of sons, between Ishmael and Isaac, and the realities that define them, spoken of as their mothers, Hagar and Sarah respectively.

Hagar is associated with slavery, Sarah with freedom, Hagar with the flesh, Sarah with the promise and the spirit, Hagar with Mount Sinai, Sarah, implicitly, with the heavenly mountain, Hagar with the old covenant, Sarah with the new covenant, Hagar with the present Jerusalem, Sarah with the Jerusalem above. Paul's purpose is not to wrench the story of Ishmael and Isaac from its context in Genesis, and use it as an illustration of some general truths. First, the theme of being sons of Abraham was a central one in the preceding chapter, so this isn't something that's chosen as an example at random.

He is drawing a contrast between two different types of sonship of Abraham, already witnessed to in the Old Testament itself. Second, he is revisiting the text of Genesis, and we should see that Paul's use of the story arises from themes that are very much at play there. In Genesis, Isaac is the child of promise and the spirit, while Ishmael is born of the flesh.

In the fullness of time, Gentiles have been brought to birth as the sons and daughters of Abraham, and this is a wonderful event, although it's against the regular course of nature. It's a gracious act of God by His spirit, not an achievement of the flesh. The same

God who miraculously opened the womb of Sarah has brought the Gentiles to birth.

Much as Ishmael, the child of the flesh, wasn't the true heir, so true inheritance belongs to the children of promise like Isaac. For the Galatians, this means that their status must rest on something more than fleshly descent from, or fleshly association with Abraham. They are free children who are no longer minors.

James Jordan describes the analogy in some depth. The reason that Hagar and Ishmael can be used to illustrate the Jews is that they were indeed the first Jews. Every Israelite was like Ishmael in that he started out uncircumcised and then was circumcised on the eighth day, as Ishmael was at the age of 13.

Like Ishmael and Abraham, Israel took upon themselves the burden of circumcision after they had lived for a time as uncircumcised. The fact that Ishmael was relieved of that burden when Isaac took it up was a message to Israel that they would be relieved of it when the Messiah took it up. Hagar and Ishmael made an exodus into the wilderness, but came only as far as Paran.

This is the truth also about Israel. Though they entered the promised land in a physical sense, they did not really enter it. As Paul writes in Hebrews, if Joshua had really given them rest, there would not remain a greater day in which the rest would be entered.

Hebrews chapter 4. As Ishmael was to Israel, so Israel was to Jesus. Ishmael was born into the faith of Abraham, came under the law, circumcision, and heard the promise. But the promise was not to him directly, but to a replacement, Isaac.

Just so, Israel was the seed of Abraham, came under the law, and heard the promise. But the promise was not to them directly, but to a replacement, Jesus. The circumcised Ishmael initially contested with Isaac to be the true heir of the promise.

Just so, the circumcision was contesting with Jesus and his people to be the true heirs of the promise. Ishmael needed to be cast out so that Isaac's role might be clarified. Just so, Israel needed to be cast out so that Jesus' role might be clarified.

Ishmael was delivered from being under the yoke of circumcision and became a God-fearer. Just so, Israel should accept being delivered from the yoke of the law, considered as a death-dealing burden, and become God-fearers. Now this would raise questions for us about the current state of Israel.

Israel descended from Abraham according to the flesh, and indeed Paul takes up those questions later on in the book of Galatians to an extent, but also elsewhere in places like Romans. Israel's place is not simply negated. Casting out the bondwoman and her son becomes necessary as they persecute and obscure the status of the true heirs.

So the Galatians need to recognise what side of the allegory they stand on and deal with

those acting on the side of Hagar accordingly. A question to consider, in what ways might Jesus be compared to Isaac?