

Galatians 4 New Living Translation (NLT)

¹ Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. ² They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. ³ And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world.

⁴ But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. ⁵ God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. ⁶ And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." ⁷ Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child.^[e] And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

Paul's Concern for the Galatians

⁸ Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist. ⁹ So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world? ¹⁰ You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years. ¹¹ I fear for you. Perhaps all my hard work with you was for nothing. ¹² Dear brothers and sisters,^[f] I plead with you to live as I do in freedom from these things, for I have become like you Gentiles—free from those laws.

You did not mistreat me when I first preached to you. ¹³ Surely you remember that I was sick when I first brought you the Good News. ¹⁴ But even though my condition tempted you to reject me, you did not despise me or turn me away. No, you took me in and cared for me as though I were an angel from God or even Christ Jesus himself. ¹⁵ Where is that joyful and grateful spirit you felt then? I am sure you would have taken out your own eyes and given them to me if it had been possible. ¹⁶ Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth?

¹⁷ Those false teachers are so eager to win your favor, but their intentions are not good. They are trying to shut you off from me so that you will pay attention only to them. ¹⁸ If someone is eager to do good things for you, that's all right; but let them do it all the time, not just when I'm with you.

¹⁹ Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives. ²⁰ I wish I were with you right now so I could change my tone. But at this distance I don't know how else to help you.

Abraham's Two Children

²¹ Tell me, you who want to live under the law, do you know what the law actually says? ²² The Scriptures say that Abraham had two sons, one from his slave wife and one from his freeborn wife. ²³ The son of the slave wife was born in a human attempt to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise. But the son of the freeborn wife was born as God's own fulfillment of his promise.

²⁴ These two women serve as an illustration of God's two covenants. The first woman, Hagar, represents Mount Sinai where people received the law that enslaved them. ²⁵ And now Jerusalem is just like Mount Sinai in Arabia, ^h because she and her children live in slavery to the law. ²⁶ But the other woman, Sarah, represents the heavenly Jerusalem. She is the free woman, and she is our mother. ²⁷ As Isaiah said,

"Rejoice, O childless woman,
you who have never given birth!
Break into a joyful shout,
you who have never been in labor!

For the desolate woman now has more children
than the woman who lives with her husband!"ⁱ

²⁸ And you, dear brothers and sisters, are children of the promise, just like Isaac. ²⁹ But you are now being persecuted by those who want you to keep the law, just as Ishmael, the child born by human effort, persecuted Isaac, the child born by the power of the Spirit.

³⁰ But what do the Scriptures say about that? "Get rid of the slave and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not share the inheritance with the free woman's son."ⁱⁱ ³¹ So, dear brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman; we are children of the free woman.

Galatians 4 Christian Standard Bible (CSB)

⁴ Now I say that as long as the heir is a child, he differs in no way from a slave, though he is the owner of everything. ² Instead, he is under guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were in slavery under the elements of the world. ⁴ When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir.

Paul’s Concern for the Galatians

⁸ But in the past, since you didn’t know God, you were enslaved to things that by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now, since you know God, or rather have become known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elements? Do you want to be enslaved to them all over again? ¹⁰ You are observing special days, months, seasons, and years. ¹¹ I am fearful for you, that perhaps my labor for you has been wasted.

¹² I beg you, brothers and sisters: Become like me, for I also became like you. You have not wronged me; ¹³ you know that previously I preached the gospel to you because of a weakness of the flesh. ¹⁴ You did not despise or reject me though my physical condition was a trial for you. On the contrary, you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself.

¹⁵ Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶ So then, have I become your enemy because I told you the truth? ¹⁷ They court you eagerly, but not for good. They want to exclude you from me, so that you would pursue them. ¹⁸ But it is always good to be pursued^[g] in a good manner—and not just when I am with you. ¹⁹ My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you. ²⁰ I would like to be with you right now and change my tone of voice, because I don’t know what to do about you.

Sarah and Hagar: Two Covenants

²¹ Tell me, you who want to be under the law, don't you hear the law? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and the other by a free woman. ²³ But the one by the slave was born as a result of the flesh, while the one by the free woman was born through promise. ²⁴ These things are being taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai and bears children into slavery—this is Hagar. ²⁵ Now Hagar represents Mount Sinai in Arabia and 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. ²⁷ For it is written,

**Rejoice, childless woman,
unable to give birth.
Burst into song and shout,
you who are not in labor,
for the children of the desolate woman will be many,
more numerous than those
of the woman who has a husband.**

²⁸ Now you too, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ But just as then the child born as a result of the flesh persecuted the one born as a result of the Spirit, so also now. ³⁰ But what does the Scripture say? **“Drive out the slave and her son, for the son of the slave will never be a coheir with the son of the free woman.”** ³¹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave but of the free woman.

Galatians 4 New King James Version (NKJV)


Sons and Heirs Through Christ

⁴ 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. ⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Fears for the Church

⁸ But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. 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.

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. ¹⁶ Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? 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.

Two Covenants

²¹ Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 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. 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.”

²⁸ Now we, brethren, as Isaac *was*, are children of promise. 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.

Galatians 4 English Standard Version (ESV)

Sons and Heirs

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, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Paul's Concern for the Galatians

⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹ 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? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

¹² Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. ¹³ You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? ¹⁷ They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. ¹⁸ It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, ¹⁹ my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! ²⁰ I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Example of Hagar and Sarah

²¹ Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. ²³ But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. ²⁴ 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. ²⁷ For it is written,

“Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;
break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
than those of the one who has a husband.”

²⁸ Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ 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.” ³¹ So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Galatians 4 Amplified Bible (AMP)

Sonship in Christ

⁴ Now what I mean [when I talk about children and their guardians] is this: as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave even though he is the [future owner and] master of all [the estate]; ² but he is under [the authority of] guardians and household administrators or managers until the date set by his father [when he is of legal age]. ³ So also we [whether Jews or Gentiles], when we were children (spiritually immature), were kept like slaves under the elementary [man-made religious or philosophical] teachings of the world. ⁴ But when [in God's plan] the proper time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the [regulations of the] Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem *and* liberate those who were under the Law, that we [who believe] might be adopted as sons [as God's children with all rights as fully grown members of a family]. ⁶ And because you [really] are [His] sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave (bond-servant), but a son; and if a son, then also an heir through [the gracious act of] God [through Christ].

⁸ But at that time, when you did not know [the true] God *and* were unacquainted with Him, you [Gentiles] were slaves to those [pagan] things which by [their very] nature were not *and* could not be gods *at all*. ⁹ Now, however, since you have come to know [the true] God [through personal experience], or rather to be known by God, how is it that you are turning back again to the weak and worthless elemental principles [of religions and philosophies], to which you want to be enslaved all over again? ¹⁰ [For example,] you observe [particular] days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored [to the point of exhaustion] over you in vain.

¹² Believers, I beg of you, become as I am [free from the bondage of Jewish ritualism and ordinances], for I *have become* as you are [a Gentile]. You did me no wrong [when I first came to you; do not do it now]. ¹³ On the contrary, you know that it was because of a physical illness that I [remained and] preached the gospel to you the first time; ¹⁴ and even though my physical condition was a trial to you, you did not regard it with contempt, or

scorn *and* reject me; but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus *Himself*.¹⁵ What then has become of that sense of blessing *and* the joy that you once had [from your salvation and your relationship with Christ]? For I testify of you that, if possible, you would have torn out your own eyes and given them to me [to replace mine].¹⁶ So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?¹⁷ These men [the Judaizers] eagerly seek you [to entrap you with honeyed words and attention, to win you over to their philosophy], not honorably [for their purpose is not honorable or worthy of consideration]. They want to isolate you [from us who oppose them] so that you will seek them.¹⁸ Now it is always pleasant to be eagerly sought after [provided that it is] for a good purpose, and not just when I am with you [seeking you myself—but beware of the others doing it].¹⁹ My little children, for whom I am again in [the pains of] labor until Christ is [completely and permanently] formed within you—²⁰ how I wish that I were with you now and could change my tone, because I am perplexed in regard to you.

Bond and Free

²¹ Tell me, you who are bent on being under the Law, do you not listen to [what] the Law [really says]?²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman [Hagar] and one by the free woman [Sarah].²³ But the child of the slave woman was born according to the flesh *and* had an ordinary birth, while the son of the free woman was born in fulfillment of the promise.²⁴ Now these facts are about to be used [by me] as an allegory [that is, I will illustrate by using them]: for these *women* can represent two covenants: one [covenant originated] from Mount Sinai [where the Law was given] that bears children [destined] for slavery; she is Hagar.²⁵ Now Hagar is (represents) Mount Sinai in Arabia and she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.²⁶ But the Jerusalem above [that is, the way of faith, represented by Sarah] is free; she is our mother.²⁷ For it is written [in the Scriptures],

“REJOICE, O BARREN WOMAN WHO HAS NOT GIVEN BIRTH;
BREAK FORTH INTO A [joyful] SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR;
FOR THE DESOLATE WOMAN HAS MANY MORE CHILDREN
THAN SHE WHO HAS A HUSBAND.”

²⁸ And we, [believing] brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children [not merely of physical descent, like Ishmael, but are children born] of promise [born miraculously]. ²⁹ But as at that time the child [of ordinary birth] born according to the flesh persecuted the son *who was born* according to [the promise and working of] the Spirit, so it is now also. ³⁰ But what does the Scripture say? “CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN [Hagar] AND HER SON [Ishmael], FOR NEVER SHALL THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN BE HEIR *and* SHARE THE INHERITANCE WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN.”

³¹ So then, believers, we [who are born again—reborn from above—spiritually transformed, renewed, and set apart for His purpose] are not children of a slave woman [the natural], but of the free woman [the supernatural].