

John 49 – Offspring of Abraham

03/23/2025

Scripture 1: (Jn. 8:31-45 ESV)

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."

They answered him, "Abraham is our father."

Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did."

They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father-- even God."

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me."

Scripture 2: (Gal. 4:21-31 ESV)

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 labor! 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.

Sermon:

Soon after the Feast of Tabernacles, after Jesus just declared “*I Am the light of the world...*”, after Jesus declared that many within His audience “*...are of this world...*”, and immediately after He prophesied “*When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.*” (Jn. 8:28-29 ESV), Jesus directly addressed “*...the Jews who had believed him...*”. He spoke another famous and often quoted declaration; another statement whose meaning gets subtly shifted, away from Jesus' intention whenever it is quoted outside of its specific Gospel context. Jesus told those who were believing in Him, “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*”.

When this verse is usually quoted, a person implies two things:

- First, that truth is the highest, most absolute ideal; and,
- Second, that truth and forthrightness are the foundation of human freedom and liberty.

However, while those statements are objectively true and, the truth of them can be inferred from the words of Jesus, that is not what Jesus {or John} intended or had in mind when He spoke them. Instead, Jesus was describing the true “offspring of Abraham”. He was speaking about:

- Himself;
- all of those possessing *pisteuo* in Him; and,
- their respective relationship to sin.

Considering just the first half of the quotation: “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples...*”; by “*my word*” Jesus means both His Word as the Scriptures (what we call the Old Testament) and His Word as His teachings and commandments. If we “*abide*” in them: means that if we heed, pay attention to, keep, follow, and obey them; then we will prove ourselves as Jesus' disciples: followers of Jesus' “Way”; and so therefore, be identified with Him and be identified as belonging to Him.

Considering the second half of the quote: “*...you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*”; by “*truth*” Jesus means both Himself as <Capital T> The <Capital T> Truth, and the Truth inherent to God's Word: the truth of His commandments and promises, and the truth of the history within it. Jesus is the LORD therefore, He is True and therefore, what He speaks is, and must be, Truth because God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29). Following God, following and obeying the Truth is what truly sets a person free. It is the true source of freedom but, freedom from what, or freedom from who?

Jesus will answer that question shortly, but before we get to that, we must consider how another similar, related, and older passage may better help us understand what John has written.

When we read our Bibles today, it is nigh impossible for us to not think about the Bible as one single and unified book because that is how it is packaged and how we receive it. We forget that while yes, the Bible is a unified whole, with one single and ultimate Author: God the Holy Spirit; and that Scripture presents one single narrative from Creation to re-Creation; of our Fall from perfection and our restoration; telling us of God's promises and how He has, is, and will continue to keep and fulfill those promises in human history, the Bible is also a compilation of individual texts which were written by many people over a period of about 1,550 years: from ~1450 BC when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, until the death of the disciple-evangelist John in ~100 AD and the Canon was closed; and that all twenty-seven received New Testament texts were written over a period of about fifty years {as compared to the thirty-nine Old Testament texts written between around 1450

BC and 400 BC}, between around 45 AD and 95 AD {with the first written texts being transcribed sometime well after the conversion of Paul}, and that the first texts written were Paul's letters {particularly, as I have argued before, Paul's letter to the Galatians which was certainly written after his first missionary journey and immediately before, I am convinced, the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15 (~48-50 AD)} not the Gospels, with his letter to the Galatians being the first. But, thinking of the Bible as only one single book causes us to forget that each of the texts are deeply connected and interrelated, especially the texts of the New Testament (yet the Old also has a definite discernible influence upon the New).

- We know from the two letters to Corinth, that Paul's correspondence often built upon itself, and that there was also a degree of influence from a third letter which was not been preserved as Scripture.
- We know that Luke wrote his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles for a patron, called Theophilus, recounting events in Jesus' life and the formation of the early church.
- The Apostle Peter mentions Paul's letters as having been accepted and used as Scripture alongside the other, older Jewish Scriptures (2 Peter 3:15-16) in his second letter.
- While scholars, historians, atheist critics, and even orthodox believers all recognize that there is a degree of similarity, probable awareness, and influence between and among the three Synoptic Gospels, although they will disagree about the scope, degree, and direction of their relationship. {I am convinced of the view: that Mark was the first Gospel written, by Mark as Peter's amanuensis; that Matthew was written by the Apostle Levi, the tax collector, where their similarities are explained by the Apostolic witness and Matthew's additions by his specific emphases, goals, and other remembrances; and that likewise, Luke's similarities to Mark and Matthew may be explained by his certain and sure engagement with Apostles, and by his familiarity with their written work through the thoroughness of his research. There is no need to posit a hypothetical “Q” (quelle) base source, when the most logical and simplest premise would imply that the true “Q” was the direct ministry of Jesus Christ.}

Therefore, since the grammatical-historical mode of Biblical interpretation considers the influence of the disparate texts upon one another, we are led to conclude:

- that since John's Gospel was one of the last New Testament texts written {I would argue for it being the second to last, immediately prior to the Revelation, but it could also have been the last and final one. Regardless, it was surely composed sometime in the late 80's or early 90's};
- that the writer John had a degree of familiarity with many of these other, earlier writings (especially those of Paul, since John spent that last years of his life in Ephesus, where he would have had close contact with Paul's protege and successor, Timothy); and,
- that therefore, John's Gospel would contain the most mature and best developed Christian theology, belief, and thought of the 1st Century.
 - Concluding this, it makes both **Total** and **No sense** that we would want introduce new believers to Jesus through John's Gospel, because while it is both the simplest and most complex book about Jesus, it was originally intended for existing believers to encourage them and deepen their faith.

Having all of that in mind, Jesus' explanation about being set free, should be considered in light of the Apostle Paul's allegorical use of the conflict between the women of Abraham's household: Sarah and Hagar; found in Galatians.

When Jesus told “the Jews” that “...*the truth will set you free.*”, those reprobates took offense and responded to Him, saying “*We are offspring of Abraham and have never been **enslaved** to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become **free**'?*”. They were only thinking of themselves and their present generation since the

descendants of Abraham had been enslaved several times in their history: by the Egyptians, by the Assyrians, by the Babylonians and Persians, and most recently by the Seleucids (only about two hundred years before). While they were not presently “enslaved” by the Romans, they were definitely being exploited and oppressed by them. But they did not consider themselves to be “enslaved” to anyone or anything. Rather, they still understood themselves as being *generally* free since, as a nation and people and faith, they did operate under some restrictions imposed by Rome's external control.

So, while they were not presently enslaved, they were also not as free as they could and should be. They were blinded and unable to see or know of their dire need to “*become free*.” This is why Jesus was calling attention to the spiritual shackles that bound them; calling attention to the **spiritual enslavement** that they were subjected to. Like them, until the Holy Spirit works within our hearts, we also are blind to the spiritual fetters that bind us.

Thus Jesus explained, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*”. **Sin** is the chain which binds us, restrains us, and restricts us from choosing to do the good, to have the faithfulness, and to give the obedience that Jesus is owed, as the LORD God. All of humanity is enslaved to sin from the cradle to the grave (Romans 6:6), except and unless God acts upon you.

Now, the Apostle Paul spent a lot of time describing and explaining the insidiousness and the universal prevalence of sin, writing in Romans, “*Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.*” (Rom. 7:7-11 ESV). He argues that Torah: the written Law and moral authority, given by the LORD through Moses and possessed by the Jews alone; was given, not just to restrain our sinful natures by prohibition, but to also increase our awareness of sin: so we might better recognize sin, and ultimately so that we might avoid sin. But instead, in our weakness, we became even more liable to succumb to the temptations of sin, when our sinful nature deceives us asking, “*Did God actually say...*” (Gen. 3:1 ESV). Therefore, we all became servants and slaves to our sinfulness, bound and restrained against the “*light of life*”, unable to ever even choose the good.

Meanwhile, Jesus applies this metaphor of the slave and Son, through the contemporary 1st Century Roman culture's household, where there were three major categories or classes of members within the “family” {Latin: *familia*}:

- the “master of the house”, the principle owner or, “father” {Latin: *pater familias*};
- the slaves or servants {Greek: *doublos*; Latin: *servus*};
- the offspring, both natural and adopted {Latin: *filii familias*}.

The father held near absolute authority within the home and over the lives of both children and slaves, regulated and limited only by Roman Civil Law {the *Jus* of the Twelve Tables, republican legislation, and the dictates or edicts of the *princeps* (the chief *princeps* being the Emperor)}.

Servants and slaves, as the lowest members of a household, had no personal rights (whether legal or natural). However, their time of service could be contractually definite or, individual slaves could purchase their freedom if they somehow gained the means and opportunity. Therefore, their membership within the “house” was naturally temporary; limited by their “terms of service” or by their death.

Meanwhile, all of the legitimate offspring within the house, but especially the eldest son, were heirs and inheritors. Therefore, they belonged to the house in perpetuity.

- These were the social elements that Jesus had in mind when He said, “*The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.*”.

However, under this system there was only one way for a person to receive true freedom and it was not through release from service. Instead, it was through adoption: by inclusion as a fully inheriting member of the family, as a son (or daughter); thereby gaining all of the rights and responsibilities that that entailed.

- The act of adoption is what Jesus meant when saying, “*So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*” because, while it is the “father” who adopts, the son is the one who also **must practically** accept, affirm, and not oppose the adoption since he risks losing or having his inheritance reduced.
- The servant or slave that is “set free” through adoption, becomes fully free within the household because they are no longer under any authority except that of the father: the absolute, authoritative head of the household.

What Jesus describes here is, from the Christian perspective, our being released from bondage to Satan and sin: the service which has restrained us from obeying God Law, the Father's Law; and our being adopted by God (John 1:14) as His “children of promise”: as Abraham's true offspring and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). Once we are adopted (an applied status that coincides with our regeneration by the Holy Spirit) we then become free and able to {*abide in [His] word...and truly be [His] disciples*}.

Then Jesus returns to addressing the disbelieving Jews, continuing by saying, “*I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.*”. Yet, before He accuses them of wanting and trying to **kill Him** because they do not believe in Him, Jesus admits and agrees that these disbelieving Jews were also “*offspring of Abraham*”, in one limited sense. However, He did not mean it in the same sense that Scripture uses the expression to describe Him or the Elect.

The Greek term for offspring {*sperma*} used here, is used throughout Scripture in two different, related ways:

- most commonly as offspring, or as children by natural generation; and,
- as offspring, or children as heirs.

This word is how the Septuagint {the Greek translation of the New Testament} handles the stories in Genesis about Ishmael and Isaac, as well as the proto-evangelon of Genesis 3:15 regarding {the woman's offspring} and, this word is how Paul explains Christ's inheritance of God's promises made to Abraham (Galatians 3:16). Meanwhile, Jesus uses it in both senses but applies it differently to the two groups. Regarding those set free by the Son, he uses it in the sense of both inheritance and a covenantal sense: where Abraham acted as the covenant representative for all of his future inheritors, but especially for Christ and all of His true disciples; where he:

- received the LORD's promises, on their behalf (Genesis 12:2-3, 15:4-21, 17:4-14);
- believed and trusted God, on their behalf (Genesis 15:6); and,
- obeyed God's commands as his faithful response, born out of his trust and loyalty to God, on their behalf (Genesis 12:4).

But, when Jesus redirected His discourse towards the unbelieving Jews, He used it in the plain natural sense of descent {ordinary generation}. When He said, “*I know that you are offspring of Abraham...*”, He meant it in the same way that the Samaritans were “*offspring of Abraham*” {as apostate Jews}; in the same sense in which Edomites (and their contemporary Idumeans, like Herod's family) were “*offspring of Abraham*” {as the descendants of Jacob's brother, Esau}; the same sense in which the Midianites were “*offspring of Abraham*” {as his descendants through Keturah, after the death of Sarah}; and in the same sense which our **present day** Arabs

are “*offspring of Abraham*”, as they claim descent through the elder but **illegitimate** line of Ishmael. Jesus used the term “offspring” to imply that being descended from Abraham was not enough to be his heir; one needed to be descended down along the legitimate line:

- the line of Isaac;
- the line of Jacob; namely,
- the line of faith and obedience.

Which leads us back to the argument Paul makes in Galatians. Paul writes, “*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.*”. He uses the historical facts of a story from Israel's ancient past; facts which describe and define two exclusive categories (or classes) of people:

- those who are the legitimate heirs to Abraham's legacy; and,
- those who are not.

He applies the historical circumstances of this binary pair in an allegorical manner, to describe the similarly exclusive division with the two principle covenants that God chose to make with humanity:

- the covenant of works, made with Adam (Genesis 2:16-17); and,
- the covenant of grace, made with Christ {via the implied and understood covenant of redemption made within the Trinity (Ephesians 1:3-14)} and promised through Abraham.

The covenant of works is fundamentally a covenant of law and obligation, while the covenant of grace is a covenant of promise and unmerited blessing.

- Paul relates the covenant of works through Hagar to Mount Sinai and the 1st Century Jew's {present Jerusalem} understanding of the Mosaic Law's absolute requirement, as commanded by Leviticus 18:5 “*You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; **if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.***” (Lev. 18:5 ESV). Whereby the Jews made themselves slaves to sin through the vain hope to gain life by their obedience, only earning death through their inability to keep God's law **perfectly** instead.
- Whereas, in contrast, Paul relates the covenant of grace through Sarah to the heavenly Jerusalem and our Christian understanding of God's gracious promise. Whereby the Elect receive redemption, justification, and adoption through the sovereign mercy of Christ alone, according to God's freely made condescension and promise to Abraham “*...to be God to you and to your offspring after you.*” (Gen. 17:7 ESV); only requiring faith and trust, fidelity and obedience, as our response to God's grace.

Then Paul concludes his argument by quoting the Scripture, “*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.*” {Context: quoting Genesis 21:10 and the decree of Sarah} to emphasize the social division between the two categories in relation to the two boys: Ishmael and Isaac; where:

- Ishmael, although the older child, was also a slave by status, since his mother Hagar was Sarah's slave and, apart from Abraham's legal recognition, should rightly be considered an illegitimate son {a child of (Greek: *porneia*) extra-marital fornication} without any right of inheritance.
- Isaac, although younger, had the true and greater claim for the inheritance because he was the eldest, legitimate son of Sarah, Abraham's principal wife.

Therefore, the first example: of Hagar, Mount Sinai, and Ishmael; relates to the slave in Jesus's metaphor because, within the 1st Century Roman household, a slave held no rights of position, of place, or of retention yet was subject to the fullest weight of the master of the house's authority; and while they might possess some freedom of choice and action, it was always constrained by their master's rule. Whereas, the second example: of Sarah, the heavenly Jerusalem, and Isaac; relates to the “son” in Jesus's metaphor because, within the 1st Century Roman household, the son and heir possessed the same degree of authority as the father, delegated, and subject only to the father's override. Therefore,

- since Jesus is the Father's Son: as the Son of Man and, as God the Son and, as the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*;
- since Jesus is the Son of David and the true heir of David's throne (2 Samuel 7:12-16);
- since Jesus is the true “*offspring of Abraham*” and therefore, the ultimate inheritor of all God's promises (Ephesians 1:11-14)
- Jesus is the **one** and **only** true Son who can free any and all whom He chooses, adopting them as sons and daughters within the household of God (John 1:12).
 - “*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*” (Jn. 1:12-13 ESV)
- For “...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Finally, to answer the question of, “Who are the true ‘*offspring of Abraham*’?” it becomes clear that they are those who abide in Christ's Word as the truth; those who trust, obey, and follow Jesus; those who live, work, and love as disciples of Jesus, following Him in His Way. The true “*offspring of Abraham*” are those who believe God, trust God, and depend entirely upon God, having confidence that He will always keep His promises; especially those which He has made for the good of His family.

Since Scripture teaches us that Christians are the true “*offspring of Abraham*” and the “*children of promise*”, how then shall we best respond to the work of the Son and His heavenly Father in our lives after they have set us free from our bondage to sin?

- Knowing and believing that we are God's children: adopted by His sovereign grace, through our given faith in Jesus Christ; we have become co-inheritors with Christ (Ephesians 1:11; Colossians 1:12; Hebrews 9:15) and equally receive the right to God's promises. Therefore, we are better encouraged to trust in His covenant promises, being confident that the Father will do all that He has declared He will do. We are confident that God loves us; He is our Father and we may and should turn to Him for all of our needs. We are certain that He defends and protects us. We know that He is our “*strength and [our] shield*” (Ps. 28:7 ESV), “*our refuge and strength*”, and “*a very present help in trouble.*” (Ps. 46:1 ESV). Truly we can say, in regards to all things, “in God we trust”.
- Knowing and believing that we are God's children, we may rightly live with “child-like faith” (Mark 10:15); not that our faith is childish, but that we know and believe that we can go to our Father in heaven

with anything and everything, certain that He will take care of it and make things right, just as we did with our earthly fathers when we were young. Our heavenly Father is our “Papa”, our “Daddy”, and even when we might think we do not need Him anymore, the truth remains that He is always there for us.

- Knowing and believing that we are God's children and that He loves us, so we want to live obediently and faithfully; keeping our Father's commandments. We know that, as His children, when we do fail and when we do disobey Him, if we earnestly repent and ask for forgiveness, then He is certain to forgive us. However, we also will not want to intentionally upset or disappoint Him because we love Him. We will not want to intentionally break His commandments or continue to live in our past sinful ways, because we do not want to cause Him grief and sorrow. Instead, we will work and live and strive to make Him glad and proud; wanting to bring Him glory and honor, instead of shame and disgrace.
- Knowing and believing that we are God's children, loved by God and loving God, we will especially work to love God through our obedience, by loving our neighbors through evangelism and disciple-making. We will all evangelize and we will all make disciples because since we love God so much, therefore we will want to tell everyone about Him and His great love; and because God loves us so much, we want to bring as many others into the light and fellowship of His love as we can. We should be like teenagers that Jesus once brought home to the Father and ever since, the group has continued to grow until God's house is feeding every kid in the neighborhood.

So, live as God's beloved “*offspring of Abraham*”. Abide in God's Word and lovingly follow His commandments. Be a true disciple of Christ and imitate Him in all that you do.

Know Him as the truth. Believe Him and His Word as the truth. Follow Him and the truth of His way and know that God the Son has surely set you free.

AMEN