

6

Children of Freedom

Galatians 3:26-5:1

The family you're born into makes all the difference in the world! Just ask Jamie Packer, son of media magnate Kerry. James (as he now prefers to be called) has stepped into his dad's business at the highest level. He's a ready-made executive, a millionaire many times over... all because of the family he's been born to. For a few years, of course, he was learning the ropes, with other executives keeping an eye on him. But now, he's in charge... and they're not!



Read Galatians 3:26- 4:7.

1. How do we fit into the "James Packer" picture?
2. From 3:28, what distinctions have now disappeared?
3. Think through the Christians you know. What sort of distinctions really have disappeared? What types of people does our church bring together as a family that wouldn't usually be together?
4. The phrase "under the basic principles of this world" could otherwise be translated "learning the basics" or even "mastering the a-b-c." What do you think he's referring to?
5. What has happened since then (v4-6)?
6. Where does that leave us now? What part does the Spirit play in this?

THINK IT THROUGH...

Does your life as a Christian reflect the fact that you're not God's slave, but God's child? How?

How has this truth been hidden by our efforts to be religious over the past 2000 years?

LOS ANGELES (AP) March 10, 2000 For the first time since the 16th century Protestant Reformation, Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Lutheran bishops hosted a joint Ash Wednesday service to welcome the Christian penitential season of Lent. The three clergymen - Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, Episcopal Bishop Frederick H. Borsch and Evangelical Lutheran Bishop Paul W. Egertson - made the traditional mark of the cross on each other's foreheads with ashes during the service at the University of Southern California.

Don't Turn Back!

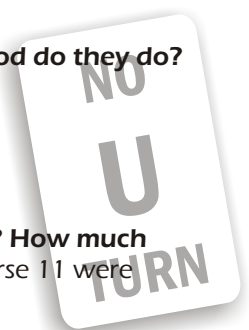
Read verses 8 to 11, and the newspaper article.

7. How does Paul describe the similarity between the Gentiles own past pagan religious observances, and the Jewish things they're being drawn to?

What sort of features and principles do all religions seem to have in common? How much good do they do?

8. Why are principles like this "weak and miserable"?

DISCUSSION: What special days, months, seasons and years do modern Christians observe? How much value do they have? Looking back over our 2000 year track record, do you think Paul's fears in verse 11 were well founded? Why, or why not?

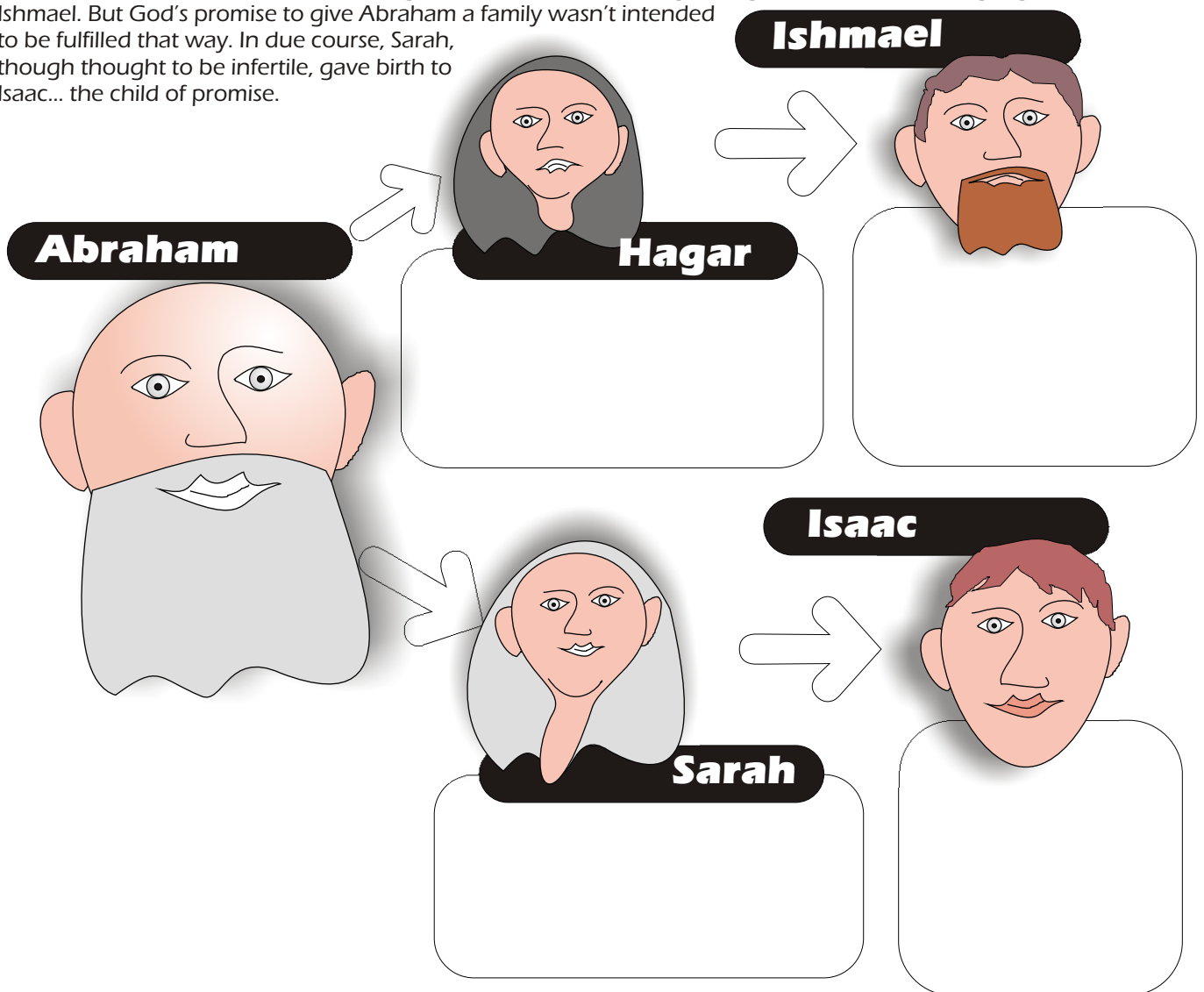


Read verses 12 to 20. Why is this issue so personal for Paul? What have the Galatians lost?

Often, when we see a Christian brother or sister behaving in an inappropriate way, we tend to resort to "rules" in the way we rebuke them. (Can you think of examples of this?) How is Paul's approach in verse 19 and 20 different to this? What is his ambition for them?

A new angle on an old story...

Paul sees parallels between the old testament story of Abraham and the present situation of the Galatians. You can read the details for yourself in Genesis 16 sometime. To cut a long story short, Abraham and his wife Sarah had been unable to conceive, so Sarah gave her husband a slave girl, Hagar, to breed from. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael. But God's promise to give Abraham a family wasn't intended to be fulfilled that way. In due course, Sarah, though thought to be infertile, gave birth to Isaac... the child of promise.



Read through **Galatians 4:21-31**, and put these descriptions in the boxes with the right characters in Paul's "figurative" retelling of the story...

Slave woman, free woman, son born in the ordinary way, son born of promise, covenant from Sinai (law), slaves, Hagar, present Jerusalem, Jerusalem above, free, born of the power of the Spirit, us.

Which person represents us (Christians)?

Which person represents the Jews?

How does the way Ishmael treated Isaac illustrate the way Christians can expect to be treated by those who are slaves to law? (Why do you think this is?)

What does the future hold for the "present Jerusalem"?

Read 5:1. This is the practical application Paul has been heading for in telling the story of Hagar and Sarah. If we're FREE, we need to LIVE LIKE IT - and appreciate our freedom enough to not let ourselves be dragged back into a form of legalistic religious slavery. What instances of "slavery" should we be mindful of today?

