Fulfilled Prophecies

Why Paul Called Jerusalem "Hagar"



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† When Paul called Jerusalem "Hagar," he wasn't simply comparing two women from Genesis. He was explaining the difference between two covenants, two Jerusalems, two kinds of children, and two completely different relationships with God (Galatians 4:21-31).

† Hagar represented the Old Covenant established at Mount Sinai, while Sarah represented the promise fulfilled through Jesus Christ. Paul's argument wasn't about the superiority of

one ethnic group over another. It was about slavery under the Law and freedom through faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29; 4:24-26).
† The remarkable part of Paul's explanation is that he identified the Jerusalem of his own day with Hagar, the slave woman, rather than Sarah, the free woman. Jerusalem possessed the temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and religious traditions, yet Paul declared that the city and her children were in slavery (Galatians 4:24-25).
† This distinction is essential to understanding why the Old Covenant Jerusalem faced judgment in AD 70 and why the heavenly Jerusalem is the permanent dwelling place of God's redeemed people (Matthew 23:37-38; Hebrews 12:22-24).
† The story begins with Abraham's two sons, but its fulfillment reaches the establishment of the New Covenant and the removal of the Old Covenant system (Genesis 21:9-12; Hebrews 8:13).

The Two Sons Of Abraham

Galatians 4:21-23
Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the Law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and one by the free woman. But the son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.
† Paul addressed people who wanted to place themselves under the Mosaic Law. His response was to take them back to Abraham, before the Law was given, and demonstrate that God's inheritance was always connected to His promise rather than human effort (Genesis 15:4-6; Galatians 3:17-18).
† Ishmael was born through Abraham and Hagar's attempt to accomplish God's promise through human arrangements. Isaac was born because God fulfilled what He had promised, even when Abraham and Sarah were beyond the normal age of having children (Genesis 16:1-4; 17:15-19; Romans 4:19-21).
† Paul's contrast wasn't between physical and nonphysical

births. Both sons were physically born. The distinction concerned the basis of their birth and inheritance, human effort contrasted with God's promise (Romans 9:7-9; Galatians 3:18).
† This established the foundation of Paul's argument. Physical descent from Abraham couldn't guarantee participation in the promised inheritance. God's promise determined who belonged to the covenant family (Romans 9:6-8; Galatians 3:29).

The Promise Came Before The Law

Galatians 3:16-18
Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as one would in referring to many, but rather as in referring to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.
† Paul identified Christ as the promised descendant of Abraham. The inheritance wasn't ultimately secured through the Sinai covenant because God's promise existed centuries before Moses received the Law (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Galatians 3:8).
† The Law served a temporary purpose within Israel's covenant history. It couldn't cancel the earlier promise or establish another means of receiving the inheritance (Galatians 3:19-25; Romans 4:13-16).
† This is why returning to the Law after Christ had come was such a serious mistake. It meant returning to a covenant arrangement that had served its purpose rather than resting in the fulfillment of God's promise (Galatians 5:1-4; Hebrews 10:1).
† The promised inheritance belongs to Christ and those united with Him through faith, not to a nation merely because of its physical ancestry (Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 3:6).

Hagar Represented Mount Sinai

Galatians 4:24-25
This is speaking allegorically, for these women are two covenants: one coming from Mount Sinai giving birth to children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children.
† Paul explicitly identified the two women as representing two covenants. This wasn't an interpretation imposed upon the passage. It was the explanation Paul himself provided (Galatians 4:22-23, 28-31).
† Hagar represented the covenant established at Mount Sinai, the covenant under which Israel received the Law, priesthood, sacrifices, and earthly sanctuary (Exodus 19:3-6; Hebrews 9:1-10).
† Paul then made his most startling statement. Hagar corresponded to the Jerusalem existing in his own generation. The city that regarded itself as the center of God's covenant relationship was identified with the slave woman (Galatians 4:25; Romans 10:2-4).
† The expression "Jerusalem that now is" identified Paul's contemporary earthly Jerusalem. It wasn't a reference to a city thousands of years in the future (Matthew 23:36-38; Luke 21:20-22).
† Jerusalem remained under the Mosaic covenant while rejecting the Messiah who fulfilled its promises. Its religious leadership continued defending the system that Christ had brought to its intended completion (John 5:39-40; Acts 6:13-14).
† Paul's statement also revealed that possession of the temple didn't prove covenant freedom. The people could possess an impressive religious system and still remain in slavery because they rejected the freedom found in Christ (John 8:31-36; Galatians 5:1).
† The distinction wasn't geographical superiority or ethnic condemnation. It was a covenant distinction between those remaining under the Law and those receiving the promise

through Christ (Romans 9:30-33; Galatians 3:28-29).

The Jerusalem Above Is Our Mother

Galatians 4:26-27
But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written: "Rejoice, infertile one, you who do not give birth; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For the children of the desolate one are more numerous Than those of the one who has a husband."

† Paul contrasted the earthly Jerusalem with the Jerusalem above. One represented slavery under the Old Covenant, while the other represented freedom through the promise fulfilled in Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 21:2).

† Notice that Paul said the Jerusalem above "is" free and "is" our mother. He spoke of a present covenant reality for believers living in the first century, not merely a distant city awaiting physical construction (Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 12:22).

† Paul quoted Isaiah's promise concerning the formerly barren woman. What appeared unproductive would become fruitful through God's redemptive work (Isaiah 54:1-3; Romans 9:24-26).

† Sarah's barrenness illustrated that God's covenant family would come into existence through His promise rather than through human ability or physical descent (Genesis 18:10-14; Romans 4:16-21).

† The Jerusalem above is the heavenly covenant community established through Jesus Christ. Its identity isn't determined by earthly walls, national boundaries, or a physical temple (Ephesians 2:19-22; Hebrews 12:22-23).

† God's people don't need to travel to the modern city of Jerusalem to enter His presence. Through Christ, believers have access to the Father by the Holy Spirit (John 4:21-24; Ephesians 2:18).

Children Of Promise, Not Children Of Slavery

Galatians 4:28-29
And you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time the son who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one who was born according to the Spirit, so it is even now.
† Paul identified believers in Christ as children of promise, just as Isaac was. Their covenant identity came through faith rather than physical ancestry or obedience to the Mosaic Law (Galatians 3:7-9, 26-29).
† Paul also connected the conflict between Ishmael and Isaac with the persecution experienced by Christians in his own generation (Genesis 21:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).
† The words "so also it is now" are significant. Paul was describing a conflict taking place during his lifetime, while the Old Covenant system and the emerging New Covenant community existed alongside each other (Acts 13:44-50; 14:19).
† The opposition wasn't merely disagreement about religious customs. It concerned whether God's promised inheritance came through the Law or through Jesus Christ (Acts 15:1-11; Galatians 2:15-21).
† Jewish believers who accepted Christ were children of promise, while those who insisted upon the Law as the basis of covenant standing remained under slavery. The distinction was faith in Christ, not ethnicity (Romans 11:1-5, 17-23).

Cast Out The Slave Woman And Her Son

Galatians 4:30-31
But what does the Scripture say? Drive out the slave woman and her son, For the son of the slave woman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman." So then, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman.
† Paul reached the decisive conclusion of his argument. Hagar's son couldn't share the inheritance assigned to Isaac, and the Old Covenant couldn't remain a competing basis of inheritance alongside the New Covenant (Genesis 21:10-12;

Hebrews 8:6-13).
† The command to cast out the slave woman pointed to the exclusion of the slavery-producing covenant arrangement from the promised inheritance. It wasn't a command for Christians to mistreat or expel Jewish people (Galatians 3:28-29; Romans 11:17-24).
† This distinction is essential. The covenant was passing away, but individuals from Israel could receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul himself was an Israelite who belonged to the redeemed people of God (Romans 11:1-5; Acts 21:20).
† The two covenants weren't intended to continue forever as equally valid systems. The Old Covenant was temporary, while the New Covenant established through Christ provided the promised inheritance (2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Hebrews 8:13).
† The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 publicly demonstrated the end of the earthly sacrificial and priestly system. The New Covenant didn't begin in AD 70, but the judgment removed the Old Covenant's central earthly institutions (Matthew 24:1-2, 34; Hebrews 10:11-18).
† Paul wasn't predicting the destruction of Jerusalem directly in this passage. He was explaining the covenant distinction that makes Jerusalem's coming judgment understandable within the larger testimony of Scripture (Matthew 23:37-38; Luke 21:20-22).

The Old Covenant Was Becoming Obsolete

Hebrews 8:13
When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.
† Hebrews confirms the covenant transition that Paul explained through Hagar and Sarah. The establishment of the New Covenant made the first covenant obsolete (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-12).
† The writer described the Old Covenant as becoming obsolete and ready to disappear. This language fits the first-century

period when the temple system still operated but no longer provided the means of covenant access to God (Hebrews 9:8-10; 10:1-4).
† Christ's sacrifice accomplished what repeated animal sacrifices couldn't accomplish. His completed work provided forgiveness and direct access to God (Hebrews 9:11-15; 10:19-22).
† The destruction of the temple in AD 70 ended the functioning earthly sanctuary, but it didn't end the New Covenant. Christ's priesthood and kingdom continue because they aren't dependent upon an earthly temple (Hebrews 7:23-25; 12:28).
† The Old Covenant's disappearance didn't mean God abandoned His promises. It meant those promises reached their fulfillment in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20; Romans 15:8-9).

The Heavenly Jerusalem Was Already Accessible

Hebrews 12:22-24
But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.
† The writer didn't tell believers that they would someday come to heavenly Jerusalem. He declared that they had already come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God (Galatians 4:26; Philippians 3:20).
† This heavenly Jerusalem is the covenant reality Paul identified with Sarah, the free woman. Believers belonged to that city through their relationship with Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:19-22; Galatians 4:28).
† The contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion is the same covenant distinction found in Paul's explanation of Hagar and Sarah (Hebrews 12:18-21; Galatians 4:24-26).

† Mount Sinai represented the covenant established through Moses, while heavenly Mount Zion represented the New Covenant mediated by Christ (2 Corinthians 3:7-11; Hebrews 8:6).
† The heavenly Jerusalem wasn't awaiting construction by human hands. Its foundation was God's redemptive work through Christ, and believers already possessed citizenship in that heavenly community (Hebrews 11:10, 16; Ephesians 2:6).
† The first-century completion of the covenant transition removed the former order, leaving the unshakable kingdom of Christ (Hebrews 12:26-28; Daniel 7:13-14).

Jesus Announced Jerusalem's Coming Judgment

Matthew 23:37-38
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!
† Jesus identified Jerusalem's rejection of God's messengers and announced the coming desolation of its house. The city that possessed the temple had rejected the Messiah to whom the Scriptures pointed (Matthew 23:29-36; John 5:39-40).
† His judgment wasn't directed against every Jewish person. Jesus and His apostles were Jewish, and thousands of Jewish believers became part of the New Covenant community (Acts 2:41; 21:20).
† The judgment concerned the covenant leadership and the city that rejected Christ and persecuted His messengers (Matthew 21:33-43; 23:34-36).
† The earthly Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 was consistent with Paul's description of the city as Hagar. The former covenant order couldn't retain the inheritance that belonged to Christ and His redeemed people (Galatians 4:25-31; Hebrews 8:13).
† Jesus had already announced that these judgments would fall

upon His own generation. The fulfillment wasn't postponed thousands of years into the future (Matthew 23:36; 24:34).

The New Jerusalem Is The Bride Of Christ

Revelation 21:2-3
And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,
† John's vision completes the covenant picture. The New Jerusalem is presented as a bride, connecting the city with the redeemed covenant people rather than merely describing buildings and streets (Revelation 21:9-10; Ephesians 5:25-27).
† Paul identified the Jerusalem above as the mother of believers, while John portrayed the New Jerusalem as the bride. These images describe different aspects of God's redeemed covenant community (Galatians 4:26; Revelation 21:9-10).
† The New Jerusalem comes from heaven because the New Covenant originates with God. It isn't the restoration of the former earthly religious system (Hebrews 8:6; 9:11).
† God's dwelling with His people fulfills the promise of covenant fellowship. Through Christ, believers have become God's dwelling place in the Spirit (Ezekiel 37:26-27; Ephesians 2:21-22).
† The New Jerusalem stands in contrast to the earthly city that rejected Christ. One belonged to the covenant passing away, while the other expresses the enduring relationship established through the New Covenant (Galatians 4:25-26; Hebrews 12:22-28).
† The fulfillment of this covenant transformation in the first century doesn't mean the physical earth disappeared. It means the former covenant order gave way to the completed redemptive order established through Jesus Christ (Isaiah

65:17-19; 2 Peter 3:13).

Historical References

† Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, described the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Romans in AD 70. His account provides historical confirmation of the judgment Jesus announced upon the city and its religious institutions (Matthew 24:1-2; Luke 21:20-24).

† In The Jewish War, Book 6, chapters 4-5, Josephus described the burning of the temple and the devastation surrounding Jerusalem's fall. These events ended the operation of the temple-centered sacrificial system that had characterized the Mosaic covenant (Hebrews 8:13; 10:11-18).

† Tacitus, the Roman historian, discussed the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in Histories, Book 5. His account provides an additional Roman historical perspective on the conflict that culminated in the city's fall (Luke 21:20-22).

† Eusebius, in Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, chapters 5-7, connected Jerusalem's destruction with the earlier warnings of Jesus and recorded the tradition that Christians had departed from Jerusalem before its destruction (Matthew 24:15-16; Luke 21:20-21).

† These historical writers don't establish Paul's theological meaning. Scripture establishes that meaning. Their accounts help confirm the first-century historical setting in which the earthly Jerusalem and its temple-centered system came to an end (Galatians 4:25-31; Matthew 24:34).

How It Applies To Us Today

† We aren't children of Hagar. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we're children of promise, belonging to the covenant family represented by Sarah (Galatians 3:26-29; 4:28, 31).

† We don't need to return to the Mosaic Law to obtain righteousness. Christ fulfilled the Law, and our standing before God rests upon His completed work (Romans 10:4; Galatians 2:16).

† We don't need a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Jesus Christ is

our eternal High Priest, and believers have direct access to the Father through Him (Hebrews 7:24-25; Ephesians 2:18).
† We aren't waiting for an earthly Jerusalem to become the center of God's kingdom. We've come to heavenly Mount Zion, and our citizenship is in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-24; Philippians 3:20).
† We don't inherit God's promises through ethnicity, religious ceremonies, or human achievement. We receive the promised inheritance through Christ (Romans 4:13-16; Galatians 3:29).
† The removal of the Old Covenant doesn't mean that God's moral standards disappeared. The New Covenant calls believers to walk by the Spirit and demonstrate love, faithfulness, and righteousness (Galatians 5:13-25; Romans 13:8-10).
† We don't need another covenant, another sacrifice, or another earthly priesthood. Christ has already established the better covenant through His own blood (Hebrews 8:6; 9:12-15).
† The heavenly Jerusalem isn't merely a future destination. It's our present covenant home, and our fellowship with God continues beyond physical death because Christ's kingdom cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:22-28; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8).
† Paul's message remains clear. We must never exchange the freedom Christ has given us for the slavery of a covenant that has already fulfilled its purpose (Galatians 5:1; Hebrews 8:13).

Q & A Appendix
Q: Why did Paul call Jerusalem "Hagar"?
A: Because Hagar represented the covenant established at Mount Sinai, and Paul identified the earthly Jerusalem of his own day with that covenant and its slavery (Galatians 4:24-25).

Q: Was Paul condemning all Jewish people?
A: No. Paul was Jewish himself, and he taught that both Jews and Gentiles receive the promised inheritance through faith in Christ. His distinction concerned covenant standing, not ethnic identity (Romans 11:1-5; Galatians 3:28-29).

Q: Why did Hagar represent slavery?
A: Hagar was a slave woman, and Paul used her position to illustrate the bondage of those seeking righteousness and inheritance through the Mosaic Law rather than through Christ (Galatians 4:22-25; 5:1-4).

Q: Why did Sarah represent freedom?
A: Sarah was the free woman whose son was born according to God's promise. Paul used her to represent the New Covenant community receiving its inheritance through Christ (Galatians 4:26-31; 3:29).

Q: What does it mean that the Jerusalem above is our mother?
A: It means believers belong to the heavenly covenant community established through Jesus Christ. Their spiritual identity comes through God's promise rather than earthly ancestry or geographical location (Galatians 4:26-28; Hebrews 12:22-24).

Q: Did the New Covenant begin in AD 70?
A: No. Jesus established the New Covenant through His death and resurrection. AD 70 marked the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, bringing the Old Covenant's earthly institutions to their historical end (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15; Matthew 24:1-2).

Q: Does Galatians 4 directly predict Jerusalem's destruction?
A: No. Paul explains the relationship between the two covenants. Jesus directly announced Jerusalem's coming destruction, and Hebrews described the Old Covenant as becoming obsolete and ready to disappear (Matthew 23:36-38; 24:1-2; Hebrews 8:13).

Q: Does God still require Christians to observe the Mosaic Law?
A: No. Believers are no longer under the Mosaic covenant as their governing covenant. They're called to live by faith, walk by

the Spirit, and fulfill the law of Christ through love (Galatians 5:13-18; 6:2; Romans 7:4-6).

Q: Is the New Jerusalem a future physical city?
A: In the fulfilled perspective, the New Jerusalem represents the heavenly covenant community of God's redeemed people. Hebrews declares that believers had already come to heavenly Jerusalem, while Revelation presents the city as the bride of Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 21:2, 9-10).

Q: What happened to the inheritance promised to Abraham?
A: The promise reached its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Everyone who belongs to Christ becomes Abraham's descendant according to the promise and an heir of the promised inheritance (Galatians 3:16, 26-29; Romans 4:13-16).

Q: Why is Paul's comparison important to fulfilled prophecy?
A: It establishes that the earthly Jerusalem belonged to the covenant passing away, while the heavenly Jerusalem belonged to the permanent New Covenant. This explains why the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 wasn't the defeat of God's promises but the historical removal of the former covenant order (Galatians 4:24-31; Hebrews 8:13; 12:22-28).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Galatians 4:21-23; Galatians 3:16-18; Galatians 4:24-25; Galatians 4:26-27; Galatians 4:28-29; Galatians 4:30-31; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 12:22-24; Matthew 23:37-38; Revelation 21:2-3
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Book 6, Chapters 4-5; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapters 5-7

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