

**The Collect:** ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

**The Epistle. Galatians 4:1-7**

NOW I say, That the heir, as long as<sup>1</sup> he is a child, differeth nothing<sup>2</sup> from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors<sup>3</sup> and governors<sup>4</sup> until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage<sup>5</sup> under the elements<sup>6</sup> of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

**The Gospel. St. Matthew 1:18-25**

THE birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying. Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

## *Heirs of All the Promises*

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, we see Paul's exasperation as one of his most beloved churches turn back to the Egypt of Judaism. In this letter, Paul seems completely uninhibited and he is not afraid of hurting any feelings. There are no formal pleasantries. Paul very quickly gets right to the point. He desperately reaches out to save a Church which is the process of falling from grace - words so terrible, no modern Evangelical would ever utter them. The churches of Galatia seemed caught in an inexorable process of returning to the same theological place from which they have so recently made their exodus.

This had become true of all the Churches within the Pauline diocese. After the Jews had made it clear that Paul was no longer welcome in their synagogues, Paul had extracted the believing Jews and the former Gentile Proselytes and helped them to set up their own assemblies in other places - some in other buildings, like the school of Tyrannus or even in private homes. But this process only exacerbated relations with the Jews.

Like the Pharaoh of Egypt, the Judaizers were simply not about to let Paul remove members from their synagogues for his new religion of Christianity. Even in Churches that had been formed without first appealing to the Jews, the Judaizers began to employ a completely different tactic. They began to come after Paul's churches to make their own converts - to do their own "sheep stealing."

The Judaizers began to tell the people of Paul's churches that faith in Christ was not enough to assure salvation. Faith in Christ alone was a distorted and deficient religion, they said. And the Judaizers would gladly supply that which was lacking in this new religion called "Christianity." They would place these Christian separatists back into what they believed was a proper relationship with the Mosaic law. They would integrate them back into a proper relationship with the Jerusalem temple. They would synthesize them back into a proper relationship with Judaism itself - from which they had become unnecessarily estranged and excommunicate through Paul's leadership and theology.

As we watch the drama unfold in the New Testament, we see Paul's slow but complete disengagement from Judaism. In this letter to the Galatians, we see the turning point. Paul says that at first he recognized, functionally, two Gospels - the Gospel to the circumcised and the Gospel to the uncircumcised. Speaking of the leadership of the Jerusalem Christian Church, which remained under the tight control of Jewish Christians, he says that *they saw that the gospel of the circumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter*. But in this very same letter to the Galatians, Paul reveals (perhaps unconsciously) how his understanding of the way that Christianity itself was related to Judaism had begun to change - and that, irrevocably.

And I think that it first began to change when Paul witnessed Peter's behavior when he heard of the approach of an envoy from James who was making an official visit to the Antiochian Church, which was primarily a Gentile "Christian" church, at which Peter himself was visiting: *For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision*. So here is the irony. As Paul is being accused of separatism,

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Peter is in fact practicing separatism. Although Paul was truly trying to forge one new man from Jew and Greek, Peter was still practicing an apartheid Judaism.

Paul was genuinely stunned by this inconsistent, hypocritical behavior. And worse – others of the concision party went with him, Paul says - *insomuch that even Barnabas himself also was carried away with their dissimulation*. The very “son of consolation” had become the very source of disconsolation to Paul - and a scandal to the fledgling Christian church. Paul was resolute: *But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?* Relations between the Jews and the Christians were indeed deteriorating rapidly.

So by the time of the writing of Galatians, Paul has effectively made the decision to leave Judaism once for all. By the time he writes his letter to the Philippian Church from Rome, his departure from Judaism is complete. It very well might be that Paul’s frustration with the Church of Galatia and its susceptibility to the Jewish argument against Christianity was in large part due to the fact that *he* had been so miserably susceptible to it himself. Think for a moment – wasn’t it true that his blind bondage to establishment Judaism – at least to the Judaism that had come to exist at the time of Rome - which had caused him to be such a relentless and merciless persecutor of the Christians? In the affair with Bathsheba, we know that David felt considerable remorse for his terrible sin. Not only can we see it in the narrative; we can see it in the Psalms too: *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, [David says] and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.*

But with Paul, we have only fragmentary accounts of what is, essentially, a complete *theological* reversal. Oh there is no doubt that Paul must have spent many lonely hours rigorously examining his own conscience – wondering how he could have been so blind – so wrong. John, who himself had made a complete break with Judaism by the time he writes his own Gospel, says that Christ came to his own people, the Jews, and they completely rejected him. One day Paul realized that he *personally* had completely rejected the Messiah foretold by the religion of his most sacred fathers.

I for one cannot help but to see the ironic, typological match between Moses and Paul. Moses was educated in the dominate religion of the Egyptians, just as Paul had been educated a *Hebrew of the Hebrews*, he said. Moses sat at the feet of the best educators that Egypt had to offer, just as Paul had been educated *at the feet of Gamaliel, and was taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers*, he said.

The Egyptians looked down their noses at the Jewish ghettos in the land of Goshen just like the Judaizers of the Jerusalem Church looked down their noses at the Christian ghettos of Paul. Both the Egyptian religious establishment and the Jewish religious establishment despised and hated their resident minorities. And when it became obvious to both Moses and to Paul that there could be no reconciliation, however much they wanted to forge one new man from their biological kin and their spiritual kin, it was time to make a complete exodus. Moses realized it. Paul realized it.

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At first, Moses and Paul negotiate with their respective establishments for a dispensation to practice their Gospel in the wilderness. Apart. Alone. In peace. Soon after, Moses and Paul realize that this would not be enough. They realize that they will always be molested by the establishment unless there is a total break. An exodus. Under the hand of Moses and under the hand of Paul, God calls his people out of a land of physical and spiritual bondage, never to return.

Although Paul makes no explicit comments which betray his self-realization that he has become a kind of second Moses, who is leading a completely new community out of Judaism, having no intention of ever coming back, he is constantly making reference to the Mosaic exodus, and is constantly juxtapositioning the new religion of Christianity with the old religion of Judaism.

In Galatians we find his sharpest and most bitter argument – not only against the pursuing armies of Judaism, that sought to recapture the Christians and drag them back to bondage of the Jewish religion, but against those within the Christian exodus who looked longingly at the religion from which they have so recently emerged and are now spiritually homesick to return. Moses cried bitterly against those who would return to Egypt. In Galatians we see Paul cry bitterly against those who would return to the circumcision theology of the Jerusalem Church.

Ironically, it was the very man that Paul had cheerfully helped to destroy who had first given Paul the idea of who he was, and what his future role in the religion of Christ was to be. And that man was Stephen, the first Greek Deacon of the Christian religion.

In recounting the typological exodus of Israel, Stephen preached to the hard-hearted Jews who were about to stone him for saying that Jesus was the new Moses – which Moses himself had predicted: *A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.*

Yes, I know that Stephen is primarily preaching about Christ, but in the prophecies of our religion, there are often multiple referents. And a multiple referent here is Paul. Because Paul is completing the work that Jesus had begun. And in both cases Jesus and Paul, the people would not obey them, just as the people would not obey Moses, [Stephen preached] *but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt.*

The time of the Old Covenant – just like the Egyptian empire itself long ago, had come to an end. When we survey the literature of the New Testament, this process is unmistakable. The old and temporary systems of religion are now passing away. The religion of Rome, the religion of Greece, the religion of Persia. The religion of Judaism, itself. These systems all told the people something about God. But they were never permanent. They were schoolmasters; tutors. Governors. They were meant to prepare the people for the final arrival of that which is permanent. They were meant to make us children of the final generation.

Once we were children in bondage to the first principles of this world. But since the advent of Christ, the Old Covenant is obsolete. All religions are obsolete. Like good schoolmasters they have guided civilization in its religious development, but now, since Christ, they are no longer needed. They have done their work, Paul argues. Like the Hebrews in Egypt, once we were in bondage to our own

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childish ideas about religion. Now, we are free to claim our rightful place as true children of Abraham - heirs of all the promises of God that have ever been made through Jesus Christ our Lord - *Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Ro 7:1 Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?

1Co 7:39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

Ga 4:1 Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all

<sup>2</sup> Appears as the same rank as the servant

<sup>3</sup> επιτροπος Foreman, chief secretary.

<sup>4</sup> Secretary, treasurer.

<sup>5</sup> δουλω

<sup>6</sup> Building blocks, essentials, ABC's 2Pe 3:12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?