

## PAUL'S 'ALLEGORY' IN GALATIANS IV

FOR MANY OF US it is axiomatic that our view of the Old Testament should be governed by the view of it taken by our Lord and His apostles, and our use of it regulated by what we see in the New Testament. The difficulty is that so often the principles which govern the New Testament's use of the Old are hard to discover, and we have become accustomed to hearing them described as arbitrary and forced. The last few years have produced some most valuable contributions — we might mention Professor Tasker's *The Old Testament in the New Testament*, Professor Dodd's *According to*

*the Scriptures*, and the recent thesis of Dr. Earle Ellis (cf. 'A Note on Pauline Hermeneutics' in *New Testament Studies*, Vol. ii, 1954) — which help to show that this is not so.

In the last newsletter reference was made to an important article by P. K. Jewett in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. xvii, 1954, 'Concerning the allegorical interpretation of Scripture'. Jewett defines allegory as 'interpreting a thing in terms of something else', and holds that this is valid providing there is a real analogy between the original meaning and the thing in terms of which one is interpreting it. The validity of this principle rests on the organic unity of Scripture.

We may test this principle, as Jewett does, on a notoriously difficult passage, the 'allegory' of Hagar and Sarah in Galatians iv. 21-31. This is often quoted as, in G. S. Duncan's words, 'one of the most remarkable instances in the New Testament of allegorical interpretation . . . such interpretations may appear fantastic and often misleading' (*Moffatt N.T.C.*, *in loc.*). Let us remember that Paul is pleading with people who, though Christians who knew the grace of God, were burdening themselves with the observance of the Jewish law as a condition of salvation. This very law, he says, contains a very relevant history. Abraham, the type of all true believers, had two sons: but only the son of his free wife, Sarah, was the heir of the rich promises made to him. The other, Ishmael, the son of the slave Hagar, was born as a result of Abraham's fleshly energy, impatience and lack of faith. The issue is that he is cast out: he and his descendants have no part in the covenant people descended from Abraham. Now there is a real analogy between this and the situation to which Paul addresses himself. Christians, born of the Spirit of God and justified by God's act through faith in Christ, are 'children of the promise' as much as Isaac was, and belong to 'Jerusalem above'. But the Galatians are being troubled by those who assert that to be accepted with God, a man must keep the Jewish law. This is the way of self-justification, of human merit, of such wilful, sinful, fleshly energy as the birth of Ishmael illustrated. It is the way of 'Jerusalem that now is': of those who go about to establish their own righteousness: the way which has no promise, but rather rejection as its fruit. Why should those who may receive the blessing of Isaac entangle themselves with the curse of Ishmael?

It is thus that the sons of Hagar and Sarah represent two covenants: and it is thus that a valid analogy is visible between the principle illustrated in Genesis and the point which the apostle is making.

It is particularly appropriate since Hagar was a slave and Sarah a free wife, and legalism leads to bondage and justification to the 'glorious liberty of the sons of God', and because Ishmael mocked at Isaac as the Jewish teachers persecuted true Christians.

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