

# Fallen Into the Hands of a Loving Father

## Chapter Four

### *The Gory Allegory*

When in primary and secondary educational institutions, linguistics and grammar were so foreign to my thinking that I couldn't even conceive of a way that such learning would ever be useful unless one wanted to be an English teacher. The teaching profession wasn't in my plan and if it had been, English would not have been my subject of choice. Passing the English course became my goal rather than learning the information, so retaining the subject matter after finishing the test was secondary to the grade and I usually forgot what I had learned soon after. When I began Hebrew classes in the 1990s I realized how important such grammatical terms are. Some terms sounded familiar, but others were completely strange to my ears. After speaking English quite well for forty years without knowing grammar, it was a shock to learn that in Hebrew it was very important. If one is going to translate the Bible from Hebrew to English one must know more than just the meaning of a few root words. Grammar, a scientific analysis of language, is essential.

My studies in the Bible had followed a similar pattern. After hearing people explain what a passage meant, their analysis seemed quite contrived. There didn't seem to be any scientific process in determining when a passage was literal or when it was figurative. One person would say a story was metaphoric in nature, while another would call it literal. Some would declare a passage to be allegorical, while others would imply it should be taken word for word as literal fact. How was a person supposed to decide what God intended for us to believe about the Scriptures? Was it just left to one's whim? Does God's intent really matter? There must be a reasonable, scientific method of analysis and if there was, I was going to find it.

Upon discovering the fields of hermeneutics and linguistics, it was obvious that few people discussing the meaning of the Bible had ever studied these fields. After hearing many teachers in the Hebrew Roots Movement, it was clear that even this movement needed a good dose of that kind of study. Once, listening to a well known scholar in hermeneutics speak, it became evident that even he would ignore rules of interpretation if they conflicted with one of his cherished doctrines. In one class lecture he stooped to name calling when mentioning a doctrine he opposed, even though, if you followed his well laid out methodology, it would have supported his opposition. It is easy to overlook rules when they conflict with strongly held beliefs. However, consistency is more likely to reveal truth.

In the article "Types, Antitypes, Linotypes and Mistypes," we attempted to review two methods of communication used in the Bible, the type/antitype and the idiom. You may wonder why so much time was spent on those concepts which seem to have little to do with the subject of the first two chapters. However, it has become painfully evident that if we do not rectify our ignorance on linguistics and

hermeneutics, we will not understand some of the concepts that will follow in this series of articles. For quite some time, we have been creating our own arbitrary rules for understanding the biblical text and if we do not learn proper methodology, my presentation in the future articles in this series will also be misunderstood.

If I were to explain that the small stream in which you were navigating your canoe was soon to become a raging torrent and would ultimately take you over a huge waterfall, you would probably at least investigate. Well, I have spotted the waterfall downstream that has wreaked havoc on many following our path. That “plunge into the depths,” where few survive, seems to be built on some misunderstandings of linguistics. If we are not careful to properly define certain figures of speech we may misunderstand the biblical text. Couple this with a “know it all” attitude, developed because we know a little more Hebraic understanding than our previous preacher, and we will send many over those falls. So please bear with me as we go over things we knew in high school but have found little practical use for in the real world. It will be very important several articles later where we will discover how to use this knowledge and see how it dramatically expands our understanding of God and His work on earth. Without it, I have seen others make shipwreck of their faith.

First, let’s begin by learning a few terms with which we once were familiar. The definitions have blurred in our minds, but we find people using them often when discussing the Bible. The vague understanding we have is sufficient to keep us from truly studying them and being able to fully distinguish the difference between them. The fog in our minds also keeps us from analyzing the Bible and comprehending why a passage does or does not say what we have been told.

Analogy: A similarity between like features of two things, on which a comparison may be based:  
The analogy between the heart and a pump.

In this definition there are three concepts that stand out. An analogy is a comparison. It deals with similarity between like features. The next word is somewhat different from this.

Simile: where two unlike things are explicitly compared: “She is like a rose”

In a simile the comparison is between unlike things, and these two things must be explicitly compared – that is, within the text, there must be some means of showing that this is a comparison. Usually, to make sure everyone knows we are comparing these dissimilar things, we use the terms like or as. So a simile clearly designates that this is an unusual comparison. Our next word adds some confusion into the mix because it is not explicit and can be used to compare things that have no natural association or things that are naturally possible yet require the listener to have additional information so as to properly distinguish it from a literal meaning.

Metaphor: a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance, as in “A mighty fortress is our God.”

A metaphor compares things which should not literally be associated. It implicitly does so, meaning that there is no clear terminology that designates that this should not be taken literally. Since there is little literal association, most assume that no one would confuse this as being literal. Going back to our example, “A mighty fortress is our God.” This does not mean that our God is a castle with a moat around it. And when one metaphorically says, “My daughter is a little princess,” he assumes that the hearer understands that he is not a king. Only if the father is literally a king would the daughter literally be a princess. So when a metaphor is used it depends on the reader having sufficient information to know that it should not be taken literally.

**Allegory:** A representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms; figurative treatment of one subject in the guise of another. 2 A symbolical narrative

Our fourth word, allegory, takes a concrete story and makes an abstract application of that story. The concrete is for the purpose of delivering an abstract thought. In using an allegory one will represent abstract or spiritual ideas while using concrete forms. The allegory is not a short comparison consisting only of a few words. Instead, it might be a short story containing concepts that can easily be transferred to another topic.

My father in law, Cecil Garrett, had a bone to pick with the claims and assertions of a past president and vice president. He composed a short story to be used as a letter to the editor of our local newspaper. He wanted to convey a caution concerning following this duo’s advice so he called the story, “A Gory Allegory.” He had some characters who were alligators in a swamp. I think one may have been named Aligator, while a second was called Billigator and a third was known as Hilligator. All of them were grouped together as Clintogators. He used these characters in comical ways to discuss economics, environmental issues and other such topics of the day. While alligators are tangible beings, he was making an abstract political analysis using concrete terms and situations. There were no real alligators, but there was a real allegory and some abstract thought being conveyed by it.

The definitions that we have discussed so far are often confused in the mind of a Bible student. Allegory and metaphor are generally thought to have very similar meanings. But looking at the definition shows that this is not the case. The terms simile and analogy are less used when speaking of Scripture, but when they are used, people often misunderstand their meaning. Because of this, it is difficult to make a reasonable assessment of a teaching until these vital terms are clarified. They can be used correctly, or they can be totally misused. We will spend most of this article on allegories and wait for another article to discuss metaphors. The other two words, simile and analogy, are important to clarify in our minds, but we will spend the majority of our remaining pages in this article discussing the allegory. So please keep the definitions of simile and analogy in mind as contrasts to the allegory while reading the following analysis.

When a person states that a passage is allegorical, metaphorical, an analogy or is being used as a simile, the hearer often thinks that the person doesn’t really believe the Bible means what it says. The person using such terms may instead be analyzing the text grammatically. Sadly though, the first conclusion

is often correct. Rather than analyzing the text with proper grammar, the speaker is merely devaluing the literal understanding of the passage. In using these terms, he really is trying to prepare you for why he doesn't believe the obvious literal meaning of the text. So both possibilities could fit the situation. In this series of articles we will discuss a grammatical analysis of certain passages and in no way wish to diminish the value of a literal understanding of the Bible. These four terms are normal parts of speech and those parts of speech are used quite often by almost all speakers and writers. They are common in English, as well as Greek and Hebrew. You probably use them often yourself, but rarely would you be able to define the terms or know which part of speech you were using. Due to our ignorance on the scientific methodology of analyzing the Bible, we often misunderstand the intent of the writer. What if the author actually was presenting an allegory and we took it literally? That could have drastic effects on the way we understand the passage and the way we obey God's word. It is even possible that we could do the opposite of what the passage meant to convey.

Let's consider a time when an allegory is used in Scripture. Synagogue teachers often used allegories to convey a message, and Paul was trained in this methodology by his teacher Gamaliel.<sup>1</sup> Gamaliel was the president and chief instructor of the premier academy of Judaic Theology in that day. The Jews have named this method of exegesis a *drash*, which is translated into English as a homily or literally, hidden. Christian theologians have historically used a Latin name calling this same method of interpretation *sensus allegoricus*. Galatians 4:24 is an example where Paul uses an allegorical interpretation of a well known historical event from Genesis. We know Paul is using this methodology since he clearly states so in the text.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Galatians 4:22** "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.<sup>23</sup> But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman *was* by promise.<sup>24</sup> Which things are an allegory:..."

Paul, by using the word allegory, was not trying to say that the story in Genesis wasn't real. Today if a speaker used such language, he would be understood as saying that the Genesis account didn't really happen. However, I have never heard of Paul being accused of such nonsense. Most read this passage and see the part about it being an allegory, yet never consider how that affects the meaning Paul is trying to convey. Most read it and assume it should be taken literally in one aspect or another even though it explicitly states, "which things are an allegory:..." This leads to false conclusions. Paul was not attempting to degrade the law given by God from Sinai in his allegorical explanation. Instead, he is trying to use a historical setting and real people to discuss the variation between the New Covenant<sup>2</sup> and the Mosaic

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>NKJV</sup> **Acts 22:3** "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.

<sup>2</sup> I am using New Covenant for recognition sake, but I prefer Renewed Covenant in that it better conveys the message. The New Covenant is often mistakenly thought to be something that has never been before. It is thought to apply to a new group of people with new conditions and new legal mandates. By reading the covenant itself a lot of this error could be dispelled. It clearly states with whom it is made, Israel and Judah, not some new entity known as the

Covenant. There was a need to distinguish between the two, because on a close read of Jeremiah 31 there is very little difference.

<sup>NKJV</sup> **Jeremiah 31:31** "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah--

The Covenant from Sinai was made with the newly formed nation of Israel the descendants of the patriarch by the same name. That nation was divided during the times of Jereboam and Rehoboam, so those same people are later referred to in Scripture as two entities, the house of Judah and the house of Israel. They are two nations that developed from that first nation formed at Sinai. It is still the same people, but they have divided, with different boundaries, different kings, and different religious practices, but still retaining a single destiny as described by a single covenant.

<sup>NKJV</sup> **Jeremiah 31:32** "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup> "But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

In the two verses above we discover a slight difference designated between the covenants mentioned. The first covenant, the children of Israel broke, so God shows that this next covenant will not be able to be broken because He will put His law in our minds and write it on our hearts. The law doesn't change, the people do, not in nationality, but in compliance. Instead of learning and attempting to write that law on our own hearts, God will miraculously put His law on our hearts. Paul addresses this theme elsewhere in his writings, but here he begins with just stating that this story of Hagar and Sarah are an allegory. So let's review the passage and analyze it as an allegory, like the author states that it is.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Galatians 4:22** For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. <sup>23</sup> But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise,

Here Paul explains how Hagar and her child Ishmael can be allegorically interpreted as the command to circumcise your heart. He infers this command, which is found in the edicts given at Sinai and recorded in Moses' farewell address in Deuteronomy.<sup>3</sup> He then contrasts the fleshly attempt of Abram to

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Gentiles or the church. It claims to put these laws on their hearts, the laws which were reported that they broke, again clearly designating the Mosaic law. Lastly, a review of the words used for "new" in both Greek (*kainos*) and Hebrew (*chadasha*) indicate that this is not a thing that had never previously been revealed. They both indicate something that is new as in freshness, not as to time. It would convey a more precise meaning if it were translated renewed covenant rather than new covenant.

<sup>3</sup> <sup>NKJV</sup> **Deuteronomy 10:16** "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

accomplish God's purpose with that of Sarah giving birth to Isaac, a miraculous work of God. Isaac was the child of promise who Paul associates with a later passage in Deuteronomy that gives the promise that God will write these laws on their hearts after they have tried and miserably failed to write them, for themselves.<sup>4</sup> The passage in Jeremiah 31:33 which states, "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts," is referring back to this promise in Deuteronomy 30:6.<sup>5</sup> The children of promise become those who God writes His laws upon their hearts. The slave child is the one who laboriously must whip himself into compliance by writing those laws on his own heart.

Hagar and Sarah are being used for this allegory because God had a plan and revealed to Abraham that he was to be the father of many nations. Since Sarah was already beyond the years of childbearing, Abraham attempted to fulfill God's words through his flesh. He took Sarah's handmaid and became a father of many nations. Unfortunately, they were not the nations that God promised, rather they were nations formed by the plans of a man. When God fulfilled His promise to Abraham, He did so miraculously, creating the seed of promise. Fleshly attempts often supply inferior results. We are still suffering from Abraham's attempt to do the work of God since the descendants of these two children have been at war with each other almost since the birth of Isaac. These two women easily portray man's attempts and methods versus God's promises. Paul has a wonderful lesson that is completely misunderstood because we do not fully understand the literary devices that are used in this passage.

The literal principal states that the literal meaning of the text is the primary meaning and any interpretation other than literal (including an allegorical interpretation) cannot change the literal meaning of the text. Paul's exegesis is in line with this principal. He is not trying to change the meaning of the original story. Hagar was a slave woman/concubine and Sarah was a wife. Paul was not trying to infer that the laws and covenant given from Sinai were given to Hagar and her descendants and that these are of no value while the covenant given in the Apostolic Writings are given to Sarah and her descendants and supersede that which was previously written. Paul knew that the laws from Sinai were binding and even shows that they were still binding in his day.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Galatians 4:25** for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem **which now is,**

(NKJV emphasis added)

Paul was differentiating between our present ability to follow God's law in this fleshly state and the work that Messiah will do upon His return when He completes the Renewed Covenant by perfecting the elect, making them to rule and reign with him in the millennial kingdom. When Messiah perfects us, He will

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<sup>4</sup> <sup>NKJV</sup> **Deuteronomy 30:6** "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah also makes a proclamation connected to Deuteronomy 10 in chapter four. <sup>NKJ</sup> **Jeremiah 4:4** Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench it, Because of the evil of your doings."

fully write God's laws on our hearts and on our minds. This means we can no longer sin. The definition of sin is still based on the same biblical commands that were given from Sinai. Paul is contrasting us writing God's law on our hearts with Yehoshua writing God's laws on our hearts. Obviously, Yehoshua's work is superior to our own.<sup>6</sup>

Many preachers use the allegorical method of interpretation to eliminate the literal meaning of the text. Unfortunately, they assume this was what Paul did in this Galatians passage. If Paul were intending to say that the Law of God was of no consequence, they would be correct. But, Paul only sounds that way if you do not understand the principles involved in developing a drash (allegorical interpretation), knowing that the literal meaning of the text must not be altered by the allegorical interpretation.

Hopefully, this short explanation will show how one can totally misinterpret the meaning of a passage by not properly assessing the parts of speech and their meanings. Without considering the methodology of Paul, this passage has been understood as telling us not to keep the law. However, if understood in its proper context, using good literary analysis, it is apparent that Paul in no way was discounting the law. If we confuse these grammatical terms and misapply them we will remain quite confused as to the meaning of any biblical passage. Grammar is a foundation to our language and the basis to understanding any written word. Our foundations must be solid when we build our theology line upon line, here a little there a little.

In a following article, we will discuss the term metaphor. All of these terms are important to fully grasp, prior to discussing how we confuse the ideas they convey, to our detriment. Hopefully, these dry discussions of grammar will blossom into a much clearer understanding of God's work with mankind and His desires for our life today.

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<sup>6</sup> This is not a full commentary on the Galatians passages. There is an assumption that the reader at least partially grasps the perspective that Paul would not have the authority to nullify God's commandments. A much larger dissertation would be required in order to fully explain the passage to the doubter. For anyone wishing to better understand this authors views, His article Paradise or Pair of Dice gives more details.

