

**Title: Freedom DNA****[Slide 1]****Text: Galatians 4:21-5:1****Family Trees****"23andMe"****[Slide 2]**

Ever wonder where you came from? Most of us are aware of our family story: my dad's parents were English and German in origin. They even spoke a little bit of tortured German around the house. On mom's side we were English and Scottish, with the pride going to the Scots. As a result, we grew up with a couple of German commands that dad said to the family dog, a riotous Buchanan plaid and an English last name that possibly refers to "a habitational name from a lost place in Derbyshire or South Yorkshire," according to ancestry.com. Where do I come from? It's complicated.

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Yet there is a way to go further back in our family history – way back, in fact. For \$99 a company named 23andMe will send you a kit that allows you to take a sample of your DNA and send it back to them for analysis. All you have to do is provide a saliva sample and they'll do the rest. In a few weeks you discover your "ancestry composition," your "DNA relatives" and what percent of your DNA comes from various parts of the world.

Amazing what lengths people will go to in order to discover their family tree!

**A Tale of Two Families:**

It seems that the young Christians in the Galatian churches were being bombarded with questions about a different kind of family tree, one you might call God's Family Tree.

Jewish people rightly traced their ancestry and spiritual heritage back to one man: Abraham. God had promised Abraham that from him would come not

just a family, but an entire nation dedicated to God. To be part of God's Family, then, required that you be part of Abraham's family line.

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But Abraham's family story was, shall we say, *very complicated*. God promised a very elderly Abraham that he would have a son. But when no child came along, Abraham and his wife took matters into their own hands. Sarah, Abraham's wife, instructed him to follow the legal custom of the day and have a child through her servant girl Hagar. The child to be born would legally belong to the woman who owned the mother. Voila! Problem solved. Or so it seemed.

The baby was born and Hagar named her little boy Ishmael, just as God had commanded her. Sometime later, Abraham and Sarah had their *own* little boy, this time according to God's promise. They named him Isaac. And that's when things got *really* complicated. It turns out that there wasn't room for the two boys and their two mothers under one tent. Hagar was sent off with Ishmael. Isaac became the first generation of God's new family.

So what about those non-Jewish Christians in Galatia? Which of the two families did they belong to? Apparently, there were people telling them that unless they converted completely to Judaism, they would never be part of Abraham's and Sarah's family – God's true people. They would, instead, be like Ishmael, at best spiritual "half breeds" always on the outside looking in.

**Family Trees, spiritual speaking:**

In writing to the Galatians, Paul picks up on this family tree business and sets the record straight. He begins by reviewing the story of Abraham and his two sons:

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*Galatians 4:21-23 NIV*

*Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise.*

In summing up the story, he reminds the Galatians that there were big differences between the two family trees that derived from Abraham:

- One son was born to a slave, the other to a free woman.
- The son of the slave was the result of Abraham's plan and action, while the other was a "miracle baby" born to Sarah in answer to God's promise.

Perhaps you can see where Paul is going with his argument. Rather than stress the *biological and ethnic* aspects of the two families, he puts the emphasis on the difference between the "flesh" and the "divine promise."

\$99 can tell you and me something about our flesh and blood origins. The price for being born into God's family? God's own Son.

## **Two Cities**

### **Family Geography:**

One of our family heirlooms is a massive cedar chest. This chest came with my mother's Scottish ancestors when they immigrated to the United States from Ireland in the early 1800s. Nestled inside it is some of the china that the family brought along as it came to the New World. It is said that the mother of the family always wanted to live by the sea so as to be as close as possible to her homeland.

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Geography figures prominently in God's Family Tree as well. The story of God's Family ranged from Egypt to Sinai, and from Sinai to the Promised Land and the royal city of Jerusalem. To this day, Jerusalem is the center of the Jewish world.

The Galatians to whom Paul was writing, lived far from Jerusalem. They didn't share the original geography of God's Family. Did that mean that they were forever doomed to be outsiders?

### **"The Present Jerusalem"**

To clear things up for them, Paul gives them a lesson in the *new* geography of God's Family. He starts by talking about the physical city of Jerusalem and what it stands for:

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*Galatians 4:24-25 NIV*

*These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.*

For Paul's Jewish contemporaries, Jerusalem was the Holy City, the city of the great King. It was the home of the Temple and the place where God had promised to dwell among His people. If ever there was a geographical home for God's true family, it would have to be Jerusalem.

But Paul turns this notion on its head! He connects Jerusalem and its Temple with the covenant that God entered into with Israel at Mt. Sinai. No argument there. But he goes on to then say that this covenant/city corresponds not to mother Sarah, but to mother Hagar!

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*"Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children." (Galatians 4:25 NIV)*

He has made this point in others ways before, explaining that being under the Old Testament Law was spiritual slavery. Now he says that the earthly city of Jerusalem, with all of its religious demands, is the geographical center of that slavery!

**"The Above Jerusalem"**

And that brings him to the other Jerusalem, the one he calls "the Above Jerusalem."

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*Galatians 4:26 NIV*

*But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.*

This "Above Jerusalem" is no earthly place. It is the spiritual home of all who have placed their faith in Jesus as Lord. These are the people of any and every race and ethnic background who are "in the Messiah."

Paul describes this family tree as the fulfillment of God's ancient promise to at last set His people free from the slavery of Sin and Death. Just as He had provided a son to Sarah, He promised to create a whole new Human Family:

*Galatians 4:27 NIV*

*For it is written:*

*"Be glad, barren woman,  
you who never bore a child;  
shout for joy and cry aloud,  
you who were never in labor;  
because more are the children of the desolate woman  
than of her who has a husband."*

### **Two Cities, Your Choice:**

In the ancient world, the city was everything. It represented the epitome of safety, prosperity and sophistication. It was the source of a person's core identity. Paul defined himself as Paul of Tarsus, the city of his birth. The city you came from said as much about you as your ancestors.

No wonder, then, that Paul anchors the Galatians in the city that matters most: the Above Jerusalem. No longer is God's Family to be defined by human categories and cultures; no longer is being part of God's People an accident of biology! From now on, the only city that matters is the New Jerusalem, the same city pictured by John as descending from God in the Book of Revelation. It is a city of the free and a city of those who are truly alive!

### **Freedom DNA**

#### **New ID:**

What this all means is nothing less than a brand new ID:

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*Galatians 4:28,31 NIV*

*Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.*

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.*

God's Family is made up of people who are birthed by His transforming power. Their ID traces back to that first miracle of Isaac being born to parents who couldn't have children. Our spiritual family tree goes back to a mother and father who dared to believe God when He promised what seemed impossible:

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*Romans 4:19-21 NIV*

*Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

When we dare to believe God's promise to make us part of His Family, He does the same for us. We gain a brand new ID.

**No confusion:**

Paul challenges the Galatians to not let themselves be confused by those who would insist on tagging them with their old, deficient ID. He warns them against giving in to the persecution that comes from that other family tree:

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*Galatians 4:29-30 NIV*

*At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."*

How tempting it is, and always has been, to want to get our hands on the project that is us! There must be something that we have to do to be worthy of God's Family! There must be some things that mark us out as more qualified than others. After all, we don't want to let the riffraff into the party, do we?

But Paul will have none of it. It's *not about us*. It's all about God and His Promise. Period.

### **Freedom DNA:**

God's purpose in creating His Promise Family is nothing less than the liberation of the human race from Sin, Death and all the brokenness of this world. Most of all, He sets us free from *ourselves*. Paul sums it all up when he says:

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*Galatians 5:1 NIV*

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

Think of all the things that cling to us, gnaw at us, hold us back and hold us down. Think of all the things that we cannot change, and that seem to snag us in their webs. Even the best things of this world can ultimately become what Paul calls "a yoke of slavery."

Now, think of what it would be like to be *free*. Like an animal that has lived its entire life in a cage, we cannot even begin to imagine true freedom. But God can. And when He comes to live inside us, when His thoughts become our thoughts, and His ways our ways, an amazing thing happens. We discover God's Freedom DNA.

You are meant to be a child of God's Promise and a citizen of His liberated city. You were created to carry in your spirit God's own DNA. But only you can embrace and believe in that new ID. Only you can welcome God's life-giving Spirit to take over in your heart and mind. Only you can say, "I am free."