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One of the most interesting things about the Bible is that its pages have something for everyone, layers upon layers of images, truths, and teaching for every facet of the human condition. One such facet, which might escape our reading is that of sibling rivalry. In the Old Testament we find examples of this from almost the very beginning, with Cain and Abel, the two sons of Adam and Eve. Cain was jealous that Abel *found favor* with God, and so Cain struck Abel down in the field and Abel died. There are also the sons of Isaac; Jacob and Esau, who's sibling rivalry resulted in the younger Jacob tricking his older brother out of his birthright and inheritance. Thankfully, this rivalry ends with the reconciliation of the two brothers around the end of the book of Genesis. Even in the New Testament, we see a bit of rivalry between James and John who as they walk with Jesus argue over who will sit beside their Lord in His Kingdom. Their mother tries to overcome the fight for prominence by asking Jesus to allow both of her sons to sit on either side of Him. Jesus overcame them all by insisting that only those who would be willing to endure difficulties and hardships for His sake would be exalted. But returning to the Old Testament, and specifically to the family of Abraham, the most famous rivalry is the rivalry between Ishmael and Isaac.

We catch a glimpse of this rivalry in the Epistle. At first it might seem daunting with all that talk of *the son of the bondwoman*, who is Ishmael, and *the son of promise*, Isaac. If ever there was a dysfunctional family, it was the family of Abraham. Abraham and Sarah were promised a son by their heavenly guests while they were under the Oaks of Mamre. They grew impatient, and took matters into their own hands, resulting in the birth of Ishmael by Sarah's servant, Hagar. Even though Abraham and Sarah were wrong in trying to accelerate God's promise of a son, God nevertheless still blessed them. Ishmael was born and his birth was followed by Isaac's. They grew up together and all was well until Sarah grew jealous of Ishmael and his mother Hagar and demanded that they be sent away into the wilderness. Despite this, God promised to bless Ishmael and to make of him a mighty nation, God intervened for him and provided for him while he and his mother journeyed through the desert. We can only imagine what the relationship could have been like between Isaac and Ishmael, but we find in the middle of Genesis that the two come together to bury their father, Abraham.

As we hear in the Epistle, *the son of the bondwoman*, Ishmael, and *the son of the promise*, Isaac, entered the theology of the Jews in Jesus' time. Thus, the Jews considered themselves to be heirs of the promise, not just spiritual descendants of Abraham and his covenant with God through Isaac, but blood descendants. Everyone else, and the Gentiles especially, were the heirs of the son of the bondwoman, and therefore outside of the Abrahamic covenant. But St. Paul turns this all upside down. Because of Jesus Christ there is no longer a differentiation between Jew and Gentile. All who confess and believe in Jesus Christ, all who have entered the Kingdom of Heaven through the waters of Baptism are now the children of the promise, the spiritual descendants of Isaac. Only in the Kingdom of Heaven is water thicker than blood, the blood of Jesus Christ, whose everlasting covenant makes the water of baptism greater than any ancestral blood lines. So, for St. Paul, the idea of bondage and freedom relate to Jesus Christ alone. Those who will not accept Him and follow Him to the Kingdom, are the new *sons of the bondwoman*, and enslaved to sin. Those who follow Jesus, will be liberated and are the new *children of promise*. Anyone still enslaved to sin, anyone outside of the Church, anyone yet to be grafted into the spiritual family tree of Jesus Christ through the waters of Baptism is in *spiritual bondage* and, thus, *unfree*.

The Catholic Biblical scholar Jeff Cavins points out that the theology that St. Paul formulated was Jesus' plan all along. This is why in the Gospel in which Jesus multiplies fish and bread also includes odd little details about their being *much grass in the place*, a prophecy from Ezekiel, in which God promises to feed His children on the mountains of Israel and lead them to grassy fields in the future. Thus, Jesus feeds the multitude, the Jews, just as Ezekiel prophesies but with twelve baskets of left-over fragments for the twelve tribes of Israel. The Jews who were recipients and witnesses of the miracle would have known the Scripture that *this is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world*. Later, Jesus performs this miracle a second time, but this time on Gentile soil with seven loaves and a few fish, and the multitude is fed with seven baskets left over, symbolic of the seven gentile nations. Jesus sends a clear message, He is not just going to shepherd and provide for the twelve tribes of Israel, who considered themselves the descendants of *the son of promise*, but also for the Gentiles, those considered to be *the sons of the bondwoman*, the heirs of Ishmael. This is because Jesus has redefined what it means to be a son of promise and a son of the bondwoman.

These lessons are so important that the Prayer Book appoints these Gospels to be read a few times a year. After three weeks of Gospels in which Jesus takes on and defeats the forces of evil, we hear it again this morning, on Refreshment Sunday. It is a reminder that as we struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil, we are to take comfort in the fact that Jesus promises His grace to us to provide for and shepherd us. And so in the middle of Lent, when we have struggled to keep even the smallest of our Lenten resolutions, stumbling into sin again and again, we are reminded to take comfort in the promise that as long as we are obedient to the Law of Christ, we are *heirs of the promise*, heirs of an everlasting covenant, which as we will hear next Sunday, a covenant which Abraham rejoiced to see. The fruit of that New Covenant is that in the next few weeks Jesus will take another piece of bread, bless it, and pass it out to His disciples, saying, *this is my body given for you, do this in remembrance of me*. Likewise, this very morning, we, the new *heirs of the promise*, are refreshed with far better bread than was multiplied on the hillside so long ago, the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. Amen.