

The Book of Galatians

Lesson 6: The Promise and the Purpose of the Law -- Galatians 3:15-25

Think about what it means to inherit something. An inheritance is not a wage you negotiate or a prize you win. It comes to you because of a relationship and a promise, often written down long before you could do anything to deserve it. A child does not earn a place in the will by good behavior. The promise was made, and the promise stands. That simple distinction sits at the center of this passage.

Paul knows the Galatians are being told that the law of Moses is the real path to God's blessing. So he asks a question that must have unsettled them: if that is true, what was God doing for the four hundred and thirty years before the law existed? God had already made an unbreakable promise to Abraham, a promise of blessing for all nations, and he had made it on the basis of grace received by faith. The law came centuries later. A promise that old and that solid cannot be canceled by a latecomer.

But this raises an obvious question, and Paul asks it plainly: then why the law at all? If the law cannot save, if the promise was always the point, what was the law for? His answer is rich and freeing. The law was never meant to be the way to life. It came to expose our sin, to show us our need, to act as a guardian watching over an immature people until the promised One arrived. The law was a signpost, not a destination.

And the One it pointed to has come. Paul says the promise to Abraham always had a single recipient in view, one offspring, one seed, who turns out to be Christ. Every promise of God converges on him. So we who trust him are no longer children under a strict guardian; we have come of age as heirs. As we read, marvel at a God who made a promise before we existed and kept it all the way to the cross.

Group Discussion: Paul says the law was "our guardian until Christ came" (3:24), a temporary tutor preparing the way. How does understanding the purpose of the Old Testament law change the way we read it and the way we relate to it as Christians today?

Personal Reflection: God kept a promise to Abraham across centuries of waiting. Where in your own life is your trust being tested by a delay between God's promise and its fulfillment?

Read Galatians 3:15-25

Study Questions

1. Paul argues that a ratified covenant cannot be annulled, and that the promise to Abraham, given 430 years before the law, was not canceled by the law (3:15-18). Why does the

priority of the promise over the law matter so much, and what does it reveal about how God always intended to bless and save his people?

2. God kept his promise to Abraham across centuries of waiting and apparent silence. Where do you find it hardest to trust God's promises when the fulfillment is delayed, and what does your impatience reveal about your view of him?
3. Paul points out that the promise was made to Abraham's "offspring," singular, and that this seed is Christ (3:16). What does it mean that all of God's promises find their focus and fulfillment in Christ, and how should that shape the way we read the whole of Scripture?
4. Paul insists the inheritance comes "by promise," as a gift, not "by the law" (3:18). Where are you still tempted to treat your relationship with God as something to be earned rather than received as a gift, and how would receiving it as gift change your heart?
5. Paul asks, "Why then the law?" and answers, "It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come" (3:19), adding that the law could not "give life" (3:21). What was the God-given purpose of the law, and what was the law never able to do?
6. Paul teaches that the law exposes sin and shuts us up under it (3:22). Are you willing to let God's word function as a mirror that shows you your own sin honestly, and what sin is it currently exposing that you would rather not see?
7. Paul describes the law as "our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith" (3:24). What does the image of the guardian or tutor teach about the law's role in leading people to Christ, and why was it always meant to be temporary?
8. Paul says, "now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian" (3:25). What does it mean to live in the maturity and freedom of those who belong to Christ, and how is that different from living as a child under constant supervision and rules?
9. Paul teaches that the law was added for a season and has now done its work, so that believers are justified by faith and are no longer under it as a guardian (3:23-25). How should Christians relate to the law of Moses now that it has been fulfilled in Christ, honoring the Old Testament as God's word and learning from it, yet living under the new covenant rather than going back under the old law?
10. Look back across the whole passage. Christ, the promised seed, has come, and in him we are heirs rather than prisoners. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you, this week, to live as a grown-up heir of the promise rather than a captive under law.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 12:1-3, the promise of blessing for all nations given to Abraham; Romans 7:7-13, the law revealing and exposing sin; Colossians 2:13-17, the record of debt nailed to the cross and the law fulfilled in Christ; Hebrews 8:6-13, the new and better covenant replacing the old; Matthew 5:17, Christ coming not to abolish but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.