

Contrasting the Promise and the Law
Galatians 3:15-18
August 8, 2012

Last time we took an initial look at the relationship between the promise made to Abraham and the covenant made with Moses. Let's review.

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

Galatians 3:8.

Now there are several things that you should notice about this promise to Abraham.

1. The time of the promise was around 2000 BC.

Now of course, this was not the first promise of the gospel. There was a promise given in Gen.3:15 that we call the protoevangelium. God obviously revealed the gospel message in very early times to Adam. Abel had some knowledge of the gospel because he offered a blood sacrifice.

But, our text says that the gospel was also preached to Abraham. This gospel that was preached to Abraham was perhaps a more formal declaration of the gospel than had been preached before. God promised Abraham a seed through whom the whole world would be blessed. This is called the gospel in verse 8. And it was given to Abraham around 2000 BC.

2. The aim of the promise was to justify the heathen as well as Israel.

The aim or purpose of the promise to Abraham was to justify the heathen and Israel through faith. Now of course, at this time, the nation of Israel did not even exist. The nation was in the bowels of Abraham. It was in the twinkle of Abraham's eye, but Israel as a nation was to come along much later. Israel, under the Mosaic Law, came 430 years later. So you will notice that the

promise given to Abraham in verse 8 was a promise to save the nations by faith.

3. The effect of the promise upon Abraham was to make him the father of all those who believe.

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

Romans 4:11

Note: Was Abraham also the father of an earthly nation? Yes. God told Abraham that he would make of him a great nation. And from Abraham's descendants God did make a nation that was ultimately known as Israel. God made this earthly nation pursuant to the Mosaic Covenant. However, being a member of this earthly nation under the Mosaic Covenant did not equate to being saved. Not all of Israel was saved. In fact, most were not. Being a member of that group, Israel, under that Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, did not mean you were saved. But, being a member of that group which was under the Promise did equate to salvation.

4. The promise to Abraham can be compared and contrasted to the Mosaic Covenant.

The Promise was given to Abraham in around 2000 BC. The Mosaic Covenant was given to Moses 430 years later. The Abrahamic Covenant was universal in scope (all nations) but the Mosaic Covenant was exclusive to Israel. The effect of the Abrahamic Covenant was blessing. (Galatians 3:9) The effect of the Mosaic Covenant was cursing. (Gal.3:10) The Abrahamic Covenant was by faith. (Gal.3:8, 9) The Mosaic Covenant was by works. The Abrahamic Covenant saves. (Galatians 3:9) The Mosaic Covenant could not save. (Galatians 3:11) The Abrahamic Covenant is eternal (3:15, 17) The Mosaic Covenant was temporary (3:19). The Abrahamic Covenant was to the seed of Abraham. (3:16) The Mosaic Covenant was to the seeds of Abraham. The Abrahamic Covenant promised the real inheritance (3:18) and by contrast the Mosaic Covenant only provided a typical inheritance. The Abrahamic Promise is not

affected by the Law. (3:17) The recipients of the Abrahamic Covenant are those of faith. The recipients of the Mosaic Covenant are the physical descendants of Abraham.

Notice the line graph below which shows the Promise beginning before the Law and continuing after the Law. Also note the beginning and ending points of the Law.

_____ Promise _____ † (Promise Fulfilled) _____
_____ M. Law _____

Consider Romans 9:1-8

1. All of Abraham's physical descendants were not children. (v.7) Also see verse 6. They are not all Israel who are of Israel. What these verses mean is that there is not a one to one correspondence between those under the Mosaic Law and those under the saving Promise of God. Not all Jews were children of promise.
2. Abraham's physical children are called children according to the flesh. (v. 3; 8) In verse 8, the physical descendants of Abraham are called the children of the flesh and they are not children of God.
3. The fact that all of Abraham's fleshly children are not saved does not undo the promise of God. (v.6) Why? Since God does not save all the physical descendants of Abraham, why is this not a breaking of His Word? The obvious answer is that the promise of salvation was not made to all of fleshly Israel. The Promise was made to all those contemplated in the Promise, whoever those may be. But the promise was clearly not made to Abraham's physical descendants. Physical descent from Abraham has nothing to do with the saving promise of God. Note the words of Jesus.

Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me . . .

John 8:39, 40

The operative principle under the Covenant of Promise is the principle of election, whereas the operative principle under the Mosaic Covenant is works.

In Romans 9 Paul is contrasting the nature of things under the Abrahamic Promise compared to the nature of things under the Mosaic Law.

And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

By the way, did you ever wonder why Jacob ended up being a Momma's boy and Esau was Daddy's boy? Did you ever wonder why it is that Rebecca was sold out to gaining the birthright for Jacob? Perhaps it is because way back, when Jacob and Esau were in the womb, God spoke to Rebecca.

For the children not yet being born . . . it was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger.

There was a sovereign choice that took place before these children were ever born and God told Rebecca, "Jacob is my choice." And favored with that knowledge all those years and believing God, Rebecca always knew that Jacob was to receive the blessing and not Esau.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by saying that all human beings who have ever been saved from hell and taken to heaven have been saved pursuant to the Promise that was made to Abraham. The Promise made to Abraham was the promise of salvation. That is why it is called the gospel in Galatians 3:8. All of those saved before Abraham's day, were nevertheless saved by the same gospel. All of those saved after Abraham's day, were saved by the same promise.

Salvation in no way, shape, or form came through the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law was a curse to all who were under the Law. (3:10) It was a curse to Ishmael. You remember Ishmael. Ishmael was an outcast. He was not chosen by God. Ishmael and his mother Hagar were a type of the fleshly nation of Israel who were in bondage under the Law. (4:25) It was a curse to Esau who was a type of those who are not elect of God. It was a curse to Nadab and Abihu who were swallowed up in God's wrath because they violated the ceremonial law of God. It was a curse to Ahab and Jezebel. It was a curse to that old High Priest Caiaphas who thought himself worthy to judge Jesus. And Caiaphas found Jesus worthy of death. It was a curse to the Pharisees who were puffed up in pride because of the Law and who had no use for Jesus. The Mosaic Law is a curse upon all those who are under it.

Ah, but the Promise of God is the promise of grace which comes through that seed, not seeds, of Abraham. The Promise of God is mercy and forgiveness upon all them that believe. The Promise of God is founded on the bedrock of God's eternal purposes in salvation. It is founded on his choices before the foundation of the world.

But the Mosaic Law said, "You do something. Here, physical descendants of Israel, here is my Law. Let's see what you can do with it. And it proved to be the greatest curse that ever came upon a people.

Thank God that salvation is not to be found in exhaustive and impossible obedience to the Mosaic Law. Salvation was never found there. It was not there before Moses. It was not there during the time of Moses. And it was not there after the time of Moses. Salvation was always found in the Promise made to Abraham before the name of Moses was ever known.

So, the natural question is, "Why then, did God impose this Mosaic Law system on Israel?"

You see, God promised universal blessing through the promise to Abraham in 2000 BC. And then, God came along 430 years later and gave a system of cursing to Moses. To Abraham, God said, "Through you all nations of the earth will be blessed." And then, God brought along another covenant through Moses

that cursed all those who were under it. Why? And isn't that the question that is posed in Galatians 3:19?

Wherefore serveth the law?

The Law seems so counter to the Promise. The Law seems to pull against the Promise and to work toward a different end. The Promise says, "I will bless you." The Law says, "I will curse you." And so we ask right along with Paul, "Wherefore serveth the law?" And we will try to answer that question in the next message.