

## The Priority Of The Promise

**Memory Text:** “For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.” (Galatians 3:18)

**Setting The Stage:** We should make promises we can keep and keep promises we make. Ever made a promise you couldn't keep? Perhaps you've been on the other end and had a promise made to you that wasn't kept. Have you ever thought that if you just tell other people about the thing you want to do that now you'll do them, or concluded that if you add the word “promise” to whatever it is you want to accomplish, that you'll accomplish it? Sometimes it doesn't work out, does it? I don't think it's a secret, but we're not very good at keeping promises.

Fortunately for us, God's promises are of a completely different order. He keeps His.

**Isaiah 46:11:** “Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.”

**Numbers 23:19:** “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”

**2 Corinthians 1:20:** “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”

### Sunday – Law & Faith

Galatians 3:15-18; Luke 1:72, 73; Acts 3:20, 21

**Galatians 3:15-20.** Paul wrote the book of Galatians in an effort to preserve unity in the church. The Galatians, Gentile converts to Christianity, had been fooled by Judaizers into accepting a different gospel than that which they had received. They began their Christian journey well, having accepted Christ by faith, but charted a new course based on works. The book of Galatians is a vigorous attack on the gospel of works and defense of the gospel of salvation by faith.

Using the scriptures (OT), so far Paul has: (1) reasoned that no one can be justified by the works of the law (2:16), and (2) shown that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works (3:6), therefore refuting the arguments of the Judaizers that Gentile converts needed to be circumcised in order to be justified/reckoned/accounted righteous/saved (see Acts 15:1; Rom. 4:5-8).

Even if Paul's opponent conceded that Abraham's life was characterized primarily by faith, he knew that some of them would still have questions about why God gave

the law to Moses 400 years after Abraham. **Did the law in any way affect the promise made to Abraham?**

**“Covenant”** (Gr. *diatheke*) (v. 15), meaning a unilaterally formulated plan or arrangement that the other party might accept or reject, but could not alter; like a will that has been ratified. The word is not used to indicate an agreement in which two parties come together on equal terms. If a human contract is thus binding, how much more is God’s. God made the promise (or covenant) to save men on the basis of faith in the coming Messiah, and Abraham accepted it by faith and obeyed it (see Gal. 3:6-9).

**“Promises”** (v. 16). What were they? (1) A son to be heir (Gen. 15:4); (2) possession of the literal land of Canaan (v. 18); (3) the prospect of becoming a great nation (v. 5); (4) progenitorship of the Messiah (Gal. 3:16); (5) and the privilege of being God’s chosen instrument to proclaim salvation to the world (Gen, 12:3). These promises were repeated to Abraham multiple times over the course of nearly fifty years (Gen. 12:1-4, 7; 13:15, 16; 15:4, 5, 13-18; 17:1-8, 16-21; 18:10; 22:17, 18).

The objective of God’s covenant with Abraham was the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of mankind. All the other promises were accessory to this. God had big plans for Israel, but they failed; yet God overruled their failure to the extent that the Messiah came to earth.

Here, by inspiration, Paul points to a figurative truth deeper than that which the promise appeared on the surface. The promise met its first and initial fulfillment in Isaac, but was to have a complete and final fulfillment in Christ. He is the One who had been promised from the entrance of sin in the world (2 Cor. 1:20; Gen. 3:15).

**Luke 1:72, 73:** “To perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham.”

This is a promise about the first coming of Jesus. Zacharias, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares Jesus to be promised Child. Of note, Zecharias’ prophecy embraces the three phases of salvation: deliverance from the penalty, power, and presence of sin (see v. 70-75).

**Acts 3:20, 21:** “And that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

Peter quotes Moses’ promise of the coming of the Messiah (Deut. 18:15). Like Zecharias before him, Peter declares that the prophets of old (Moses, Samuel, and those who followed) all spoke of the salvation God promised through Christ. God’s gospel encompasses the restoration of mankind to the image of God.

**“The law”** (v. 17). The entire legal system under which Israel was constituted a theocracy, at Mt. Sinai, including the moral law, which God proclaimed in person, and the ceremonial laws promulgated through Moses.

“430 years” (v. 17). This period spans the interval from God’s original call to Abraham, to the establishment of Israel as a nation at the time of the Exodus (Gen. 12:1; Ex. 12:40).

**What point was Paul trying to make (v. 18)?** The giving of this law at Mt. Sinai could not replace, or in any way alter, the provisions of the covenant. The giving of the law didn’t provide a new means for salvation; it didn’t establish a system of righteousness by works to take the place of, or compete with the promise of righteousness by faith in the coming Messiah. That means, contrary to popular opinion, mankind was saved by faith from Moses to the cross (and beyond, of course)

**Romans 4:13, 14, 16:** “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect... Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace...”

In other words, if a person could be justified by the works of the law (circumcision, ceremonial law, moral law), then God’s promises, our faith response, and God’s grace are made irrelevant. **Do you trust that God’s grace is sufficient to accomplish what it set out to accomplish; that is, our complete redemption?**

### **Monday – Faith & Law**

Romans 3:31; Genesis 26:5; James 2:21-23

**Does God’s law have absolutely no value then? Does faith negate the law?**

**Romans 3:31:** “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.” (see Rom. 7:7, 12; 8:3; Matt. 5:17-20)

If justification by faith abolishes the law, then there was no need for the atoning death of Christ to release the sinner from his sins, and restore him to peace with God. Christ died because the law could not be changed. It was that law that we transgressed thus causing us to incur the death sentence. If the law could have been done away with after the cross, then it could have been done away with before the cross, thus not necessitating a substitute.

Additionally, genuine faith implies in itself an unreserved willingness to fulfill the will of God in a life of obedience to His law. Real faith, based on wholehearted love for the Lord, can only lead to obedience.

**Genesis 26:4, 5:** “And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”

Abraham faith was perfected by his obedience. Neither trust nor obedience are complete without each other.

**James 2:21-23:** “ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.”

Abraham’s works proved the genuineness of his faith. If we could reword what James has said, we could say that Abraham was justified by a faith that works, not faith *and* works.

**Titus 3:4-8:** “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.”

**How is your faith? Is it genuine? Is it obedient to God’s will?**

## **Tuesday – The Purpose Of The Law**

Galatians 3:19; Romans 3:20; Romans 7:13

No one today can be justified by works. **Then, what purpose does the law serve? Why did God go to all that trouble to give His law if it wasn’t going to serve a significant purpose; or does it have more importance than we realize?**

**Galatians 3:19:** “ What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.”

The law Paul is speaking about here in particular is the Ten Commandments (see Acts 7:53; Ex. 20:19; Heb. 2:2). Why was the law “added” if the covenant was adequate for salvation? Paul isn’t saying that the law added to God’s covenant as if it were some sort of addendum to a will that altered the original provisions. The law had been in existence long before Sinai (more on that in a moment). Paul means, instead, that the law was given to Israel for an entirely different purpose. It was to

redirect the people back to God and the grace He offers to all those who come to Him in faith.

**Romans 3:20:** "...for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

**Romans 7:13:** "Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful."

*The law is a revealer of sin, not a justifier of sin.* It is like a magnifying glass, not designed to increase the amount of dirty spots in a garment, but to make them stand out clearly and reveal what can't normally be seen with the naked eye.

**Why do we need to know we've broken God's law?** We need to know, because without knowing our true condition we won't ever look for help and assistance. (Man stuck in ATM – he knew he was stuck and needed help outside of him to free him) When I know how evil my heart is I realize that I need a change of heart, but I know I can't change it, so I go to the only One who can – Jesus.

### **Wednesday – The Duration Of God's Law**

Galatians 3:19; Genesis 2:17; 4:7; 39:9; Exodus 16:28-30; Romans 8:3, 4

**"Added"** (Gal. 3:19). The difference between the time before Sinai and those afterward was not a difference of whether the law existed or not, but one of explicit revelation of the law (at Sinai there was a concrete revelation of the law on two tables of stone). God's law has always been in existence just as He instilled laws into nature from the very beginning. (Gen. 1:25 – "after its kind" - the law of heredity)

**Genesis 2:17:** "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (cp. Rom. 6:23) In eating the fruit, what commandments did Adam and Eve violate?

**Genesis 4:7:** "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." God warned Cain that if he killed his brother it would be considered a sin (cp. 1 John 3:4)

**Genesis 39:9:** "There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" What commandment would Joseph have broken if he slept with Potiphar's wife?

**Exodus 16:28-30:** "And the Lord said to Moses, 'How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in

his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day.”

“Till the Seed should come” (Gal. 3:19). We don’t need to make the mistake that the word “until” always implies a duration of time.

**Psalm 112:8:** “His heart is established; he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire upon his enemies.” Does this mean that when he triumphs he will become afraid?

**Revelation 2:25:** “ But hold fast what you have till I come.” Does Jesus mean that when He comes we no longer need to be faithful?

The role of the law did not end with the first coming of Christ. We’re told that He came to “magnify the law” (Isa. 42:21) What Paul is saying is that when Christ came it marked a decisive turning point in history – Christ can do what the law could never do – provide true remedy for sin, that is, justify sinners and by His Spirit fulfill His law in them.

**Romans 8:3, 4:** “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

### **Thursday – The Superiority Of The Promise**

Galatians 3:20; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 3:14

**Galatians 3:19, 20.** Paul’s basic point is clear: the law is secondary to the promise because it was mediated through angels and Moses (see Acts 7:53; Deut. 5:5). As impressive as the giving of the law on Sinai was, with countless angels in attendance, and as important as Moses was in the presentation of the law at that time, the giving of the law indirect. In contrast, God ‘s promise was made directly to Abraham (and therefore, to all believers), for there was no need for a mediator.

In the end, no matter how important the law is, it is no substitute for the promise of salvation through grace by faith. Actually, the law helps us better understand just how wonderful the promise really is.

How would you like to have been able to speak with the Lord face to face like Abraham did? In Gen. 15:1-6; 18:1-33; 22:1-8 we have accounts of when God met with Abraham to confirm His promises. Does God desire to come close to speak His promises to you and me today like He did with Abraham of old?

**2 Corinthians 13:14:** “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”

**Galatians 3:14:** “that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”