

Galatians 3: 15-18—¹⁵“Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. ¹⁶The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ. ¹⁷What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. ¹⁸For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.”

- The possible argument Paul’s adversaries likely made may have gone something like this: “We grant that Abraham and the folks before Moses were saved by faith, but it is obvious that when God gave the law to Moses the basis of salvation changed. A new covenant was made and a new means of salvation was then established. After Moses, the basis of salvation became the Law in place of faith or at least it supplemented faith. The covenant with Moses replaced the covenant with Abraham, because it was only a temporary measure that God provided until He gave Moses the more perfect and complete covenant of Law. Abraham and others who lived before the law were saved by faith only because they did not have the Law. Why else would God have given the Mosaic covenant of Law? And the Law, with its 613 commandments...well, if that doesn’t teach that our inheritance comes on the basis of works...then just what does it teach?”
- “The heart of Paul’s answer is to show that the covenant with Abraham was an unconditional covenant of promise relying solely on God’s faithfulness, whereas the covenant with Moses was a conditional covenant of law relying on man’s faithfulness. To Abraham, God said, ‘I will.’ Through Moses He said, ‘Thou shalt.’ The promise set forth a religion dependent on God. The law set forth a religion dependent on man. The promise centers on God’s plan, God’s grace, God’s initiative. God’s sovereignty, God’s blessings. The law centers on man’s duty, man’s work, man’s responsibility, man’s behavior, man’s obedience. The promise, being grounded in grace, requires only sincere faith. The law being grounded in works, demands perfect obedience.”
- Two types of covenants:¹
 - Unconditional (Covenant with Abraham)
 - Conditional (Covenant with Moses)

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- At the very outset, Paul uses the example of a will.
- *Diathēkē* (covenant) is a general term for a binding agreement.
- John Grisham’s book *The Testament*
- Covenants were inviolable and unamendable. Once ratified, they were irrevocable and unchangeable.
- **Genesis 15**—“1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward. " 2 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate

¹ John MacArthur, *Galatians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), n.p. For a couple of helpful works on the differences between conditional and unconditional covenants see Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Baker Academic, 2006), and O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1981).

is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." 4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. 7 He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." 8 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" 9 So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." 10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. 11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. 13 Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. (Exodus 12: 35-36—"The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. 36 The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.") 15 You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. 16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." 17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram..."

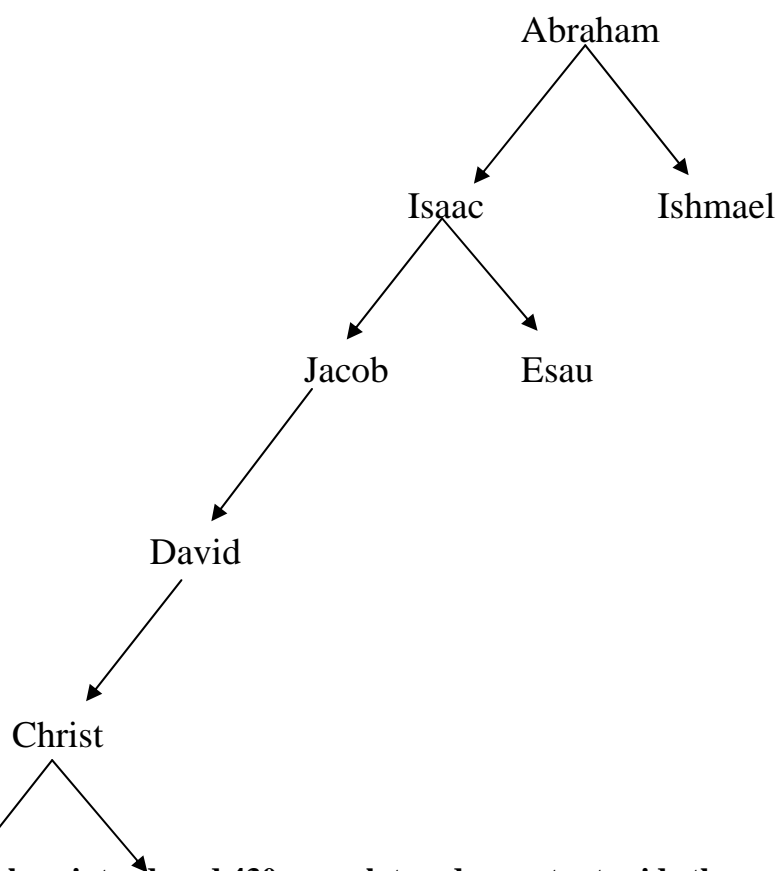
¹⁶**The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ.**

- The one and only heir of every promise of God is Christ.
- There has never been nor can there ever be salvation apart from the finished work of Christ. The covenant with Abraham was fulfilled in the covenant of Jesus Christ, and therefore the covenant of law, whatever its character and purpose, did not abrogate or modify those two covenants,
- **Longenecker:** "Moses, the mediator of the law, has no relation to the universal people of God, the people collected from all nations; this is because the law was given by Moses (from God, through angels) to one nation only, Israel. That fact alone suggests that the law is to have nothing to do with God's worldwide people. If God is one, then God's people are to be drawn from universal ranks; if the law was given only to Israel, then it is not (directly) relevant to the eschatological people of the one God."²
- **Moo:** "In the New Testament, therefore, Law and 'Gospel' primarily denote, not two constant aspects of God's word to us, but two successive eras in salvation history."³
- Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit Paul exegetes the passage. The term seed, is singular in Genesis 22:18. It was not referring to many, but to one, "And to your seed."

² Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1998), 57.

³ Moo, Douglas J., *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 322.

- **Genesis 22: 17-18**—“I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”



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- The Lord repeated the promise to Abraham’s son Isaac (Genesis 26:24) and then to his grandson Jacob (28:15). The Law came 645 years after Abraham, but 215 years later God repeated the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob, exactly four hundred and thirty years prior to the Mosaic covenant at Sinai.
- Even the covenant with Abraham did not *establish* the principle of salvation by faith but only verified and typified it.

- From the time of Adam's fall, faith had been the only means of man's becoming right with God.
 - The mere passage of time could have no effect on it all, much less nullify it.
- ¹⁸**For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise."**
- **Luther:** "Let me illustrate. A man of great wealth adopts a strange lad for his son. Remember, he does not owe the lad anything. In due time he appoints the lad heir to his entire fortune. Several years later the old man asks the lad to do something for him. And the young lad does it. Can the lad then go around and say that he deserved the inheritance by his obedience to the old man's request? How can anybody say that righteousness is obtained by obedience to the Law when the Law was given four hundred and thirty years after God's promise of the blessing?"⁴
 - God's dealings with Abraham and Moses were based on two different principles.
 - To Abraham He gave a promise ("I will show you a land...I will bless you..." Genesis 12:1, 2).
 - But to Moses He gave the law, summarized in the Ten Commandments.
 - **Luther:** "These two things (as I do often repeat), to wit, the law and the promise, must be diligently distinguished. For in time, in place, and in person, and generally in all other circumstances, they are separate as far asunder as heaven and earth..."⁵
 - The law depends on man's performance, whereas the one granted...to Abraham by means of a promise depends on God's power. The term translated "gave it to" (as in, "**God in his grace gave it to Abraham...**") is the perfect tense of *charizomai* (to give graciously) and points to the permanent character of the inheritance.
 - The principles behind the two types of inheritance are incompatible.
 - One is by God's law and man's works and the other by God's grace and man's faith.
 - The abilities to fulfill the covenants are of an infinitely different order.
 - Man *cannot succeed* in perfectly keeping the law, and God *cannot fail* in perfectly keeping the promise.
 - **Stott:** "We cannot come to Christ to be justified until we have first been to Moses to be condemned. But once we have gone to Moses, and acknowledged our sin, guilt and condemnation, we must not stay there. We must let Moses send us to Christ"⁶
 - **Longenecker:** "Rather than demonstrating the glory of the law, the involvement of angels and of Moses in the giving of the law implies that the law can grant only indirect relationship with God at best. The agitators seem to have paraded the law as the means of ensuring intimacy with God. Paul, however, portrays the law as an instrument that disrupts the direct and intimate relationship with God that is found in Christ...After the coming of Christ. The law is comparable to an enslaving cosmic power that turns people away from direct, unmediated experience of the sovereign God."⁷

⁴ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, T. Graebner, trans. (Seattle: The World Wide School, 1999), <http://www.worldwideschool.org/library/books/relg/christiantheology/CommentaryontheEpistletotheGalatians/chap8.html>.

⁵ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1953), 291.

⁶ John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1968), 102.

⁷ Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God*, 62.

- **Moo:** “Paul views God’s work of redemption in Christ as the answer to the problem posed by the negative effects of the law (Rom. 3:21-26; 7:4-6; 8:2-4; Gal. 3:13-14; 4:7). Sending Christ to die on the cross implies that the situation from which we had to be rescued was not the subjective one of misunderstanding or misusing the law, but the objective one of being imprisoned under its sin-revealing and sin-provoking powers.”⁸
- Application: Even today, if God has called you to do something or made a promise to you, it is His responsibility to fulfill it, not yours. Your responsibility is to be faithful and obedient. If you are able to fulfill it on your own, then in all likelihood, it wasn’t God who promised. God is not in the business of calling you to do things that you are able to do on your own. He’s in the business of calling you to things that you cannot do apart from him. IF we as a Church are capable of fulfilling

⁸ Moo, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 333.