

# **GALATIANS – Lesson 11**

## **3:15-18 - “The Everlasting Covenant”**

**January 19, 2014**  
**Craig Crawshaw**

**Galatians 3:15-18** *15 Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.*

**16** *Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as referring to many, but rather to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ.*

**17** *What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.*

**18** *For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.*

Last week we finished in v. 14 of chapter 3 with some important thoughts that lead us into today’s consideration.

**Galatians 3:14** [Jesus died] *“in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”*

### **1. Jesus’ death brought the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles**

This means it was Jesus’ death that fulfilled God’s promise to Abraham that in Abraham’s “seed” = Jesus, all the nations [Gentiles] would be blessed

### **2. Jesus’ death allows believers to receive the promise of the Spirit through faith**

This means that it was Jesus’ death that ended the era of the Law and ushered in the era of faith, which would bring believers the Holy Spirit

In the remainder of the chapter, which will take us through our next 3 lessons including today, Paul elaborates on this truth.

Here is our simple outline of these 3 lessons, the remainder of Galatians, chapter 3.

#### **3:15-18 PROMISE**

#### **3:19-22 LAW**

#### **3:23-29 FAITH**

1. Note that these have a chronological progression, each associated with a person – (1) the promise given to Abraham, (2) the law given through Moses, and (3) faith which came through Jesus
2. Note also the many times these three words are mentioned in 3:15-29, with the predominance of “promise” in v. 15-18 (4x), “law” in v. 19-22 (4x) and “faith” in v. 23-29 (5x). All together, these 3 words are mentioned 21 times in this section!

Paul’s argument is this: that promise and faith are linked, and that the Law is an intermediary step to bring the promise given long ago through faith today. We will examine this in detail over the next few weeks. But for today we examine: THE PROMISE of the EVERLASTING COVENANT, often called “The Abrahamic Covenant.”

## **The Example of Irrevocable Covenant**

**3:15** begins by helping us better understand a divine covenant in terms of the example of an earthly contractual agreement. Paul illustrates that a human contract, such as a will, cannot be altered after it is ratified. His point is that the divine promise/contract/covenant that God made to Abraham and His descendants, cannot be changed, even by the Law given to Moses.

## **Teaching “the seed” as being Jesus**

**3:16** reminds the listeners of the promise as recorded in Genesis. The promise was made to “Abraham and his seed” with the “seed” being used as singular, rather than as plural. This is Spirit-inspired interpretation by Paul, teaching that the singular “seed” refers to Jesus (who was in the lineage of Abraham). Thus he argues that the promise made to Abraham was fulfilled in Jesus – a spectacular claim! – especially to a Jewish audience.

**3:17** argues that **“earlier” trumps “later.”** Paul has been teaching that our salvation is based on faith (trusting in Jesus) rather than on the Law (human effort). Now he says specifically that the Law (which came 430 years after the covenant promise) given to Abraham cannot overturn or invalidate that promise. The contract that was made earlier cannot be undone by a later contract. That is, the Law cannot undo the everlasting promise of blessings to the nations by faith.

**3:18** argues that **“promise” trumps “law.”** Our inheritance of salvation through faith was promised long ago by an everlasting covenant, therefore the Law which came later cannot have anything to do with our salvation. Quite a claim! – especially considering how monumentally important the Law was to the Jews.

Now the question “on the table” is – so what is the Law for? – why was it even given? – and what role does it play today in the life of the Christian? GREAT QUESTIONS – that will be answered in next week’s lesson!!!

But for today, we want to better investigate THE PROMISE – the Everlasting Abrahamic Covenant that is so intimately linked to our faith today.  
FOR THIS, WE MUST JOURNEY BACK TO THE PAGES OF GENESIS.

In GENESIS we find God giving the EVERLASTING COVENANT PROMISE 7 times, and then giving a final reminder toward the end of the book. 5 are given to Abraham – each time at a critical moment of FAITH in Abraham’s life. 2 more are given as reaffirmation to both Isaac and Jacob. As we look at each, watch for the . . .

### **3-FOLD COVENANT PROMISE**

1. **of LAND** – the promised land of Canaan
2. **of INNUMERABLE DESCENDANTS** - of people and nations
3. **of BLESSING** - through the seed

## **THE PROMISE, part 1 (as Abram was leaving Ur to go to Canaan - age 75)**

FAITH CHALLENGE: To follow God's leading

**Gen. 12:1-3** *Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

NOTE: all 3 parts of the promise are mentioned

## **THE PROMISE, part 2 (after Lot separated from Abram - about age 80)**

FAITH CHALLENGE: To trust God to guide Lot's choice of land

**Genesis 13:15-16** *"For all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.*

NOTE: 2 of the 3 parts of the promise are mentioned (not the blessing)

## **THE PROMISE, part 3 (before Hagar and Ishmael – about age 85)**

FAITH CHALLENGE: To believe God for a son

**Genesis 15 (whole chapter) v. 5-7** *And He [the Lord] took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. And He said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it."*

NOTE AGAIN: 2 of the 3 parts of the promise are mentioned (not the blessing)

## **2 SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS IN CHAPTER 15**

1. **Abram's faith is was counted as righteousness.** Here is where Abraham became the father of our faith!
2. **God makes the covenant by Himself** (read vs. 9-12, 17)  
God has Abram bring 5 animals: calf, goat, ram, turtledove and pigeon. Abraham then cut the calf, goat and ram in two, separating the halves with a pathway between. The slain birds were put on either side, but not cut. This was how a covenant was ratified by two parties in those days. Each party would walk between the dead carcasses, making solemn promise that if either failed to keep the covenant made, they would be cut asunder like these animals. But God causes Abram to fall asleep! And God alone goes between the carcasses as a smoking oven and flaming torch. This covenant is all about God, and has nothing to do with Abraham. IT IS UNCONDITIONAL and ONE-SIDED!

#### **THE PROMISE, part 4 (when God changes Abram to Abraham - age 99)**

(Abram = exalted father; Abraham = father of a multitude)

FAITH CHALLENGE: To believe God for a son in his old age

**Genesis 17:1-8 v. 4** "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations." **v. 7-8** "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you through out their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

NOTE AGAIN: 2 of the 3 parts of the promise are mentioned (not the blessing)

But THIS TIME it is said to be an everlasting covenant

#### **THE PROMISE, part 5 (when Abraham offers Isaac as sacrifice – c.age 115)**

FAITH CHALLENGE: To obey God in offering his son as sacrifice

**Genesis 22:16-18** "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. **In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.**"

NOTE: INNUMERABLE DESCENDANTS and BLESSING are promised.

22:18 is the verse that Paul refers to in today's Galatians passage referring to the "seed" that is Jesus

#### **THE PROMISE, part 6 (given to Isaac after Abraham's death at age 175)**

FAITH CHALLENGE: To walk in the faith of his father

**Genesis 26:3-4** "Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."

NOTE: All 3 parts of the promise are given (since the first given to Abram)

#### **THE PROMISE, part 7 (given to Jacob when he saw angels on a ladder)**

FAITH CHALLENGE: To believe in God's continual intercession

**Genesis 28:13-14** And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth . . . and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

NOTE: All 3 parts of the promise are given

## **The PROMISE – the final reminder**

**(given to Jacob (now Israel) before he takes his family to Egypt)**

FAITH CHALLENGE: Trust God in a foreign environment

**Genesis 46:3-4** *He said "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close our eyes."*

NOTE: The promise is not given in detail – just that God would make of Israel's family a great nation in Egypt, partially fulfilling the promise. Yet this was said in 1875 B.C. – 430 years before the 10 Commandments were given to Moses in 1445 B.C., which must be what Paul was referring to in Galatians 3 when he says that the Law was given 430 years after the promise was given (this last time). Selah!

## **CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE PROMISE**

### **1. THE PROMISE IS SUPERIOR TO THE LAW**

1. it is EARLIER
2. It is UNCONDITIONAL
3. It is ONE PARTY ONLY – God!

### **2. THE PROMISE IS THE PREDECESSOR OF OUR FAITH (not the Law)**

### **3. THE PROMISE IS EVERLASTING (for us!)**

1. forever blessed in the LAND
2. with INNUMERABLE FAMILY
3. and forever BLESSED by Jesus !

So how does the Law fit in??? - NEXT WEEK !!!