

Exegetical Notes – Galatians 3:15-25

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen for Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

Galatians 3:15-25

Verses 15-18

¹⁵ Brothers and sisters, 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. ¹⁶ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. ¹⁷ What 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. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

- Paul explained that the terms of a contract are determined when the contract is signed and cannot be altered thereafter. This was also so between God and Abraham
- God made a covenant with Abraham. The terms are recorded in Genesis 22:15-18. Because Abraham had acted faithfully, trusting God when God required him to offer his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering, God blessed Abraham. In this covenant, God promised Abraham descendants as many as stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore. Because of his faithfulness in obeying God, Abraham would become “the father of many nations.”
- Genesis 22:18 presents a problem. There, God promised that through Abraham’s “seed” all the nations of the world will be blessed. The problem is that the Hebrew word translated “seed” or “offspring” in the NIV, is a singular Hebrew noun. The noun is singular. Therefore, it can refer to only one person, not many. Who that one person is is the question at the heart of the Mideast situation today. Jews take it to be Isaac. They believe that the seed of Abraham referred to is Isaac and that God’s blessing comes to the world through the Jewish people. Arabs believe that the person here referred to is Ishmael, Abraham’s son with his wife’s slave girl. They believe

that the world is blessed by them because they are descended from Ishmael. Paul interprets this word as referring to Jesus. Both the Jews and the Arabs reject Paul's interpretation of the verse. However, Paul is correct.

- The Law of Moses was not given to the Jewish people until 430 years after God made this covenant with Abraham. The terms of the previous contract cannot be altered because of a later contract. Thus, the promise to Abraham still stands. The promise of God's blessing does not come through the law but through the "Seed of Abraham," Jesus. Through Jesus, the whole world is blessed.

Verses 19-20

¹⁹ Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. ²⁰ A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

- So Paul asked, if the blessing of God comes through the "Seed of Abraham" and Jesus is that seed, why was the law given?
- Paul explained that the law was given through angels to Moses until Jesus, the Seed of Abraham, came.
- Moses, the prophets, and the rabbis were the mediators who interpreted and explained the law to the people of God. Many people explained the law to the people over the years. However, God alone gave Jesus to the world. The Law requires that the people do certain things to receive blessing. In the gift of Jesus, God acted alone. The promise to Abraham is an act of God's grace. Abraham is blessed because he trusted God.

Verses 21-22

²¹ Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. ²² But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

- The law and the grace of God are not opposed to each other. If the Law alone could bring salvation from death, then the law would save us.
- Sin caused us to break the law. Because we cannot and will not obey the entirety of the law, we cannot be saved by it. We are locked up because of our sin and are slaves to it.

- But through faith in Jesus, the lock is broken and we are set free from the consequences of sin, death. The promise of life is in Jesus and his grace given by God to all who trust Jesus.

Verses 23-25

²³ Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

- Until the coming of Jesus, the law served to protect us by keeping us away from sin. It was our custodian, or our guardian, pointing us in the right direction. It could not save us because we continued to break it.
- Christ paid the cost of our sin. He died in our place. Now, we see that our salvation is not in us, but in Him. We must trust Jesus to save us.

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