

# New Covenant Theology



# Comparing and Contrasting the Covenants

- Last time, we began looking at **Galatians 3:15-26** which describes the relationship between ***three*** covenants:
  - The Abrahamic Covenant
  - The Law of Moses (and the Old Covenant)
  - Christ (and the New Covenant)

# Relationship Between Three Covenants (Galatians 3:15-26)

We saw that this text breaks up into roughly ***two*** major sections:

- **3:15-18** – The Abrahamic Covenant was ***ultimately*** fulfilled in Christ (and the New Covenant) without any interference or help from the Law of Moses.
- **3:19-26** – The Law of Moses (which came between the Abrahamic Covenant and its fulfillment in Christ) served a **valuable purpose, but was temporary.**

## Galatians 3:19-22

We got as far as **verse 20**, which is right in the middle of a section where Paul raises and answers **two** questions about the Law that might naturally arise in the mind of his readers because of the things he said up to this point about the Law:

- **Question # 1 - What, then, was the *purpose* of the law?** If the Law was only temporary and didn't save – why did God give it? (**vss. 19-20**)
- **Question # 2 - Is the law *opposed* to the promises of God?** Since the Law and the Promise are separate and distinct from one another, does this mean that the Law is somehow opposed to or in competition with the promises of God? (**vss. 21-22**)

# Galatians 3:15-25 (continued)

*<sup>21</sup> Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. <sup>22</sup> But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

*<sup>23</sup> Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, <sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*

# Galatians 3:21-22

- **Question # 2: Is the law opposed to the promises of God?**
  - *Certainly not!* – Paul is emphatic. Law and the promises are both from God and therefore are not opposed, but complementary. Each serves a ***different purpose*** in the plan of God.
  - *For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.* – But, as Paul has already shown (3:10-11), the law ***can't*** give life (i.e. salvation) – the purpose of the Law was to show those who were under it (i.e. the Jews) that they were imprisoned by sin.
  - *But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.* (NIV) – God's purpose in declaring through the scriptures that all men are imprisoned under the power of sin is so that some might realize their desperate need and seek refuge in the promise given to those who have faith in Christ.

# Galatians 3:23-24

*<sup>23</sup> Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.*

- To what event or period of time does Paul refer when he says, “*Now before faith came*”?
- It is clear from the next phrase that this “*faith*” came *after* the period of time when the Jews were “*held captive under the law*”.
- But we also know that Paul *can’t* mean that the “*faith*” referred to here is something *new*. Faith has *always* been the means by which God saves men, even in Old Testament times – as we saw in Paul’s earlier discussion of Abraham.
- I believe “*faith*” here refers to the distinctive kind of faith that New Covenant believers have as they trust in the historically revealed person of Jesus Christ, in which case, Paul would be referring here to the coming of Christ and the subsequent New Covenant era.
- Taken in this way, “*before faith came*” is another way of saying “*until Christ came*” like he says in the parallel statement in the next verse.

# Galatians 3:23-24

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- I believe Paul uses “*we*” and “*our*” in these verses to refer to himself and his fellow Jews who lived under the dominion of the Law of Moses **prior** to the coming of Christ.
- He uses two very similar metaphors to describe what he and his fellow Jews experienced living under the Law before Christ came:
  - **Verse 23** – The Law is seen as a jailer by whom the Jews living under him were “*held captive*”
  - **Verse 24** – The Law is pictured as a “*guardian*” who, in that day was not a teacher, but was responsible for overseeing underage children and keeping them in check.
- In short, the focus here is on the:
  - Supervisory function of the Law
  - Inferior status of someone under such supervision
  - Temporary nature of this situation in salvation history

# Galatians 3:23-24

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- Those who hold to Covenant Theology (Presbyterians, for example), will say they think these verses are describing the series of events in the life of an individual person who is lead or taught by the Law (as a “schoolmaster”) to believe in Christ.
- Translators who hold to this interpretation will translate this verse in a way that reflects that idea:
  - *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. (Gal 3:24 KJV)*
  - *So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. (Gal 3:24 NIV)*

# Galatians 3:23-24

<sup>23</sup> Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

- But in the broader context, Paul is not talking about the experience of an individual person. He is talking about a historical sequence of events:
  - Beginning with the promises made to Abraham (verse 16)
  - Then the Law which was added 430 years later(verse 17-19)
  - **Until** the coming of Christ, the promised offspring (verse 19)
- If there is still any question about this being a historical sequence, look at the recap Paul gives few verses later:
  - *[An]heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we [Jews] also, when we were children [i.e. before Christ came], were enslaved [under the Law] ... But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* (Gal 4:1-5)

# Galatians 3:23-26

<sup>23</sup> Now before [the New Covenant age of] *faith came* [in other words, before Jesus came to earth], *we* [Jews] *were held captive under the law* [of Moses], *imprisoned until the coming* [the New Covenant age of] *faith would be revealed.*

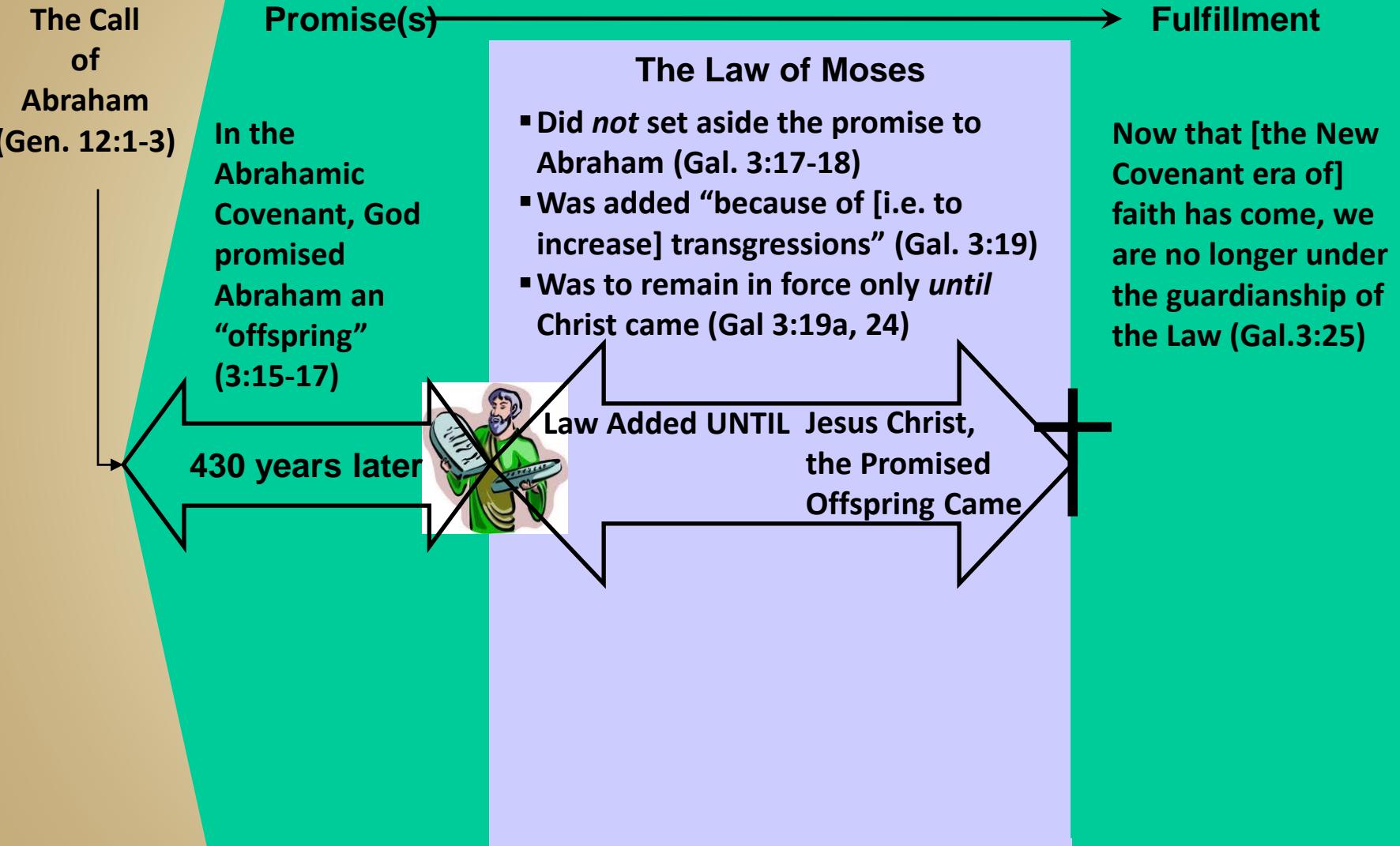
<sup>24</sup> So then, *the law was our* [me and my fellow Jews'] *guardian until Christ came* in order that we might *be* [driven to see our need to be] *justified by faith.*

<sup>25</sup> But now that [the New Covenant age of] *faith has come*, *we* [Jews] *we are no longer under a guardian,*

<sup>26</sup> *for in Christ Jesus you* [Gentiles along with us Jews] *are all sons of God, through faith.*

# Promise and Law - Galatians 3:15-25

The Call  
of  
Abraham  
(Gen. 12:1-3)



# Questions

- Do you feel like you have a pretty good understanding of the things we covered in Galatians 3:15-26?
- If not, are there some specific things that I can try to clear up for you?
- Did you find the chart at the end to be helpful in summarizing Paul's argument?