

**THE
PRIORITY
OF THE
PROMISE**





There are three key words in Galatians 3:15-20: Promise, covenant and law. We should study how Paul uses those three words in this section.

- ✔ **The covenant and the promise.**
- ✔ **The promise and the law.**
- ✔ **The purpose of the law.**
- ✔ **The superiority of the promise.**

THE COVENANT AND THE PROMISE

“Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.” (Galatians 3:15)

The Greek word for “covenant” is *diathēkē*. It means both covenant and testament. It’s a type covenant where only one of the parts makes a promise to the other part. That promise is usually fulfilled in a certain moment (for example, after the testator passes away).

The confirmed covenant Paul wrote about is that type of covenant. That’s “the promises” God made “to Abraham and his Seed,” “who is Christ.” (Galatians 3:16).

God promises and we receive. Abraham just accepted the promise by faith. God always fulfills His promises (2 Corinthians 1:20).



THE PROMISE AND THE LAW

“And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.” (Galatians 3:17)



Paul compares the promise received by faith with the law that was announced 430 years later.

Did the law abrogate the previous promise? No. Did the fulfillment of the promise [Christ] abrogate the law? No.

Paul wrote about this in Romans 3: “Do we then make void the law through faith?” (Romans 3:31). Did God get rid of the law after fulfilling the promise? The answer is clear: “Certainly not!”

Salvation is by faith in the promise, so the law cannot save us. On the other hand, faith doesn’t void the law. So, what’s the purpose of the law?

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

“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.” (Galatians 3:19)

Paul didn't mean that the law was added to the covenant as an appendix. The covenant was unilateral, so it didn't depend on things men could do.



The law was introduced to show our sinful condition and to open our eyes to the sin in our lives (Romans 7:13).

The term “till the Seed” could mean that the law was no longer needed after Christ came. Nevertheless, “till” doesn't always mean a certain period of time.

For example, Jesus said: “But hold fast what you have till I come.” (Revelation 2:25) That doesn't mean that we will no longer need love or kindness after He comes again...



THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

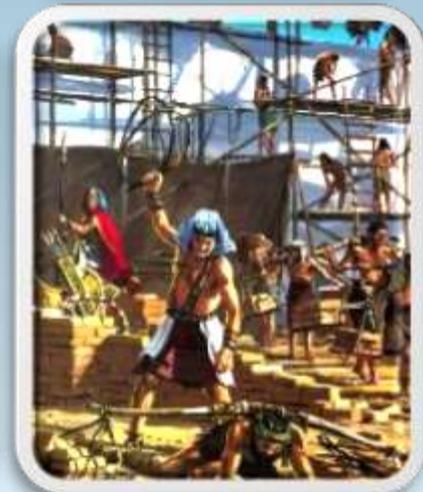
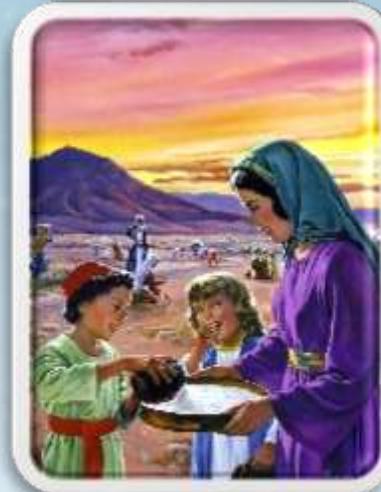
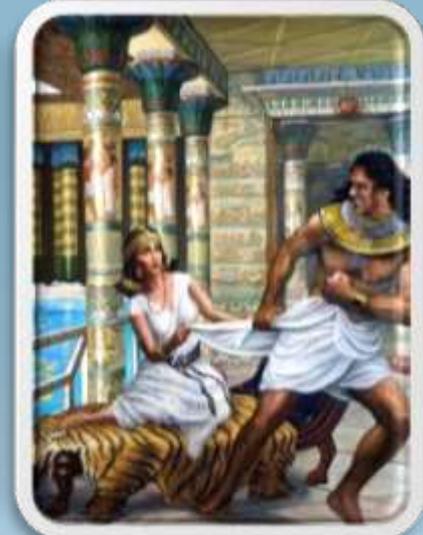
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The law was meant for more than filling a void from 430 years after the promise (Sinai) until its fulfillment (Christ). Its lifetime is much longer than that.

For example, God said that Abraham “obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.” (Genesis 26:5) Joseph knew that adultery was a sin against God (Genesis 39:7-10). The people of Israel kept the Sabbath day before the law was announced (Exodus 16:22-26).

Then why did God announce the law in Sinai to the people of Israel through Moses?

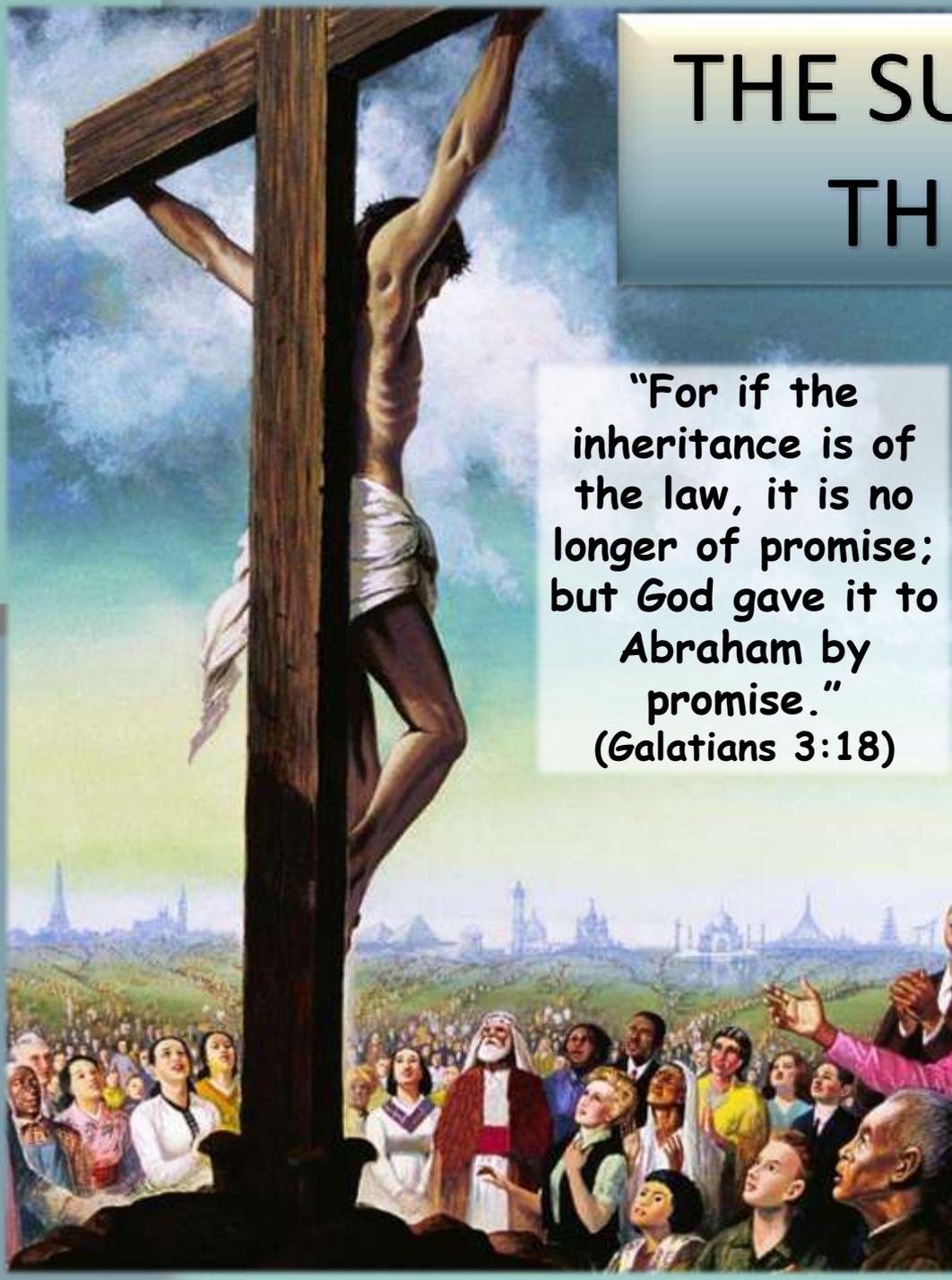
Because the people had forgotten most of the law during their slavery in Egypt.



“God’s law is a transcript of His character. It was given to man in the beginning as the standard of obedience. In succeeding ages this law was lost sight of... In course of time the Israelites went into Egypt, where for many years they suffered grievous oppression at the hands of the Egyptians...

At Sinai the law was given a second time. In awful grandeur the Lord spoke His precepts and with His own finger engraved the Decalogue upon tables of stone.

Passing down through the centuries, we find that there came a time when God’s law must once more be unmistakably revealed as the standard of obedience.”



THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PROMISE

**"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)**

The law God gave Israel is eternal but cannot save anyone.

The sacrifice of Jesus (the promise) was the turning point in the story of Salvation. From that moment on, there's a way to be saved (that was foreshadowed by the ceremonial law).

The law is important, but it cannot replace the promise of salvation by grace and faith alone. Thanks to the law, we can better understand how wonderful that promise is.

“The mediatorial work of Christ commenced with the commencement of human guilt and suffering and misery, as soon as man became a transgressor. The law was not abolished to save man and bring him into union with God. But Christ assumed the office of his surety and deliverer in becoming *sin for man*, that man might become the righteousness of God in and through Him who was one with the Father. Sinners can be justified by God only when He pardons their sins, remits the punishment they deserve, and treats them as though they were really just and had not sinned, receiving them into divine favor and treating them as if they were righteous. They are justified alone through the imputed righteousness of Christ. The Father accepts the Son, and through the atoning sacrifice of His Son accepts the sinner.”