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Galatians

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.

Galatians 3:16

The words of Paul in this verse are the subject of an almost countless number of pages of analysis, speculation, and frustration. If one is truly concerned about the complete meaning of what is being discussed, referring to many of those commentaries is a must.

First, Paul begins with "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made." It is already known that the promise was made to Abraham; however, this says "promises." The Bible reveals that the promise was reiterated to him on several occasions. Therefore the plural is used. Further, it says that the promises were made to "his Seed." Therefore, the promises were made to more than just Abraham. The word in the NKJV is capitalized as "Seed" because they believe Paul is explaining the Seed as Christ the Person. But this becomes problematic.

Paul next states that "He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one." This becomes rather difficult because though it is true that the word for "seed" is singular, it always involves a multitude within the singular. In other words, when speaking of the "seed of Abraham" it is referring to many people. The singular is used for the whole. Whether in Hebrew or Greek the same truth is seen. In Greek, Paul says *sperma* (seed) instead of *spermata* (seeds), but *sperma* still includes a corporate whole who issue from one.

What is often inferred is that Paul is saying that this word is referring to Christ the Person and that this was justifiable when speaking to non-Jewish Galatians, or it was acceptable based on rabbinical ways of analyzing Scripture. A third option is that this is speaking of Christ the singular Person as spiritually representing a collective whole. For example, in Matthew 2:15, Christ is used as a fulfilled "type" of the collective body of Israel. But these are just simple ways of dismissing what is not at all obvious. If the word "seed" consistently means a corporate whole when speaking of offspring, then that is how it should be taken. Does this mean Paul is wrong? Of course not!

It must be understood that Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Therefore, the "seed" is speaking of a certain section of his offspring. The "promises" were repeated to only one of them - for example Isaac received the promise. After this, Jacob received the promise, etc. Thus the use of "seed" and "promises" is speaking of a corporate whole, not of the Person of Christ. However, this corporate whole is one in Christ; it is not speaking of Christ the individual, but of Christ the body of believers. This is made explicit later in this same chapter.

To give the whole thought, the NKJV says, "He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." In this, they have made the supposition that the "seed" is Christ. They capitalize "Seed" and they use the pronoun "who" to translate the Greek word *hos*. This supposition, however, is incorrect. The word *hos* can have various meanings, such as who, which, what, that, etc. Translations which read something like, "'And to thy seed,' which is Christ" (YLT) convey the proper meaning.

It is the corporate body, in Christ, to whom the promises were made. The promise does not include Ishmael, for example, even though he was a descendant of Abraham. The promise does not include Esau, although the same is true with him. However, it does include any and all who have called on Christ and who are now adopted into the family of Abraham by faith, being now "in Christ."

The Geneva Bible rightly comments that "Paul does not speak of Christ's person, but of two peoples, who grew together in one, in Christ." Both Jew and Gentile

alike are the seed of Abraham to whom the promises were made. This conveys the whole point of Paul's letter to the Galatians. It is not those who are dependent on the law (meaning observant Jews) to whom the promises were made, but to any and all who - like Abraham - take God at His word and demonstrate simple faith in Him.

Life application: It is a shame that people get caught up in a single translation of the Bible. In so doing, there is always the chance that the rendering is incorrect. In the case of this verse, a simple capitalization and the use of one incorrect pronoun can bring out an entirely different meaning than that which is intended. This misunderstanding will not necessarily lead to some type of heresy, but it may lead to confusion when someone is approached with the original meaning of the word translated as "seed." In this inability to properly explain what is being said, a perceived inaccuracy is found in the Bible. Thus it can give ammo to deniers of the Bible to further challenge its inspiration. Doctrine does matter. Detailed study of the word is important.

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 now gives a further explanation of the logical thought process which he has already described, that of the promise preceding the law and which stands apart from, and superior to, the law. He has shown that those who attempt to be justified by works of the law are under a curse (v. 10); that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God (v. 11) because the law is not of faith (v.12); that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law (v. 13) so that the blessings of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles (v.14).

As the Gentiles had no law, just as Abraham had no law, then how could the law somehow add to their righteousness? Christ had come and so any who received him by faith would be just as Abraham because the promises were made to Abraham and those who issued from him; those who are in Christ (v.16).

Understanding all of this, Paul now says that "the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later..."

The law came long, long after Abraham's death. It was never a part of his life and it had no bearing at all on his declaration of righteousness. In fact, the law came after a full 215 years of him and his descendants living in Canaan, and then another 215 years of his descendants living in Egypt. It was his grandson Jacob who went down to Egypt, and it was Jacob's great-great grandson Moses who led the people out of Egypt and to Sinai where the law was received.

During all of that intervening time, there was no law and yet the people were considered righteous as they lived by faith in the promises of God. Their standing before God was a part of the promise made to Abraham, and the law had no bearing on it at all. Further, the law "cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect." Bible scholar Bengel notes that, "The greatness of the interval increases the authority of the promise."

This is what Paul alluded to in verse 15 when using the example of a covenant between mere men. As this is applicable in such a covenant, how much more so is it when dealing with the promises of God! Paul is trying to wake the Galatians up to the fact that they are as Abraham was, living by promise and not by law. The purpose of the law has nothing to do with a declaration of righteousness. In fact, as Paul will continue to show, the law stands contrary to such a declaration.

As a final note, the duration of time that Paul speaks of here, that of 430 years, is an exact figure of time. It was precisely 430 years from the promise to the exodus from Egypt. It is too much information to include in this commentary, but it is exactly as described above - 215 years time in Canaan and 215 years in Egypt. The biblical account shows this exactly and there is no contradiction in it.

Life application: The law came after the promise. Gentiles were never considered under the law, and for the Jews, the law was fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, to insert

(or reinsert) the law is to set aside the promises of God. Don't pursue such a path. Have faith in God and what He has done in Christ for your justification.

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

Paul sums up this paragraph with an obvious conclusion of the thoughts he has thus far presented. How can one read these words and deny the evident nature of what they state? And yet, for 2000 years, people have been caught up in the legalistic practice of reinserting (or if Gentile, inserting) the law into their practicing theology. Taken at face value, it is clear that this approach is utter folly.

He begins with, "For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise." The promise was given to Abraham without any strings attached to it. A promise was made; Abraham believed; and Abraham was declared righteous. In the covenant made at Mount Sinai, however, there was an agreement between both parties before the covenant was made. It was, in essence, a contract requiring performance. If either party failed to keep the contract, then there would be penalties associated with it. Such was not the case with Abraham. There was nothing to fulfill; there was simply a declaration of righteousness.

If the Lord later added the law into what was promised, then "*it is* no longer of promise." The promise would not actually be a promise and the words of God to Abraham would have been deceitful, and the addition of the law would then have been manipulative. However, neither is the case. Instead, "God gave it to Abraham by promise."

Abraham was given a promise which could in no way be affected by the later coming of the law. In this verse, the nouns "law" and "promise" have no article. They are being considered in their "characteristic principles, which were not only diverse, but contrary" (Pulpit Commentary). Further, the verb for "gave" in the Greek is in the perfect tense. Paul is showing that it was and it forever is an enduring promise. The matter is settled. Along with that, the placing of "God" is in

the emphatic position, "...but to Abraham through a promise has granted (it) God." The stress would be like saying, "...but no less than God Himself has given the promise to Abraham."

As it is no less than God who gave the promise, and as it is a "forever and enduring promise," then the contradictory idea of having the law later become a part of what is needed to receive the Messianic blessings is utterly ridiculous. Rather, the Galatians received the promise by faith and only by faith. For them to insert the law would nullify the words of promise.

Life application: Understanding right theology is hard work, but to shun it will inevitably lead one down a highway to heresy. Meditate on Scripture; contemplate the grace of Christ; and don't let the next passing fad or smooth talking preacher lead you away from what is sound.