

**Galatians 3: 17 and 18; “The Inheritance is of Promise”, A Bible Study prepared for the evening of December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013, by Pastor Paul Rendall, and conducted at the church.**

We saw the last time that we were together that the promise of the covenant which God made with Abraham was made to him and to his “Seed”. And we saw that the promised “Seed” was Christ, who was not to come into the world for several thousand years yet, but promised here to Abraham in his becoming the first Hebrew. The Hebrews were the people of God’s purpose; Abraham and his descendants were the people through whom would come God’s promised Christ or the Messiah. Christ’s being born as the Savior of the world was the fulfillment of God’s covenant of purpose with Abraham, and indeed all of God’s Elect people in in times and ages. Abraham is the spiritual father of all Jews and Gentiles who trust in Christ, whether in Old Testament times or New. We who believe, it says in verse 14, “receive the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith.” It is the Holy Spirit who gives all of God’s Elect people the ability to be changed in their hearts; to be born again in regeneration, and to live the Christian life to the glory of God. Now, since there are many people who think that they are being saved by their religious works, what we are studying tonight is of great importance. Because, whether it was the Jews of Paul’s day, or whether it is the people of our day who think that they are being saved by their going to church and taking the sacraments, they shall not find at the last that they have any inheritance with God unless they come by faith to Jesus Christ. So we need to see tonight, that the inheritance is not of the law; rather the eternal inheritance comes to each and every believing soul, by means of a promise. Therefore, we want 1<sup>st</sup> of all to see, that the promise of an eternal inheritance existed before the law was ever given. 2<sup>nd</sup> – We want to see that that covenant of God’s purpose cannot be annulled by the law. **1<sup>st</sup> of all – Let us see that the promise of an eternal inheritance existed before the law was ever given.** (verse 17)

“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.” “For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.” What inheritance is being spoken of here? Is it earthly or eternal? Well it is both, and the earthly inheritance is a type of the eternal inheritance, and the promise of both was given to Abraham. Turn with me over to Genesis 12, verses 1-7. “Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show to you.’ “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.” “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him.” “And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.” “Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan.” “So they came to the land of Canaan.” “Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh.” “And the Canaanites were then in the land.” “Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ “And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.” Now clearly these words of God’s to Abraham show us that He intended to make Abram a great nation of people, the Jews, and that He was going to give them a certain earthly land. This land, the land of Canaan, was at that time filled with Canaanites, and God said to him that He was going to give it to Abraham, and to his descendants, or to his “seed” it is rendered in the King James version. We have already in our last study seen, that the “Seed” refers to Christ in reference to all the spiritual promises that Abraham was given by God.

But turn over with me to Hebrews Chapter 11, verses 8-10. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance.” “And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” “By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Now, here we are shown a very important truth; that the physical inheritance was a type of the eternal inheritance. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were heirs; they were going to receive an inheritance of this physical geographic land, the land of promise. But verse 10 says, “He waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Surely this is no city of man’s making. The receiving of the promise that he would inherit this physical land, and that it would someday have a city called Jerusalem situated on it, which would be the capital city of this geographic land and ethnic people; this was all typical spiritually of the eternal inheritance of all believers in Christ; the promised “Seed”. The promise was given to Abraham and to his “Seed” which was Christ. All believers are heirs of promise; they have an eternal inheritance through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. This was a promise which was given to Abram in the beginning of his sojourn to the land which would be the inheritance for his physical descendants the Jews, and also incorporated into it the spiritual promise of a “city” or an inheritance which would not be built by man, but by God; that is the church of Jesus Christ, composed of both Jews and Gentiles; believers in both Old Testament times and New.

Now look at verse 12. “Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.” “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, (that is the earthly tangible land of Canaan, nor the tangible spiritual blessing of seeing Christ Himself, in their day) but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” Verse 14 – For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.” “And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.” “But now they desire a better, that is a heavenly country.” “Therefore God is not ashamed to call them brethren, for He has prepared a city for them.” So, we can see here that even though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were promised, and eventually given a share in the earthly inheritance of the land of Canaan, that this was not really what they were looking for. They were by faith in the promise of Christ looking for the heavenly country, and the spiritual City of God which would be built by the Lord Jesus Christ. This city is spiritual and it is made up people all believing in the promise of God which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The promise made to Abraham was eventually to be fulfilled in Christ, but the spiritual benefits of salvation were applied to him, way back there in time, at the beginning of the nation and people of Israel, not by their works, but by the grace which would be purchased by Christ.

Look over at Hebrews 9: 15 – “And for this reason Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” You can see here that Christ’s death secured all the blessings of salvation “for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant.” That is, Christ’s purchase at the cross, what had been promised by God all the way from the beginning of the world, and certainly from the beginning of the Jewish race and people; He paid the price for those transgressions which were committed under the time of the first covenant. The word “covenant” is translated “testament” in the King James and may be a better rendering in this place, of the Greek word “diatheke”, here. John Gill says: “The covenant of grace, as administered under the Gospel dispensation, is a testament or will. The Jews have adopted the Greek word, here used, into their language, and pronounce it דייתקי, and by it understand a dying man’s last will and testament (d). Some of them make it to be of Hebrew derivation; as if it was said, למיקם תהי דא, “this shall be to confirm” (e), or this shall

be stable and firm; though others own it to be the same with this Greek word διαθηκη (f). The covenant of grace, is properly a covenant to Christ, and a testament or will to his people: it is his and their Father's will, concerning giving them both grace and glory; it consists of many gifts and legacies; in it Christ is made heir of all things, and his people are made joint heirs with him; they are given to him as his portion; and they have all things pertaining to life and godliness bequeathed to them, even all spiritual blessings; the witnesses of it are Father, Son, and Spirit; and the seals of it are the blood of Christ, and the grace of the Spirit; and this is registered in the Scriptures by holy men as notaries; and is unalterable and immutable.” (end of quote) This goes hand in hand with what Peter says in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1: 3 and 4. “Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you....” So you see, the inheritance for Old Testament saints was heaven, and the inheritance for the New Testament saints is also heaven; but all the blessings of justification, adoption, and sanctification were applied to believers before the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ, based upon what Christ would come to do and fulfill on their behalf. And these same blessings are also applied to all New Testament believers now, and into the future until the end of the world, based upon Christ’s finished work as well. Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world in the mind of God, and that is how all of this should be understood.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – We want to see that that covenant of God’s purpose cannot be annulled by the law.**

Verse 17 – “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.” “For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.” At the time of the promise given to Abraham, the law had not yet been given, and would not be given for 430 years. Therefore, Paul is reasoning, how can the inheritance be of the law at all; seeing that to do and fulfill the all the requirements necessary for receiving an inheritance by observing the law, the requirement with all of its stated conditions did not yet exist? This is very wonderful reasoning indeed, and frees us to see that all the conditions requisite for our salvation rest upon what God promised that He would do for Abraham, and also then, what He has promised that He will do for us. Turn with back to Exodus Chapter 12, verses 40-42. “Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred thirty years.” “And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.” “It is a night of solemn remembrance for the children of Israel throughout their generations.” Truly, this is a grand picture of God’s great redemption in Christ. Here in Exodus Chapter 12 we find God Himself bringing out all the “armies of Israel”, all of their several millions of people, at the very time that He had promised to do it. And this, you will observe was before the giving of the law in Exodus 20.

Therefore we should understand that if we were to trace back 430 years to the day, we would find the covenant with Abraham being ratified by God Himself declaring what He Himself would do. And indeed we do find this ratification, if you will turn back with me to Genesis Chapter 15, verses 6-21. Remember that in verses 1-6 we find God’s justifying of Abraham, declaring him righteous on the basis of his faith. “And Abraham believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” “Then He said to him, I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.” “And he said, ‘Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?’” “So He said to him, ‘Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.’” “Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other;

but he did not cut the birds in two.” “and when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.” “Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.” “Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.’ “And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.” “Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.” “But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” “And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.” “On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and Jebusites.’” If my calculations are right, we see here that the 400 years, going back from Israel’s leaving Egypt bring us to the time when Isaac was weaned and the day that he was mocked by Hagar’s son Ishmael. (See Adam Clarke’s comment at Genesis 15: 13, who mentions Ainsworth’s calculations; also Matthew Henry) Ishmael was the son of the bondwoman, Hagar, who was Egyptian. But he was born of the flesh, and Isaac born according to the Spirit. If you add thirty years going back from that point, you would probably come to the very night of this incident where God Himself told Abraham that he would inherit the land. God ratified the covenant of the promise of Christ that night when “a smoking oven and a flaming torch” passed between the pieces of the sacrifices cut in half. It was not Abraham who ratified this covenant of promise, but God Himself. The smoking oven of affliction for God’s chosen people in Egypt would turn to the torch light of the pillar of fire leading the way into the Promised land. All of these things are a type of what God would do for His believing people and His New Testament Church through Jesus Christ our Lord. We are saved by what God has done, and is doing for us through Jesus Christ our Lord. We do not have to try to be justified by the law. We only need believe in Christ.