

Scripture and the Life of God

Session 4

The Result of the Jerusalem Council - Acts 15

Paul refers to this in Galatians 2:1-10

Peter and James both agree with Paul on the nature of the gospel

Letter was sent to the Gentile believers

No circumcision, but three restrictions:

avoid food sacrificed to idols

eating meat with blood still in it

sexual immorality

Galatians 3:19-29

So why did God give the law? That's the question Paul asks now

Israel - a microcosm of the problem with all of humanity

The Torah comes in to do what God needs to do at the moment - set the boundaries of the covenant community

A lot of Romans 6-8 is in the background of Paul's statements here in Galatians (slaves of sin vs. slaves of righteousness)

The Law was added “because of transgressions”

What does this mean?

The answer involves understanding the chronological sequence

It is NOT a progressive revelation, but the story swings back and forth between light and darkness

The OT story is about terrible things happening and God needing to shine a light in the darkness

The law was necessary to stop Israel going from bad to worse

The Goal

The Messiah

It is the Messiah who sums up God's people in himself

Deuteronomy 33 - the law was given through angels (divine revelation, given through Moses)

Galatians 3:20 - “He is, however, not the mediator of the law, but God is one” - the whole passage is about the single family God promised

Moses cannot be the mediator of the single family. The law divides the family. But God is one, therefore, there is one family

3:21 - Is the law against God's promises?

No - the law is designed for God's covenant promises

But the law was not given to fully fulfill the promises, but as a placeholder

3:21 - if the law could have given life, that would have been the end of it

3:22 - The law was given to enclose everything under sin so that the promise could be given to those who believe

Galatians 3:23-29

A picture of the Messiah and his people - the divine purpose that does what God promised Abraham from the beginning

Israel was kept under guard by the law—provided a boundary fence around Israel

v. 24 - law was like a babysitter looking after us until the coming of the Messiah, so that then we might be given covenant membership via messianic faithfulness

v. 25-26 - Now the faithfulness has come, you no longer need a babysitter - the people of God are constituted in a new way

Galatians 3:23-29

Jesus' people are summed up and found in him

v. 26-29 - you are all children of God through IN the Messiah Jesus

When God looks at the Messiah, he sees all who belong to him

3:27 - Baptism

All who are baptized in the Messiah are in the Messiah

baptism symbolizes the new Exodus, death, and resurrection

unites people in the Messiah - you've come through water, been clothed, so that now you have a new identity and are part of a new family

You are already the people of the Messiah - why go back to two families instead of one?

3:28 - A Play on a Jewish Prayer

A regular Jewish prayer: "Thank God you did not make me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman."

Paul flips this prayer on its ear

Faith is the same for Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female

The revelation of the love of God is the same for all

3:29 - Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's offspring!

Galatians 4:1-12

A new division in Paul's argument

v. 1 - An example from Roman practice - as long as the legal heir was still a child (a minor) he was not superior to a slave (though, in prospect, he was the lord of the manor)

Adopted children have the same status

v. 2 - minor children remained under guardianship (tutors) until a date set by the father

The Status of Jews and Gentiles under the Law

Paul's argument: Jews and Gentiles have the same status

For Paul, the Jews were like adopted minors, the Gentiles like slaves - both need redemption and adoption as sons - neither has a natural birthright

v. 3 - while minors, both were enslaved to the "elemental spirits of the world" - elementary teachings found in the world, one form of which is the law of Moses

In other words, both Jews and Gentiles were subject to these teachings, though different teachings

Galatians 4:4-7

But in the fullness of time (the time appointed by the Father), God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law

to redeem those who were under the law so that (together) Jews and Gentiles might receive adoption as children and receive their inheritance

What is that inheritance? The Spirit of his Son

So, you are no longer slaves but children and, if a child, you are also an heir

Implication - Gentiles submitting to the law is going back to slavery, back to childhood

Galatians 4:8-11

Paul reminds Galatians of their former slavery to “beings which by nature are not gods” (speaking to former pagans) - perhaps speaking about the emperor cult?

Now you have come to God, why turn back to those weak spirits and be enslaved again?

v. 10 - Paul draws an analogy between calendar-based worship of the emperor cult and the calendar-based worship of the Mosaic law

In other words - Jews and Gentiles - you are in the same boat, under the same slavery, but you’ve been set free! Don’t go back!

Galatians 4:12-20

Paul makes an appeal to friendship, warning about rival missionaries

Appealing at several different levels, both teasing and ironic

The Galatians are like his children who are now teenagers, rebellious and awkward

Galatians 14:12-20

v. 12 - "Become like I am because I have become like you are" - like a Gentile in order to win Gentiles, not paying attention to ethnic restrictions

v. 13 - "physical infirmity" - beaten up - people would normally shun someone who has been beaten up, but they welcomed him as though an angel (messenger) of God

The message he brought had the power to transform them

v. 15 - so what happened to the blessing you gave me then? "Eyes" = probably a metaphor (though may refer to Paul's poor eyesight, maybe the result of being beaten?)

Galatians 4:12-20

v. 16 - Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

v. 17 - these missionaries are "zealous" for you - trying to lure you - but their zeal is wrongly directed (and Paul understood zeal)

v. 18 - it is good to be zealous for a good cause, but they are doing the very thing I resisted when I went up to Jerusalem

Be zealous, instead, for the real gospel!

v. 20 - gives his admonition in friendship

Interesting fact - many graveyards 2nd/3rd century graveyards in Galatia contain many people named "Paul"

Galatians 4:21-5:1

v. 21 - So, you want to live under the law, do you? Are you prepared to hear what it actually says?

v. 22 - Perhaps the agitating missionaries were pointing to the Abraham story - but once you start talking about two families you'll see what their defining characteristics are

v. 22 - two sons, setting up the idea of slavery and freedom. Hagar and Ishmael = slave, Sarah and Isaac = free. You are part of the latter family.

Two Covenants/ Two Jerusalems

v. 24 - Two women stand for two different covenants: The Sinai Covenant and the Covenant made with Abraham

Sinai (Arabia) represents the Mosaic law

v. 25 - Sinai = the present Jerusalem "in slavery with her children"

v. 26 - "the Jerusalem above" - not the heavenly place where people go when they die, but God bringing his heavenly purpose to earth (on earth as it is in heaven)

See also Revelation 21:2, 22

Galatians 4:27-30

v. 27 - Allusion to Isaiah 54:1-3 - The children of the barren woman will possess the nations

v. 28 - You are children of the barren woman, children of the promise

v. 29 - But just like the slave child persecuted the child of promise in Abraham's day, so now you can expect to be persecuted by those still enslaved to the old way and the elemental spirits

v. 30 - but what does the Scripture say? Drive out the slave child (in other words, drive out these missionaries!)

Galatians 4:31-5:1

"Friends," we are children not of the slave but of the free woman

5:1 - for freedom Christ has set us free - don't go back to slavery!

Table Talk

What do these passages teach you about God?

What do these passages teach you about human beings?

What do these passages teach you about the relationship between God and human beings?
