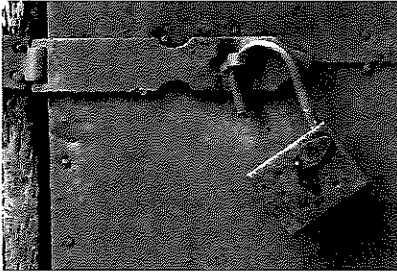


God Keeps His Promises



Topic

God's promises

Theme

God always keeps His promises.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will draw comfort and encouragement from God's promises.

Materials

• Resources 1 and 8

Scripture Focus

Galatians 3:15–22

Summary

God's promise to Abraham included His blessing of life through Jesus Christ. The law that came later could not invalidate God's promise. Its purpose was to communicate God's high and holy standards, declare sinners guilty and condemned, and convince them of their sin and need of Christ.

Outline

I. God's Promise and the Law (Gal. 3:15–18)

- A. How promises work (3:15)
- B. What God promised (3:16)
- C. When God made His promise (3:17)
- D. Why God's promise remains (3:18)

II. God's Purpose of the Law (Gal. 3:19–22)

- A. Reveals sin (3:19, 20)
- B. Points to Christ (3:21, 22)

Memory Verse

*"But the scripture hath concluded all under sin,
that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe"
(Galatians 3:22).*

GETTING STARTED

Broken Promises

ASK: If God were only as good as you are at keeping promises, how much encouragement would you find in His promises? (Q1)

ASK: Which of God's promises are you glad He keeps? (Q2)

God, by contrast, always keeps His promises. At age 110, Joshua looked back over his life and Israel's history, and told the Israelites, "Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Josh. 23:14).

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

In the process of answering the Judaizers' false teaching (Gal. 3:15–22), Paul further clarified truths about the gospel and salvation. His teaching reassures us that God always keeps His promises.

I. God's Promise and the Law (Gal. 3:15–18)

The Galatians' defection from the truth of the gospel troubled Paul. Nevertheless, he did not let his disappointment and frustration get out of control. He modeled the spirit of meekness he later exhorted the Galatians to maintain as they restored a sinning brother (6:1). He came off his severe tone and addressed the Galatians as "brethren," or brothers and sisters in Christ (Gal. 3:15). In his commitment to truth, Paul did not abandon his tenderness toward his fellow Christians.

A. How promises work (3:15)

READ: Galatians 3:15.

Paul began his explanation of God's promises and the law with a brief reminder of how promises are supposed to work in everyday life. In the business world of his day, legal promises or covenants were binding and could not be overturned by later laws or by a change of heart. Paul's overall point is that if people are bound by the legal commitments they make, certainly God will keep the promises He has made.

Paul expounded on how promises work and noted two important facts about legal covenants. First, once a covenant is ratified, no one can simply set it aside. A property owner has the right to dispose of his property as he chooses. No one can revoke his action. In a similar way, nothing the Judaizers said or did could overturn God's promises. No one can nullify God's promise.

Second, no one can make additions to a ratified covenant. The original terms of the covenant cannot be altered later. In that sense, Judaizers had no legal basis and no precedent for adding regulations to God's promises concerning salvation.

ASK: How would your life be different if God reneged on His promises? (Q3)

ASK: Why are God's promises ironclad? (Q4) *God is infinitely holy and infinitely powerful. He won't go back on His promise because He cannot sin. He is more powerful than anyone else and can ensure no one changes what He has promised.*

B. What God promised (3:16)

God made promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3) as well as a specific Covenant with him (15:18–21). Of God's promises to Abraham, some were universal, meaning they have implications beyond Abraham and his descendants. Of the universal promises, one of them had to do with God's provision of salvation through Abraham.

READ: Genesis 12:3. **ASK:** What universal promises did God make to Abraham? (Q5) *God promised to bless and curse nations based on how the nations treated Israel; God promised that in Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed.*

God's promise to bless the families of the earth through Abraham is the promise Paul referred to in Galatians 3:16. Christ is the Seed of Abraham that brought universal blessing to the world.

READ: Galatians 3:16; Genesis 22:17, 18.

The Hebrew word for seed is a collective singular noun, like our word “family” or “army.” In Galatians 3:16, Paul indicated that this singular word was significant. God could have chosen a plural word, like “seeds” or “children,” if He had wanted to speak only in terms of the many descendants of Abraham who would enjoy the promises. However, God purposefully chose to use the singular use of the word “seed.”

As Paul reflected on God's promises to Abraham, he recognized that God's words carried a special significance. The ultimate fulfillment of the promises related to Christ, Who was the singular promised Seed of Abraham. Christ was Abraham's seed in a way in which none of Abraham's other descendants could qualify. He was born of a virgin, meaning He was both fully man and fully God. As humanity's sinless sacrifice for sin, Jesus opened the door to the fulfillment of God's promise to bless the families of the earth through Abraham.

When God made promises to Abraham, He framed them in the context of a free and unconditional contract. He did not condition them on the obedience of Abraham or of his descendants. His promises are as certain as His character is unchanging.

C. When God made His promise (3:17)

God gave the promises of blessings to Abraham several times, and later confirmed the promises to Abraham's son Isaac (Gen. 27) and to his grandson Jacob (Gen. 28; 35; 46). A period of 430 years intervened between God's final confirmation of the promise to Jacob and His giving of the law to Moses (Exod. 12:40; Gal. 3:17).

READ: Galatians 3:17.

Paul pointed to the timeline of events because it proved that the law could not take priority over God's unchangeable promise to Abraham. God's unconditional promises cannot be changed or replaced by anything that came after them.

God does not contradict Himself. Both promise and law had a place in God's program for humanity. The promise guaranteed God's blessing to Abraham and through Abraham to the world. God freely committed Himself in an unconditional way to this promise. However, God also spoke the law and gave it to Moses and the Israelites. Both promise and law are God's Word.

The Jews had not kept promise and law in their proper places. They had limited the promise to focus on Jewish national prosperity rather than on universal spiritual blessing. They failed to recognize that the law was intended to reveal to Israel its sin and need for God's grace. They had treated the law as a way to gain salvation by earning God's favor.

READ: Matthew 3:9. **ASK:** How do John the Baptist's words to the Pharisees and Sadducees parallel Paul's words about Abraham's natural descendants? (Q6) *John warned the Pharisees not to think they were righteous simply because they were Abraham's descendants.*

Both promise and law were valid for different reasons. The promise served as God's unfailing commitment to bring blessing through Abraham. The law demonstrated God's unchanging standard of holiness and the impossibility of human beings to achieve it by their own effort. The law pointed sinners to the need of God's grace, and the promise offered that grace. The promise did not lower God's standard of holiness, and the law could not cancel that promise (3:17).

D. Why God's promise remains (3:18)

Galatians 3:18 advances Paul's key point. First, he made it clear that if the inheritance of God's blessing came by law, it could not come by promise. Law demands human achievement or accomplishment in order to realize benefits. The benefits are therefore conditional. God's promises were motivated by love and came without conditions. Promise speaks of receiving a blessing given by another.

Second, God made the promise to Abraham. The promise didn't come from a mere human with limited ability to keep the promise. God's promises are supported by His perfect knowledge, infinite power, and absolute wisdom. God's holy character and infinite abilities guarantee His promises.

Third, God was not coerced into blessing Abraham. He chose to bless Abraham voluntarily. God's promise to bless the families of the earth through Christ, the Seed of Abraham, was not conditioned upon Abraham's faithfulness; the promise came with no conditions. God chose to commit Himself to blessing the world through Abraham by making a promise to the patriarch.

ASK: If the law were necessary to earn what God promised, then the promise would be conditional. How much hope and encouragement would a promise have if it was based on sinful man's abilities? (Q7) *None. We would be no better off than if God hadn't made the promise.*

Fourth, because God chose to work by promise, His blessings could not be

Note that the law, referred to as the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 19—Deut. 28), was a conditional covenant. As such, it contained conditional blessings and curses. If Israel obeyed God, He would allow them to stay in the Promised Land and enjoy its benefits. If they disobeyed, He promised to kick them out of the Land for a period of time. Israel violated the Mosaic Covenant and ended up in captivity for good. Judah also went into captivity before returning to the land. The Mosaic Covenant is not like the promises God made to Abraham. Those promises have no conditions for anyone to keep.

achieved through the law. The Judaizers tried to substitute law for grace. However, to introduce the principle of law was to distort what God had determined to promise.

II. God's Purpose and the Law (Gal. 3:19–22)

Up to this point Paul had been contrasting the law and the promise, or the principles of works and faith. Paul emphasized the inadequacy of the law because the Judaizers had argued that the law was all-important. Apparently, they thought it was better than the promise God had made to Abraham because it was newer than the promise.

In Galatians 3:19–22 Paul balanced what he had said in the previous verses. He did not want his readers to get the impression that the law had no value whatsoever. He showed that it did not contradict God's promise; it complemented it.

A. Reveals lostness (3:19, 20)

READ: Romans 3:19.

Paul asked and then answered a question that must have puzzled his readers. He asked, "What was the purpose of the law?" He explained that God gave the law after He had given the promise "because of transgressions." In other words, God gave the law to show that no one could meet His standard of holiness. The Jews could examine the law and recognize that they were sinners and were guilty before God.

ASK: How might a mirror by itself help a person solve a bedhead problem? (Q8) *It can't. It's powerless to change the person's hair.*

ASK: How might a mirror's purpose illustrate the law's purpose? (Q9) *The mirror's purpose is to reflect reality. The law reflected the Jew's sinful hearts.*

ASK: Why should we not be surprised by the removal of the Ten Commandments from public places? (Q10) *Sinners don't like looking into the "mirror" of God's Word and seeing their sin.*

God never intended for the law to be permanent. Paul wrote, "It was added . . . till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3:19). Christ is the promised Seed of Abraham. After His death, which brought the promised blessing to all the nations, the law became obsolete.

The Jews recognized that Moses had received the law by way of angels (Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2). Paul used this concept to support his argument that grace is superior to law. The law was at least two steps removed from God, because "it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator" (Gal. 3:19). After receiving the law through angels, Moses passed it along to Israel. However, the gospel had come directly from God (3:20). No mediator was needed because God is one and the promise fully rested in His hands. A person does not have the option to add to or take away from the promise of God. His or her only choice is to accept or reject it.

ASK: How is your faith in a promise affected by the person making the promise? (Q11)

B. Points to Christ (3:21, 22)

Verse 21 poses a second question that must have puzzled the Galatians, “Is the law then against the promises of God?” In other words, are the principles of law and promise contradictory? Paul answered this question by setting up a hypothetical situation. He reasoned that if God had given a law that could have produced spiritual life, a person would be righteous before God by keeping the law perfectly. However, if that were the case, there would be no need for God’s grace working through the promise.

READ: Exodus 20:1–17. **ASK:** What must be true of someone who reads the Ten Commandments and believes he or she is not guilty before God? (Q12)
The person would have to be delusional.

“The scripture hath concluded all under sin,” Paul assured his readers in verse 22. The law condemned everyone, because no one completely obeyed it. The law showed sinners what God demanded, but it had no power to enable them to meet those demands. Sinners can receive spiritual life only by believing on Jesus Christ (22b).

MAKING IT PERSONAL

God’s Sure Promises

RESOURCE: Display resource 8. **ASK:** What has God promised to us? (Q13)
(Record or reveal answers.) *Power for service, Acts 1:8; victory over temptation, 1 Corinthians 10:13; comfort in trials, 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4; eternal life, John 3:16; eternal rewards, 2 Corinthians 5:10.*

ASK: Which of God’s promises will help you live effectively this week? (Q14)

Looking in God’s Word

While the law is no longer in effect, God still has a righteous standard for our lives in His Word. For instance, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in some form in the New Testament. So, reading and studying God’s Word will often have a convicting effect on our lives. The Spirit uses God’s Word to prompt us to obey God. He then empowers us to say no to temptation and yes to God.

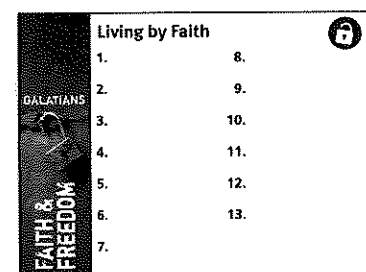
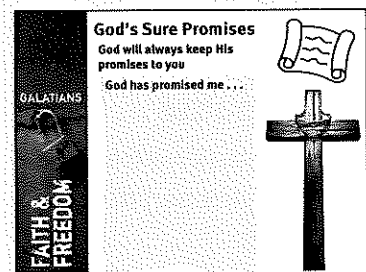
ASK: How has reading and studying God’s Word had a cleansing effect on your life? (Q15)

ASK: How might you increase your intake of God’s Word? (Q16)

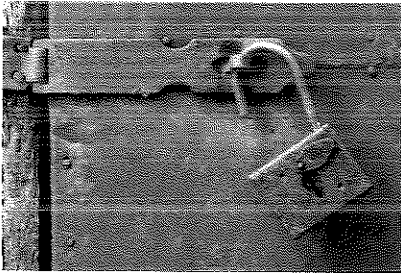
Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to record a summary for this lesson: Trust God’s promises for salvation and life.

Encourage your learners to memorize Galatians 3:22. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.



From Servant to Son



Topic

Freedom in Christ

Theme

Christ releases sinners from bondage and leads them into blessing.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will appreciate being part of God's family.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 9

Scripture Focus

Galatians 3:23–4:7

Summary

Before Christ died on the cross, the law functioned as a disciplinarian keeping people in bondage. However, Christ fulfilled the law. He shed His blood to pay the penalty the law required and to redeem those who were under the law. Redeemed by the blood of Christ, believers are God's sons and heirs.

Outline

I. The Law Led to Christ (Gal. 3:23–29)

- A. The Law was a schoolmaster (3:23, 24)
- B. Faith closed the school of law (3:25, 26)
- C. In Christ is the promise (3:27–29)

II. Christ Led to Adoption in God's Family (Gal. 4:1–7)

- A. The law imposed bondage (4:1–3)
- B. Christ redeemed from the bondage of law (4:4, 5)
- C. In Christ is sonship (4:6, 7)

Memory Verses

"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:6, 7).