The Dispensational Implications of Galatians 3:17-19

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Introduction

Although the biblical term for "dispensation" (οἰκονομία, *economy, stewardship, administration*) does not occur in the passage currently under study, the text does contain implications for dispensationalism in at least three areas: (1) the relationship between the covenants and the different administrations of God during various periods; (2) the role of the "Seed of Abraham" (Jesus Christ) in the fulfillment of the covenants and in marking off the dispensations; and (3) an important perspective on the progress of revelation, including the effect of later revelation on earlier promises.

Three separate dispensational arrangements are implicit in Galatians 3:17-19 -- the dispensation of Patriarchal Rule or of Promise (from Abraham to the giving of the Law), the dispensation of the Mosaic Law (from the Law to the coming of Christ), and the dispensation of Grace (from Christ to the millennial kingdom). These dispensations are distinguished by distinctive changes in God's administration of mankind, and they were communicated through new revelation which God delivered at each point in human history to convey His will. Ryrie explains this concept in the following words:

> God's truth was obviously not given all at one time, and the varying stages of revelation show that He has worked in different ways at different times….It is the marking off of these stages in the revelation of the purpose of God that is the basis for the dispensational approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures….In this unfolding there are distinguishable stages of revelation when God introduces new things for which man becomes responsible. These stages are economies, stewardships, or dispensations in the unfolding of His purpose. Dispensationalism, therefore, recognizes both the unity of His purpose and the diversity in the unfolding of it.[1]

A dispensation consists of a divinely established administration or stewardship which is set forth in God's revelation of His will. Ryrie further elaborates:

> In His world God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the passage of time….In its Biblical usage, a dispensation is a divinely established stewardship of a particular revelation of God's mind and will which brings added responsibility to the whole race of men or that portion of the race to whom the revelation is particularly given by God….Thus, the distinguishing characteristics of a different dispensation are a change in God's governmental relationship with man (though a dispensation does not have to be composed entirely of completely new features), a resultant change in man's responsibility, and corresponding revelation necessary to effect the change (which is new and is a stage in the progress of revelation through the Bible).[2]

The primary focus when considering dispensations should be on the details of the distinctive stewardship arrangement that has been instituted by God through His specific revelation for each dispensation, rather than on the period of time during which these arrangements may be in force. However, it is obvious that these arrangements will be implemented during a specific period of human history, and it is not unreasonable to recognize that dispensations have a temporal component. While God is infinite with respect to time, His creatures are not and any revelation of His purpose for finite creatures must of necessity occur within the temporal realm of their existence.

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1 Charles C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 31, 33.

2 Ryrie, 29, 30, 34.

With these basic concepts and definitions in mind, the remainder of this paper will focus on an exegetical study of Galatians 3:17-19. During this exegetical analysis, each verse will be examined to determine its implications for dispensationalism.

Exegesis of Galatians 3:17

> **Του῾το δε΄ λέγω:** (What I am saying is this:) **διαθήκην προκεκυρωμένην ὑπο΄ του῾ θεου῾** (a covenant having been previously confirmed by God) **ὁ μετα΄ τετρακόσια καί΄ τριάκοντα ἔτη γεγονω΄΄ νόμο΄** (the *having-come-into-being-after-four-hundred-and-thirty-years* law) **οὐκ ἀκυροι῾** (cannot annul) **εἰ΄ το΄ καταργη῾σαι τη΄ν ἐπαγγελίαν** (so as to abolish the promise).

Paul introduces his argument with the phrase, "Now I am saying this:" and the structure of the sentence which follows has several features of interest. The direct object (διαθήκην, *covenant*) appears first for emphasis. This covenant must refer to the Abrahamic Covenant -- the promises made by God to Abraham -- which Paul previously discussed in Galatians 3:6-9, 14-16. Paul had made it clear that Abraham received these unconditional promises by faith alone and that God reckoned righteousness to his account. Abraham becomes Paul's primary example of justification by faith apart from works of the law. When discussing the Abrahamic Covenant Paul concentrates on the provision of "blessing for the nations." Ryrie comments, "Notice that in Galatians 3:8 Paul focuses on only one promise in the Abrahamic covenant, namely, 'All the nations shall be blessed in you.'"[3] He goes on to say:

> Before Israel ever came into being as a nation through Isaac and Jacob, Abraham became the pattern for the justification of all people, including those who would believe from among the Jewish nation that would later arise. Faith and justification are personal and individual matters, and belonging to the spiritual seed of Abraham is also a personal and individual matter unrelated to race. The spiritual seed of Abraham does not mean Israel, for Abraham is related to Israel as a national father, and he is related as a spiritual father to believing individuals of all nations (including the Jewish nation) who believe.[4]

This distinction between the natural descendants of Abraham and the spiritual descendants is an important one, because the Jewish people had come to link the Abrahamic covenant with the Mosaic Law, and to tie the promised blessings of God exclusively to membership in the nation of Israel. In discussing Paul's line of reasoning here, Hansen states that, "Behind this argument was the traditional Jewish understanding of the Abrahamic covenant in terms of the Mosaic Law. Indeed, the term covenant became synonymous with law."[5] But in Galatians 3:17 Paul is deliberately breaking down this traditional Jewish link by equating the *covenant* with the *promise* as opposed to the Law. In this regard Longenecker observes that, "Verse 17 contains a number of terms that are either the same as or synonymous with those used in vv 15-16. The nouns διαθήκη (vv 15, 17) and ἐπανγγελία (vv 16, 17) are the most obvious: the first covering the whole semantic range from a human 'will' to a divine 'covenant,' with diverse applications depending on context; the second, whether plural or singular, having reference to God's promise to Abraham."[6] Hansen explains how Paul's linking of these two terms serves the purpose of his argument:

> In this argument, Paul equates the promise and the covenant and splits apart the covenant promise from the law…His use of *promise* as an equivalent term for *covenant* in v. 17 and his frequent repetition of 'promise' in the argument indicate that he is determined to capture the concept of the covenant for his own use against the troublemakers….Probably the reason why Paul

3 Ryrie, 138.

4 Ryrie, 139.

5 G. Walter Hansen, Abraham in Galatians. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, Ltd., 1989), 127.

6 Richard N. Longenecker, Galatians. (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 132.

> did not use διαθήκη after 3:17 was precisely because it had been almost inseparably linked in Jewish tradition with the Mosaic Law, circumcision, and the election of the Jewish nation. So Paul drops the term to avoid confusing his understanding of the covenant with this Jewish monistic, nationalistic understanding. But he maintains the concept of the covenant in this argument for his Gentile mission by defining the Abrahamic covenant in terms of a promise of blessing for Gentiles.[7]

By "capturing the concept of the covenant for his own use" Paul was able to clearly point out the error of the Judaistic teachers in the Galatian churches: they had missed the fact that the fulfillment of this aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant had arrived at that point in salvation history. Dunn expresses this idea in the following words:

> We can re-express the main thrust of the Galatians 3 exposition in this way. The promise was not simply of land and of seed. It was also of blessing, and of blessing to the Gentiles through Abraham: 'In you [Abraham] shall all the nations/Gentiles be blessed' (Gal. 3:8). This element of promise, of blessing for the nations, Paul clearly regarded as a fundamental feature of the promise to Abraham (hence 3:14). The critique at this point, then, is that Paul's kinfolk were failing to recognize that the time for fulfillment of this element of the promise had arrived together with the promised seed.[8]

It is important to understand that the Abrahamic Covenant contained a *collection* of promises -- some addressed to Abraham himself, others to specific descendants of Abraham, and some to "All the nations/Gentiles." Galatians 3:17-19 clearly illustrates the larger principle that specific promises made by God may have outcomes or fulfillments that stretch across several dispensations. Ryrie comments that, "Clearly some promises given in one dispensation are not fulfilled in that same economy."[9] In other words, dispensations are not necessarily marked off by the giving or the fulfilling of specific covenant promises.

There are two noteworthy aspects of the perfect passive participle which describes the covenant in 3:17. First, the perfect tense indicates that God's act of confirming the covenant happened in the past, but with results that continued on into the time of the writer. This shows that the covenant was still in force at least until the time when Paul was composing the epistle to the Galatians. Second, the verb κυρόω, *to make valid*, is used with the prefixed preposition προ- adding the temporal aspect of God *previously* confirming the covenant. Longenecker comments that, "The verb προκυροω (establish previously) appears in both sections as a perfect passive participle and functions similarly in both, though in v 17 the prefix προ- is added to make clear the temporal relation between the covenant and the law."[10] Longenecker goes on to say:

> In line with Hillel's seventh exegetical rule *dabar hallamed me'inyayno* (i.e., a word established by its context), [Paul] argues for the precedence of the Abrahamic covenant with its promise over the Mosaic law with its prescriptions, insisting that the purpose of the law of Moses had nothing to do with either annulling or adding to what God had covenanted with Abraham.[11]

Paul's argument in this verse involves a temporal line of reasoning. This is clear not only from the temporal prefix of the participle mentioned above, but also from the use of the temporal preposition μετα΄ (*after*) and the specific number of years (ἔτη) from the time of the promise to the introduction of the Law. He is demonstrating the temporal validity of the promises given to Abraham, even across several dispensational arrangements. The promises made to Abraham were made during what dispensationalists often call the dispensation of Promise or of Patriarchal Rule. "Until this dispensation, all mankind had been directly related to God's governing

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7 Hansen, 128.

8 James D. G. Dunn, The Theology of Paul the Apostle. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 144.

9 Ryrie, 57.

10 Longenecker, 133.

11 Ibid.

principles. Now God marked out one family and one nation and in them made a representative test of all. The responsibility of the patriarchs was simply to believe and serve God, and God gave them every material and spiritual provision to encourage them to do this."[12] A collection of promises was given to Abraham during this dispensation, and those promises having direct bearing on Abraham himself were fulfilled during his lifetime. After Abraham's death, the promises as yet unfulfilled were confirmed to Isaac and again to Jacob. But even within the lifetimes of all of the patriarchs there were promises that remained unfulfilled.

Next God instituted a new arrangement under which He governed His people through the Mosaic Law. Paul had already referred to this as a time when "as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse" (Galatians 3:10) because of the humanly impossible task of measuring up to the standards of the Mosaic Law. Baker describes what life was like under the temporal rule of the Mosaic Law as well as what provisions were made for one's eternal well-being:

> It is the plain teaching of the New Testament that every one who did not continue in all things that are written in the book of the law was under the curse, and it is equally plain that not one Israelite ever continued in all that the law demanded. The conclusion is inescapable that all must have been under the curse of the law. Did this mean, then, that all were lost? No, it could not, for it is equally plain that many of the Old Testament saints were saved. What, then, did the curse of the law mean? The law has a system of penalties, the extreme one being death. Paul teaches that the law has dominion over a man as long as he is alive, but that physical death frees one from the law (Romans 7:1-6). We have already shown that the Israelites, by virtue of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Passover, and the Covenant sacrifice were on redemption ground and were considered to be God's chosen nation and the people of God before ever the law was imposed upon them. Again, Paul makes it plain that the Law, which was given 430 years after the promise to Abraham, could not disannul the promise (Galatians 3:17). Therefore it should be clear that salvation under the Dispensation of Law was upon the basis of the promise, and that while breaking of the law might bring physical death, as it did in many cases, it could not result in disannulling of the promise. Physical death is not necessarily synonymous with spiritual death, even when it is visited as a penalty.[13]

It is clear, then, that even during the dispensation of Law one's standing before God continued to be by grace through faith according to the pattern of God's dealing with Abraham. Ryrie elaborates on this idea:

> Under the law God provided a way whereby people could be <u>eternally</u> acceptable before Him. He also provided ways whereby people could be <u>temporally</u> acceptable before Him. Breaking the Sabbath was punishable by death. Keeping the Sabbath meant continuance in the present life. But keeping the Sabbath did not mean eternal life. Therefore, it is entirely harmonious to say that the means of eternal salvation was by grace and that the means of temporal life was by law….The law could not save, and yet the law was the revelation of God for that time. That the law could not save is perfectly clear. People were saved under the Law economy but not by the law. Scripture is plain concerning this fact – Romans 3:20 and 2 Corinthians 3:6-7. And yet the law contained the revelation that brought people to a realization that their faith must be placed in God the Savior. How did it do this? Primarily by the worship it instituted through the sacrificial system. The sacrifices were part of the law; the keeping of them did not save, and yet a person could respond to what they taught so as to effect eternal salvation.[14]

It is important to understand that the institution of the Mosaic Law did not do away with God's gracious gift of justification by faith. Wuest comments that, "Grace flowed full and free from Adam's time to Abraham's, and from Abraham's time to Moses', and from Moses' time to Paul's. And it flows full and free from Paul's time through the present, and will be in force as the only way in which God saves a sinner, until the Great White Throne. The law was merely in force from Moses' time to Christ's death on the Cross, and even while it was in

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12 Ryrie, 54.

13 Charles R. Baker, <u>A Dispensational Theology</u>. (Grand Rapids: Grace Bible College Publications, 1971), 98-99.

14 Ryrie, 117.

force, God saved sinners by pure grace."[15]

In addition to this, it was *during* the dispensation of Law that God graciously amplified the "land" features of the Abrahamic Covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-10), as well as graciously amplifying the "seed" promises to include the kingdom, house, and throne of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:14-17, 20-21; Ezekiel 37:24-25; Daniel 7:13-14; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11). In Galatians 3:17, Paul is making the point that the Mosaic Law was never intended to annul any of the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant nor to abolish the unconditional promises given through Abraham. Not only did the promises made to Abraham endure through the dispensation of Law, but God continued to elaborate upon them through the progress of revelation during that time.

Exegesis of Galatians 3:18

> **εἰ γάρ ἐκ νόμου ἡ κληρονομία** (for if by law [is] the inheritance)**, οὐκέτι ἐξ ἐπαγγελίας** ([it is] no longer by promise), **τῷ δὲ Ἀβραάμ** (but to Abraham) **δι' ἐπαγγελίας κεχάρισται ὁ θεός** (by means of promise God has given it)**.**

γάρ (*for*) at the beginning of this verse introduces Paul's on-going explanation of what he has just stated. Regarding the connection between Galatians 3:17 and 3:18, Lenski comments that, "*For* makes still clearer the fact that the law, which came into being hundreds of years later than the testament, does not alter its confirmation, does not put its promise out of effect. Paul states it conditionally: 'If the inheritance (is derived) from law, no longer (is it derived) from promise.' If, since the days of Moses and Sinai, the source of the inheritance lies in the law, then a mighty reversal has certainly taken place, then the source is no longer what it was before in Abraham's time and in the centuries following, namely promise. Then no one is able to get this inheritance by simply believing the promise as Abraham, the patriarchs, their families and descendants did during those centuries."[16] If this were the case, then what did Abraham and all subsequent believers do for 430 years until the coming of the Law? This question is absurd because all of these people were justified by grace through faith, following the pattern of Abraham.

In Galatians 3:18 the words νόμου (*law*) and ἐπαγγελία (*promise*) are both anarthrous. Wuest explains that the missing definite articles indicate that "Paul is speaking of them here in their character of two opposing principles."[17] In other words, does the gracious inheritance given by God come by observing the principle of Law or the principle of Promise? Paul gives the answer in the final phrase: God has given it by the principle of Promise and <u>not</u> by the principle of Law. Regarding the logic of Galatians 3:18, Burton comments, "The implied object of the verb is evidently τὴν κληρονομίαν. …The statement as a whole constitutes the minor premise of which the preceding sentence is the major premise. If the inheritance is by law, it is not by promise; but it is by promise; <u>therefore it is not by law</u>."[18] [emphasis added]

One of the key terms in Galatians 3:18 is the word *inheritance* (κληρονομία), by which Paul means the inheritance of the promised blessings given by God through Abraham. "*Inheritance* is introduced by Paul into

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15 Kenneth S. Wuest, <u>Galatians in the Greek New Testament</u>. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1944), 105.

16 R. C. H. Lenski, <u>The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians</u>. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), 164.

17 Wuest, 102.

18 Ernest DeWitt Burton, <u>A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians</u>. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921), 186.

the discussion here for the first time, though subsequently it plays a major role (κληρονομια, *inheritance* here; κληρονομος, *heir* at 3:29; 4:1, 7; κληρονομεω, *inherit* at 4:30; 5:21; with the idea being prominent in the illustration of 4:1-7, the allegory of 4:21-31, and the blessing of 6:16)."[19] Bruce explains that the concept of inheritance was implicit in Paul's previous discussion of the covenant in Galatians 3:15-16.

> The inheritance has been implied in vv 15-17; promises made with regard to a man's descendants involve the principle of inheritance. If the inheritance of Abraham's descendants were based on law -- more specifically, the Mosaic Law -- then it would belong to the people of the law, i.e. the Jewish nation. But if it is based on the promise made to Abraham, generations before the giving of the law, then the law cannot affect it. It belongs to the people of faith (cf. v7, οἱ ἐκ πίστεως) who, whether of Gentile or Jewish birth, are the true children of Abraham. And it is certainly on promise that the inheritance is based: τῳ᾽ δε΄ Αβραα΄μ δι΄ ἐπαγγελία ς κεχάρισται ὁ θεός -- by promise, and therefore by faith, for it was on account of his faith in the promise of God that Abraham was justified (v 6).[20]

This emphasis on the inheritance coming through faith becomes an important assertion in Paul's argument against the Judaizing teachers in Galatia. In 3:17 Paul effectively disconnected the Law from the covenant using a <u>temporal</u> argument -- the Law which came 430 years afterward cannot annul a covenant previously confirmed by God. Now Paul separates the Law from the promise using a <u>methodological</u> argument -- the inheritance comes *by means of* the promise but <u>not</u> *by means of* the Law. Hansen elaborates on the impact this argument would have on the false teachers in Galatia:

> In Paul's view, those who seek the inheritance through the law have failed to recognize the precedence of the promise in salvation history. <u>They are left with only the law; they are excluded from the covenant; they have lost the inheritance</u>. The redefinition of κληρονομία is an essential part of Paul's argument. The troublemakers' definition is reflected in the protasis of v. 18: ἐν νόμου ἡ κληρονομία. Keeping the law is considered to be a necessary condition for claiming the inheritance. Against this position, Paul defines the inheritance as ἐξ ἐπαγγελίας. The precedence of the promise in salvation history, as Paul sees it, has already established the basis for this dissociation of ἐκ νόμου ἡ κληρονομία from ἐξ ἐπαγγελίας. Paul adds to this argument by drawing attention to the gift character of the promised inheritance. Paul points out the incompatibility between receiving the inheritance as a gift on the basis of a promise and receiving it as a payment for keeping the law.[21] [emphasis added]

As Hansen has already mentioned, the verb κεχάρισται (*has graciously given*) is a key word in this passage. The perfect tense indicates that not only did God graciously promise the inheritance to Abraham at a time in past history, but He continues to keep specific promises in force at least through the time of the apostle Paul. Longenecker comments that, "The perfect tense (κεχάρισται) identifies the inheritance as still being in force, so bringing to the fore Paul's underlying argument throughout vv 15-17.…When speaking of acceptance before God and the reception of God's benefits, Paul insists that law and promise must be kept separate, for they operate on entirely different planes. To bring them together as equals, in fact, is to destroy all that God has graciously established by promise."[22]

In addition to the implications of the perfect tense of this verb, Wuest explains that the meaning expressed by this verb was the ideal choice to communicate God's truth and to counter the claims of the Judaizers:

> The word *gave* is from *charizomai*. This is a specialized word. It denotes not merely a gift, but a gift which is given out of the spontaneous generosity of the giver's heart, with no strings tied to it. The Greek word *grace* (*charis*) has the same root and the same meaning. Thus the word refers, not to an undertaking based upon terms of mutual agreement, but upon the free

19 Longenecker, 134.

20 F. F. Bruce, <u>The Epistle to the Galatians</u>. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 174.

21 Hansen, 128-129.

22 Longenecker, 134.

> act of one who gives something, expecting no pay for it. This at once shows the difference between law and grace. If salvation were by obedience to the law, that would mean that it would be based upon a mutual agreement between God and the sinner whereby God would obligate Himself to give salvation to any sinner who would earn it by obedience to the law. But the very genius of the word *charizomai* militates against the teaching of the Judaizers, namely, that salvation is by works. There is a Greek word *huposchesis* which is used of an offer based upon the terms of a mutual agreement. But it is not used here. Furthermore, the verb *gave* is in the perfect tense here, which tense speaks of a past completed act having present results. The past act of God giving the inheritance on the basis of a promise, has present results, present to the writer.[23]

The structure of the final clause of 3:18 contains some features that are also worthy of note. First, the phrase "to Abraham" is put forward for emphasis, again stressing the importance of the example of Abraham in receiving the promises by faith alone apart from works of the Law. Next is the phrase "through promise" which emphasizes the means or method that God chose for the inheritance to be given. Then the subject of the sentence (*God*) is placed after the verb in the final emphatic position. Morris comments on this section as follows:

> The concluding words of the verse are forceful: *to Abraham* comes first, for the example of the patriarch was specially important. *Through a promise*: the preposition indicates the means through which God conveyed his good gift; promise is very much in Paul's mind at this section of his argument; he uses the word 8 times in this chapter. He is emphasizing the fact that the gift God made to Abraham was far from being the result of law-keeping. It came to the great patriarch only by promise. The verb that follows is in the perfect tense, which indicates that the gift was complete and permanent. And the subject of the verb, *God*, comes last for emphasis. It was none less than God who made this gift.[24]

Exegesis of Galatians 3:19

> **Τί οὖν ὁ νόμος**; (Why then the law?) **τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη,** (it was added for the sake of transgressions) **ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ τό σπέρμα** (until the Seed would come) **ᾧ ἐπήγγελται** (to whom it has been promised)**, διαταγεί δι' ἀγγέλων ἐν χειρί μεσίτου** (having been ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator).

The subject of the initial interrogatory phrase is "the Law," which appears here with the definite article. Longenecker comments that, "ὁ νόμος is certainly the Mosaic law, the article specifying that law which has repeatedly been referred to in the immediate context and earlier: the law that appeared 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant (3:17)."[25] In answer to this initial question regarding the purpose of the Law, the word *transgressions* is placed first to stress the characteristics of sin with which the Law was meant to interact. Wuest explains the significance of this special term:

> The simple verb means 'to step,' the prefixed preposition, 'beyond.' It refers to the act of a person stepping beyond a fixed limit into forbidden territory. The word for sin is *hamartia* which meant in classical Greek 'to miss the mark,' and was used of a person who failed to hit a target…thus the word implies a deviation from the right course of action. But the word in the classics never had the idea of a willful transgression or overstepping of limitations with reference to conduct imposed by the deity….Before the law was given by Moses to Israel, the wrong doing of man was recognized as *hamartia*, sin, a deviation from the course of right conduct. But when the law was given, sin was seen to be, not merely the following of evil impulses, but the violation of explicit law. Thus, the exceeding sinfulness of sin was recognized by the human race, which otherwise might not have been evident. The law therefore was not given because of the existence of transgressions, but to show *hamartia* (sin) in its true light, an overstepping of what is right into the realm of what is wrong.[26]

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23 Wuest, 102-103.

24 Leon Morris, Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 112.

25 Longenecker, 138.

26 Wuest, 104.

Burton elaborates on the importance of Paul's choice of the word παραβάσεων in this verse: "The phrase is, therefore, by no means the equivalent of ἁμαρτιῶν χάριν, and since the distinguishing feature of παράβασις is that it is not simply the following of evil impulse, but violation of explicit law, it naturally suggests, as involved in the παραβάσεων, the recognition of the sinfulness of the deeds, which otherwise might have passed without recognition."[27]

There has been some debate about the meaning of the preposition χάριν (*for the sake of*) in this context, since it can have either a causative or telic sense. After carefully analyzing the usage as well as the context, Longenecker classifies the uses as either *causative* or *cognitive*. He makes the following observations about its use in this passage:

> The prepositional use of χάριν, which almost always appears after the word it governs, may be understood as either *cognitive* in function (i.e., 'to bring about a knowledge of' or 'point out' transgressions) or *causative* in function (i.e., 'to cause' or 'increase' transgressions). The noun παραβάσις has the sense of 'deviation from a standard or norm,' or of 'neglecting an obligation'….Both the immediate context and Paul's usual way of speaking about the function of the law favor a cognitive interpretation, that the law was given to bring about a consciousness of sin in sin-hardened humanity. For although '*because of transgressions*' can be understood in a causal fashion, '*to bring about or multiply sin*' makes little sense of the following temporal clause '*until the Seed to whom the promise was given should come*.'[28]

As to the cognitive use of the preposition, Morris remarks that, "Without the law sinners would not recognize that they were sinners in God's sight (cf. Rom. 3:20; 4:15). The law was given not so much to take away sin as to show us how greatly we needed salvation."[29] In a similar fashion, Baker elaborates on the cognitive purpose of the Law:

> It is evident from such passages as Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16 that the law was not given to save man or to deliver him from the dominion of sin. It would thus appear that in the redemptive purposes of God, God placed His people under the Law before He sent His Son into the world to die for sin in order to first fully manifest the sinfulness of sin, so that the need for salvation might be fully realized and so that the magnitude of the worth of Christ's sacrifice might be better understood and appreciated.[30]

The verb which is used to answer the question concerning the purpose of the Law is the aorist passive form of προστίθημι, "*it was added*." A key point about the meaning of this verb is stressed by Longenecker:

> It introduces an important *temporal* point: the Mosaic law was brought into effect by God subsequent to his covenant of promise. The fact that the augmented προστίθημι (*add to something already present*) appears in the text and not the simple verb τίθημι (place, set up) signals a nuance of disparagement and suggests that the law was not of the essence of God's redemptive activity with humankind. Or as Burton aptly puts it: "προσετέθη marks the law as supplementary, and hence subordinate to the covenant."[31]

Bruce also explains that, "When Paul says that the law *was added* (προσετέθη), he means that it was added to the human situation for a special purpose -- a purpose totally different from that of the promise."[32] Here again

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27 Burton, 188.

28 Longenecker, 138.

29 Morris, 113.

30 Baker, 98.

31 Longenecker, 138.

32 Bruce, 176.

we see that the apostle Paul (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) has chosen the exact word required to communicate this truth without confusion.

Once again it is evident that Paul's line of reasoning makes use of temporal categories which also mark off the boundaries of dispensational arrangements that were put in place by God during the course of human history. Burton comments that, "The whole clause, ἄχρι, etc., sets the limit to the period during which the law continues. Thus the covenant of promise is presented to the mind as of permanent validity, both beginning before and continuing through the period of the law and afterwards, the law on the other hand as temporary, added to the permanent covenant for a period limited in both directions."[33] This use of temporal markers is even more obvious when the context of Galatians 3 and 4 is examined. Barrett outlines Paul's temporal logic in the following sequence:

> The thought of Gal. 3 and 4 is governed throughout by the idea of *terminus ad quem*:
> 3:19: It was added on account of transgressions ***until*** the seed should come.
> 3:23: ***Before*** faith came we were kept under guard under the law, shut up ***until*** faith should be revealed.
> 3:24: The law has been our tutor ***up to the time*** of Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ***But now*** that faith has come, we are ***no longer*** under a tutor.
> 4:1: ***As long as*** the heir is under age…***until*** the time appointed by his father.
> 4:3: ***When*** we were under age…***but when*** the fullness of the time came…
> The force of these temporal limits and contrasts cannot be missed.[34]

Dunn also comments that, "We should not underestimate the significance at this point of Paul's assumption that the coming of Christ marked an eschatological division of time."[35] After the atoning sacrifice of Christ, God put into place a new dispensational relationship which He communicated through additional revelation at that time. Ryrie explains the dispensational transition that is implied in Galatians 3:19.

> After the coming of Christ, God's governing relationship with mankind was no longer through the Mosaic Law. The rent veil and the end of approach to God through the sacrificial system show this. Witness, too, the distinguishable difference in relation to justification as summarized by Paul in his sermon at Antioch in Pisidia: "Through Him everyone who believed is freed [justified] from all things, from which you could not be freed [justified] through the Law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). Here is unquestionably a distinguishable and different way of running the affairs of the world regarding man's responsibility in relation to the most important area of justification. With the coming of Christ the requirement for justification became faith in Him. This, too, is obviously a distinctive stage in the progress of revelation. Therefore, we conclude that a new dispensation was inaugurated, since the economy and responsibility changed and the new revelation was given.[36]

Dunn elaborates on this by saying that, "The guardian role of the law was a kind of interregnum between the giving of the promise and its fulfillment (3:16-25). The law was a sort of regent during the time of Israel's minority (4:1-5). But that also means that this role was intended to end with the coming of 'the faith' (3:23-25), with the arrival of the promised seed (3:16), with the sending of God's Son (4:4). Coming to expression here is a fundamental feature of Paul's perspective -- his sense that the coming of Christ marked a climax and completion in God's overarching purpose. Here Christ is the promised seed: a new epoch in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham is underway. The sending of God's Son indicates that God's long-standing intention has reached its fulfillment at the appointed time (4:4) at the date set (4:2)."[37] This again emphasizes the fact that promises made to Abraham under a completely different dispensational arrangement have enduring validity and

33 Burton, 189.
34 Barrett, 65.
35 Dunn, 145.
36 Ryrie, 34.
37 Dunn, 143-144.

fulfillments that cross dispensational boundaries.

The next significant term in Galatians 3:19 is the use of the word σπέρμα (*seed*), which Paul had previously identified as referring to Jesus Christ (3:16). Here Paul states that the Law was to be in effect until that point in human history when "the Seed" arrived on the scene. The logic involved in focusing *Abraham's seed* into a single individual (Jesus Christ), is explained by Barrett:

> Jesus Christ is the seed (σπέρμα) of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). God's promise was addressed not only to Abraham but to his seed. Since Abraham has long since gone to his rest, it will be for and through the seed that the promise is fulfilled. It is certainly true that in Genesis the promises are not thought of as focused upon one person, but upon a long line of descent, involving in each generation a plurality of persons. The Hebrew *zera'* and the Greek σπέρμα, both translated *seed*, are both collective terms….Ishmael was, humanly speaking, Abraham's seed; but the Old Testament is clear that it is in the line of Isaac, not of Ishmael, that Abraham's seed was counted. Similarly in the next generation: of the twins, Jacob and Esau, one was loved and the other hated. In that generation too the collective *seed* was narrowed to one person. It is quite consistent with this approach that Paul should think of the *seed* of Abraham as eventually concentrated in the one person, Jesus Christ….It is Paul's teaching that election, predestination, is effected by God in Jesus Christ, and never apart from him; and it is in Jesus Christ that the whole body of Christians are what they are, as the context in Gal. 3 brings out.[38]

In this way, Paul focused attention on Jesus Christ as the embodiment of God's promised blessings. Hansen explains that one of the consequences of this line of reasoning is that, "The messianic definition of σπέρμα removes Jewish national boundaries as the limits of the inheritance of the Abrahamic blessing. The link Paul makes between Abraham and Christ <u>bypasses the Mosaic law and the Jewish nation as channels for the reception of the promises to Abraham</u>, with the result that Christ alone is the channel of the promised blessing."[39] [emphasis added] This opened a new doorway of blessing directly to the Gentiles, apart from the Mosaic Law.

One final feature of Galatians 3:19 which will be mentioned is the perfect tense of the verb ἐπήγγελται (*it has been promised*). Longenecker comments that, "The perfect tense of the deponent verb ἐπαγγέλλομαι (*promise*) signals a past action with present results, thereby suggesting that the promise is still in effect. The whole clause beginning with the temporal conjunction ἄχρι (*until*) sets the *terminus ad quem* for the law, just as προσετέθη sets its *terminus a quo*. Thus the Mosaic law, for Paul, was intended by God to be in effect for God's people only up until the coming of Christ."[40] In other words, the starting point as well as the ending point for the dispensation of Law is implicitly communicated in this single verse. Barrett also adds the following insights: "The law belonged strictly to the interim period between the time when it was given and the coming of the seed (ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθη τό σπέρμα, Gal. 3:19). A promise also is an interim arrangement, for a promise lapses as soon as it is fulfilled; the interim character of the law is thus not a disparagement of it. When the seed comes, both promise and law cease, in their old meaning. Law and promise, however, terminate in different ways, and the arrival of the seed who was to be both agent and recipient of the promise was the signal for the abrogation of the law."[41] Since Paul was focusing specifically on the "blessing" promise of the Abrahamic Covenant, it is clear that the time for the fulfillment of this particular promise had indeed arrived for believing Jews and Gentiles alike. However, the other aspects of God's promises through Abraham still stand and await their future fulfillment. These promises include Israel's possession of the entire promised land (the Land Covenant), the enduring kingship promised to David as Abraham's seed (the Davidic Covenant), and the regeneration of all

38 Barrett, 76-77.

39 Hansen, 129.

40 Longenecker, 139.

41 Barrett, 60-61.

Israel at the time of the second coming of Christ (the New Covenant).

Conclusion

The exegesis of Galatians 3:17-19 clearly reveals that promises given by God at specific points in the progress of revelation may have fulfillments which cross dispensational boundaries. A change in God's dispensational arrangement does not invalidate or cancel an earlier promise. In fact, promises given during an earlier dispensation may be amplified or expanded through revelation given in subsequent dispensations, although the promises themselves await future fulfillment. Promises such as those contained in God's unilateral covenant with Abraham are temporal in that they lapse when they are fulfilled. Dispensational arrangements are also temporal in that they lapse when they are changed by God through additional revelation. But these must be viewed as being two distinct activities of God. The coming of Christ as the ultimate Seed of Abraham not only opened the door for the fulfillment of the "blessing for all nations" promise of the Abrahamic Covenant, but it also coincided with the end of the dispensation of Law. Even though these two events occurred together, they should be understood as representing two specific acts of God: the fulfillment of one of the promises made through Abraham and the termination of a subsequent dispensational relationship.

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