

Galatians 3:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

Analysis

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. Paul now states the conclusion of his legal analogy. 'This I say' (touto de legō, τοῦτο δὲ λέγω) introduces the decisive point. 'The covenant, that was confirmed before of God' (diathēkēn prokekryōmenēn hypo tou theou, διαθήκην προκεκυρωμένην ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ)—the perfect passive participle emphasizes the covenant's permanent, divinely ratified status before the Law came.

'In Christ' (eis Christon, εἰς Χριστόν) indicates the covenant's goal and fulfillment—the Abrahamic covenant was always about Christ (v. 16). 'The law, which was four hundred and thirty years after' (ho meta tetrakosia kai triakonta etē gegonōs nomos, ὁ μετὰ τετρακόσια καὶ τριάκοντα ἔτη γεγονώς νόμος)—the Law's late arrival, centuries after Abraham, proves it cannot alter the covenant. The verb 'disannul' (akyroi, ἀκυροῖ) means 'invalidate, nullify'—the Law cannot cancel the Abrahamic promise.

The purpose clause 'that it should make the promise of none effect' (eis to katargēsai tēn epangelian, εἰς τὸ καταργῆσαι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν) states what cannot happen: the Law cannot abolish the promise. Paul's logic is devastating—the promise preceded the Law by 430 years; therefore, the promise stands

independent of the Law. Justification is by promise-faith (Abraham), not Law-works (Moses).

Historical Context

The 430 years spans from God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, ca. 2091 BC; or Genesis 15, ca. 2081 BC) to the giving of the Law at Sinai (Exodus 19-20, ca. 1446 BC). Exodus 12:40-41 also mentions 430 years from Abraham's entry into Canaan to the Exodus. Paul's point: the chronology matters theologically. The gospel (promise, faith, blessing) predates the Law by over four centuries; therefore, the Law cannot be the basis of justification. The Judaizers reversed this, treating the Law as foundational; Paul restores chronological and theological priority to the promise.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Why is the 430-year gap between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic Law theologically significant for Paul's argument?
2. How does the principle that 'later legislation cannot annul earlier covenants' apply to the relationship between Law and promise?
3. In what ways do Christians today mistakenly allow 'the Law' (rules, regulations, religious duties) to nullify the promise-gospel of grace through faith?

Interlinear Text

τοῦτο δὲ λέγω· διαθήκην προκεκυρωμένην ὑπὸ τοῦ
this And I say that the covenant that was confirmed before of G3588
G5124 G1161 G3004 G1242 G4300 G5259

θεοῦ εἰς Χριστὸν ὁ μετὰ ἔτη τετρακόσια καὶ
God in Christ G3588 after years four hundred and G2532
G2316 G1519 G5547 G3326 G2094 G5071

τριάκοντα γεγονὼς νόμος οὐκ ἀκυροῖ εἰς τὸ
thirty which was the law cannot disannul in G3588
G5144 G1096 G3551 G3756 G208 G1519

καταργῆσαι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν
it should make the promise G1860
G2673

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 15:13 (Parallel theme): And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not their's, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;

Romans 3:3 (References God): For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

2 Corinthians 1:20 (Covenant): For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

Isaiah 14:27 (Parallel theme): For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

Colossians 2:4 (Word): And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.

1 Corinthians 1:17 (Word): For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

John 1:17 (Word): For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:15 (Covenant): Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

Galatians 5:4 (Word): Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

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