

Galatians 3:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

Analysis

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Paul anticipates an objection: 'Wherefore then serveth the law?' (ti oun ho nomos, τί οὖν ὁ νόμος)—if the Law cannot justify or inherit, what's its purpose? The answer: 'It was added because of transgressions' (tōn parabaseōn charin prosetethē, τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη). The phrase 'because of' (charin, χάριν) is ambiguous: 'for the sake of' could mean

1. to reveal/increase transgressions (Romans 5:20, 7:7-13) or
2. to restrain transgressions (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

Both are true—the Law exposes sin and temporarily governs conduct.

The clause 'till the seed should come to whom the promise was made' (achris hou elthē to sperma hō epēngeltai, ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα ᾧ ἐπήγγελλται) reveals the Law's temporary nature. The conjunction achris hou (ἄχρις οὗ)—'until'—indicates the Law's time-limited function, ending when the Seed (Christ, v. 16) came. The promise was made to Christ; the Law was a temporary addendum until Christ arrived.

The phrase 'ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator' (diatageis di' angelōn en cheiri mesitou, διαταγείς δι' ἀγγέλων ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου) indicates the Law's inferior mediation—given through angels (Acts 7:53, Hebrews 2:2) and a human mediator (Moses), unlike the Abrahamic promise spoken directly by God. The Law's indirect, temporary, inferior status contrasts with the promise's direct, permanent, superior status.

Historical Context

Jewish tradition (reflected in Deuteronomy 33:2 LXX, Jubilees, Josephus, Acts 7:53, Hebrews 2:2) held that angels mediated the Law at Sinai, with Moses as the human mediator between God and Israel. Paul uses this tradition to argue the Law's inferiority: the promise came directly from God to Abraham; the Law came indirectly through angelic and human mediation. The Law's purpose was temporary and preparatory—revealing sin and restraining evil until Christ came. Once Christ arrived, the Law's custodial function ended (v. 24-25).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the Law's purpose ('added because of transgressions') differ from justification? What does the Law reveal about sin and human inability?
2. What is the significance of the Law being 'until the seed should come'? How does Christ's arrival fulfill and end the Law's custodial function?
3. Why does Paul emphasize the Law's indirect mediation (angels, Moses) compared to the promise's direct communication from God? What does this reveal about their relative importance?

Interlinear Text

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|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Τί | οὖν | ὁ | νόμος | τῶν | παραβάσεων | χάριν |
| Wherefore | then | G3588 | serveth the law | G3588 | transgressions | because of |
| G5101 | G3767 | | G3551 | | G3847 | G5484 |
| προσετέθη | ἄχρις | ᾧ | ἔλθῃ | τὸ | σπέρμα | ᾧ |
| It was added | till | to whom | should come | G3588 | the seed | to whom |
| G4369 | G891 | G3739 | G2064 | | G4690 | G3739 |
| ἐπήγγελλται | διαταγεῖς | δι' | ἀγγέλων | ἐν | χειρὶ | |
| the promise was made | and it was ordained | by | angels | in | the hand | |
| G1861 | G1299 | G1223 | G32 | G1722 | G5495 | |
| μεσίτου | | | | | | |
| of a mediator | | | | | | |
| G3316 | | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Acts 7:53 (Word): Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

Hebrews 2:2 (Word): For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward;

Galatians 3:16 (Covenant): Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

Romans 4:15 (Word): Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

Acts 7:38 (Sin): This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:

Romans 2:13 (Word): (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

John 15:22 (Sin): If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.

Deuteronomy 5:5 (Word): (I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to shew you the word of the LORD: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount;) saying,

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

Hebrews 2:5 (Parallel theme): For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.