

enant given to Abraham was the promise of blessing upon the nations (Gentiles). It follows, then, that the Gentiles likewise are sovereignly chosen by God as a matter of His grace. To suggest that their inclusion in the covenant was based upon their obedience to the rabbinic ritual of proselytism is therefore contrary to the covenant itself.

18 For if the inheritance is based on Torah, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

First, it is interesting to note the typical Pauline style of writing in this verse. It literally would read: “For if out from Torah is the inheritance, no longer is it out from promise.” Here, as in the previous verses, the use of the preposition “out from” (ἐκ, *ek*) means “having its source from” or (as the NASB has it) “based upon.” NIV has “depends on” which also gives the sense; ESV, “For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise ...” Any translation will have to supply words to interpret Paul’s use of the preposition “out from,” and all of the above have surely captured the sense: the covenant promises were not given as rewards for obedience, but as the sure and sovereign promise of God. To teach that the promises were rewards is likewise to put the promise of Messiah and the salvation He brings as dependent upon mankind. This turns the whole covenant on its head.

Thus Paul introduces the term “inheritance” (κληρονομία, *kleronomia*), but this concept has been implied in the previous verses in that blessings are promised to the subsequent generations of Abraham as well as to the generations of Gentiles who would be chosen for blessing. “Inheritance,” then, is equivalent to “the promise.” The inheritance which God ultimately promises to all covenant members is the blessing that comes through the “Seed,” that is, Messiah.

The fact that Paul begins this verse with “For” (γάρ, *gar*) marks it as proof of his previous argument. As such, it shows that Paul was not arguing for the superiority of the Abrahamic covenant on the basis of priority in time. Rather, his argument is based upon the fact that God’s covenant blessings are grounded first and foremost in the exercise of His sovereign grace, and that this gracious stature of the covenant cannot be controverted by the later bilateral covenant at Sinai. When he says “if the inheritance is based on Torah,” he means “if the inheritance is based upon obeying the Torah,” including (for sake of argument) Oral Torah, then it falls outside of the covenant since the covenant was given to Abraham as a unilateral promise not based upon his obedience. Thus Paul states that God granted (χαρίζομαι, *charizomai*⁵⁸) blessing (salvation is the zenith of this blessing) to Abraham by means of promise. And we should note that the Greek verb here is in the perfect tense, emphasizing the historical action of grace to Abraham, but also that the same gracious character of the covenant continues in the present.

Paul’s argument, then, is based, not on the temporal priority of the Abrahamic covenant so much as it is upon the essential nature of it. As Dunn writes, “Paul stakes his case on the theological axiom that salvation is always, first to last, a matter of divine initiative and grace.”⁵⁹ By this Paul

58 Note that the Greek word for “grace,” χάρις, *charis*, is the noun which is cognate to χαρίζομαι, *charizomai*.

59 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 186.

does not deprecate the Torah, but places the Torah in its proper place within the Divine scheme of redemption. Torah leads to faith and specifically to the object of faith, Yeshua. As such, it is good and valuable. But it is not the means of covenant membership. To attempt to put Torah in this role is to make it out to be something God never intended, and is therefore to diminish and even distort it.

19 Why the Torah then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

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The obvious question that would arise in the minds of Paul's detractors (in this case, the Influencers) is "if the Torah was not given as the means of entering the covenant, then what was its purpose?" As usual, Paul anticipates the questions of his audience and sets himself to answer them. He has given a threefold argument in verses 15-18 that the inheritance of blessing is realized 1) by promise, 2) in the Seed (=Messiah), and 3) that such a promise cannot be modified or nullified by the subsequent giving of the Torah. Now Paul must answer the question of the Torah's role, for otherwise it would appear as though the Torah was superfluous. If the blessing comes entirely apart from the Torah, then is the Torah really necessary? Contrary to the stance of Historic Christianity, Paul teaches us here that the Torah is not only necessary—it is essential.

It is unfortunate that this verse has almost universally been interpreted in a negative sense by Christian commentators throughout the centuries. Lightfoot's comments are representative of this negative view of Torah:

Had the law, then, no purpose? Yes; but its very purpose, its whole character and history, betray its inferiority to the dispensation of grace. In four points this inferiority is seen. First; Instead of justifying, it condemns; instead of giving life, it kills; it was added to reveal and multiply transgressions. Secondly; It was but temporary. When the seed came to whom the promise was given it was annulled. Thirdly; It did not come directly from God to man. There was a double interposition, a twofold mediation, between the giver and the recipient. There were angels, who administered it as God's instruments; there was Moses (or the high-priest), who delivered it to man. Fourthly; As follows from the idea of mediation, it was of the nature of a contract, depending for its fulfillment on the observation of its conditions by the two contracting parties. Not so the promise, which, proceeding from the sole fiat of God, is unconditional and unchangeable.⁶⁰

Contrast this with the viewpoint of the Sages:

"Precious are Israelites, to whom was given the precious thing." It was an act of still greater love that it was made known to them that to them was given that precious thing with which the world was made, "as it is said, For I give you a good doctrine. Do not forsake my Torah (Prov. 4:2).⁶¹

What was Paul's assessment here? Is he teaching that the Torah was given

⁶⁰ J. Lightfoot, *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Draper, 1891), p. 258.

⁶¹ m.*Avot* 3.14 (Neusner's translation).

in order to “trap” Israel, to entice her to transgression so that she would be guilty? This, of course, is usually the way the verse is read. But to read this verse in such a negative light is to disregard what the Torah says about itself. Moses makes it clear (Deut 30:11f) that the Torah which God had given to Israel was not too difficult for them, nor was it out of their reach. The reason was because God has set Himself to circumcise their hearts (Deut 30:6f) and thus to enable them to obey Him as He desired. Far from being an instrument of death, the Torah was given to Israel for life (Deut 30:15f). Granted, her unfaithfulness would bring about the curses of the Torah, but this was not its purpose—its purpose was to lead her in the paths of righteousness. This is because the Torah was given to Israel as God’s redeemed nation—as those who should have already committed themselves in faith to Him. Yet the Torah would surely mark those who were of true faith and those who were only giving lip-service to God. The word of God is a sharp sword, and it does divide (Heb 4:12f), but to those who have had their hearts circumcised by the Spirit, the Torah comes as a divine blessing, guiding and instructing in the ways of God.

The language of our present verse would indicate that we should read it positively, not negatively. “Why the Torah? It was given (added to the revelation already given in the Abrahamic covenant) to reveal the divine method of dealing with transgressions,” i.e., “for the sake of transgressions” (τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν). The Greek particle χάριν (*charin*) indicates “the goal” to which something points or proceeds.⁶² The Torah was given with the goal of revealing God’s method of dealing with transgressions.

But already prejudiced against the Torah, the typical Christian exegesis misses the fact that a great deal of the Torah centers upon the Tabernacle / Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices. How were the covenant members to deal with the inevitable presence of sin in their personal and corporate lives? The Torah gives the answer: by repentance and acceptance of God’s gracious gift of forgiveness through the payment of a just penalty exemplified in the sacrifice. It was the Torah that revealed in clear detail the method which God had provided for transgression, and it was this method—the sacrificial system and priesthood—that pointed to Messiah, the ultimate sacrifice and means of eternal forgiveness.

Thus Paul adds: “until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.” In the Greek, this clause follows second, immediately after “it was added for the sake of transgressions.” The ESV has the order correct: “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.” The Torah was given in order to reveal God’s gracious manner of dealing with transgressions, i.e., through the death of an innocent substitute. Paul therefore immediately makes this point by adding “until the seed would come” Here, as often, the word “until” (ἄχρι, *achri*; Hebrew אד, *ad*) has the primary meaning of “marker of continuous extent of time up to a point, until.”⁶³ The point is that the revelation of the Torah regarding how God provides redemption in the face of transgressions has its focal point in Yeshua. Once Yeshua had come and offered Himself as God’s eternal sacrifice, the ultimate revelation to which the sacrifices pointed had been given. This is Paul’s consistent

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62 BDAG, “χάριν”.

63 BDAG, “ἄχρι”.

perspective: the Torah leads to Yeshua (cf. Rom 10:4 and the continuing context of Gal 3).

The use of “until” in the phrase “until the seed would come” does not mean that once Yeshua has come, the Torah is no longer of any value. What it does mean is that the revelation of God’s redemptive plan, the means of forgiveness given as it was in the Torah, is eclipsed in the brightness of the revelation in His Messiah. Even this does not mean that the revelatory value of the sacrifices has been nullified. But it means that the revelation of God’s salvation finds its greatest expression in Yeshua who is the fulfillment of the Torah’s revelation.

The final clause of the verse (as it is in the Greek and some English translations) notes that the Torah was given “by the hand” (a straightforward Semitic idiom) of a mediator (=Moses) ordained through angels. Once again, this has been misinterpreted by Christian commentators to mean that the Torah had less than divine origins. We’ve already seen Lightfoot’s assessment (see above). Others take it even further: “a categorical denial of the divine origin of the Torah;⁶⁴ the law “is the product of demonic angelic powers;⁶⁵ “on the way to a Gnostic understanding of the law.”⁶⁶ Have these commentators forgotten that the tablets which Moses brought down from the mountain were written with the very finger of the Almighty (Ex 31:18; Deut 9:10; Ex 8:15)? To put such nonsense in the mouth of Paul is ludicrous. Paul believed the Torah to be of divine origin: “All Scripture is God breathed ...” (2Tim 3:16) and the only Scripture Paul had in hand was the Tanach.

Rather, the mention of a mediator (Moses) and the role of angels in the giving of the Torah would have come across to any Jewish audience as praise, not deprecation. Paul did not want the Galatians to think that just because he was putting a great emphasis upon the promise made to Abraham, that he thought the Torah to have little value. Far from it! He simply wants to show that the Torah has a divine purpose in the plan of redemption, and that to give it its proper place is both honoring to God, the Giver of the Torah, and good for believers who will walk and live according to its precepts. The mention of Moses and angels puts the Torah in a place of honor, not one of diminished value.

The presence of angels at the giving of the Torah was a familiar motif in the Judaisms of Paul’s day. It was most likely based upon the interpretation of Deut 33:2 as translated by the Lxx. The Hebrew reads: “He said, ‘The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.’” The Lxx translated it this way: “And he said, The Lord is come from Sinai, and has appeared from Seir to us, and has hasted out of the mount of Pharan, with the ten thousands of Cades; on his right hand were his angels with him.”

The Midrash confirms this angelic motif in the giving of the Torah:

When He goes forth to battle, He goes alone, for it says, The Lord is a man of war (Ex 15:3), but when He came to give the Torah on Sinai, myriads [of angels] accompanied Him, as it says, ‘The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands upon thousands’ (Ps 68:18). (Mid. Rab.

64 J. W. Drane, *Paul: Libertine or Legalist?* (SPCK, 1975), p. 34.

65 H. Hübner, *The Law in Paul’s Thought* (T & T Clark, 1984), pp. 24–36.

66 H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (Vandenhoeck, 1965), p. 158, quoted from Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 190.

Exodus 29.8)⁶⁷

Likewise, the Apostolic Scriptures affirm the role of angels in giving the Torah (Acts 7:38; 53; Heb 2:2). The point is simply that the Torah came with great majesty, and was given to Moses as the trustworthy mediator to the people of Israel. That he was “faithful” in the discharge of his duties is directly stated in Scripture (Heb 3:2-5).

Thus, rather than lowering the Torah to some obscurity, Paul here elevates it to its proper place as the vehicle of God’s divine revelation in the matter of man’s salvation. To deny the Torah a role in entering the covenant in no way diminished its proper purpose. Paul does not want to be falsely accused of dismissing the Torah, and thus he adds these clauses to emphasize its glory and value. What Paul does wish to do is to establish the Torah’s proper role in God’s redemptive scheme, and in so doing, to give the Torah its proper due.

20 Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.

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This verse has baffled commentators since ancient times. Lightfoot notes that he is aware of more than 250 different interpretations,⁶⁸ and Bruce points out the various “tortuous” attempts to make sense of the verse.⁶⁹ The Greek is very succinct: ὁ δὲ μεσίτης ἑνὸς οὐκ ἔστιν, ὁ δὲ θεὸς εἷς ἐστίν, literally, “the mediator of one is not, and (but) God is one.” Yet the meaning in context seems quite clear: there is no mediator when only one party exists (since a mediator by nature of his office stands between two people), but God is one. Paul is talking about the difference between the types of covenants represented by the Abrahamic and Sinaitic. Whereas the Abrahamic is a unilateral covenant (patterned after the Royal Grant Treaty) wherein only the Covenant Maker Himself secures the success of the covenant and is therefore in no need of a mediator, the Sinaitic is patterned after the Suzerain-Vassal treaty in which both parties swear to uphold the covenant, and thus the successful outcome of the covenant is dependent upon both.

Excursus: Covenant Types & Paul’s Argument

Essentially two types of covenants existed during the time of the patriarchal era (2nd millennia B.C.E.) and may be distinguished: the Royal Grant covenant or treaty, and the Suzerain-Vassal covenant or treaty. While it is wrong to suggest hard and fast boundaries between the two kinds of covenants, it seems clear that the differences which separated them were recognized and practiced in the Ancient Near East. Below is a chart comparing the basic characteristics of each.

67 Other Jewish sources that mention the role of angels in giving Torah are: Jub 1:29-2:1; Philo, *Som.* 1.145; Josephus, *Ant.* xv. 136; Apoc. Mos., preface. These are listed in Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 191.

68 Lightfoot, *Galatians*, p. 260.

69 F. F. Bruce, *Galatians*, pp. 178–9.

Royal Grant Treaty/Covenant	Suzerain-Vassal Treaty/Covenant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To protect the rights of the Vassal • The Great King (Suzerain) takes the oath • The curses are against those who might deprive the Vassal of the Suzerain's gift • The Grant (gift) is promised to all future generations of the Vassal • The Grant is a reward for faithful service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To protect the rights of the Suzerain • Vassal takes the oath • The curses are directed toward the Vassal • No guarantee for future generations • The Suzerain-Vassal covenant is primarily political in nature

The Royal Grant Treaty is well attested in the remains of the Ancient Near East. The primary distinctives are that the Suzerain takes it upon himself to grant to his favored Vassal a gift of Land as a reward for his faithful service. In contrast, the Suzerain-Vassal Treaty is made in order to assure the rights and authority of the Suzerain in the land of the Vassal. It is clear that even though there may be requirements attached to both types of covenants, the primary difference between them is simply that the Royal Grant covenant is a non-conditional covenant in which the Great King promises to reward the Vassal, while in the Suzerain-Vassal covenant or treaty, the relationship between Suzerain and Vassal is maintained only as long as the Vassal continues to demonstrate loyalty and fidelity to the Suzerain. Clearly, the Abrahamic is modeled after the Royal Grant, and the Mosaic after the Suzerain-Vassal.⁷⁰

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Yet even in light of this seemingly obvious fact (that Paul is emphasizing the different types of covenants), many commentators still choose to see in this verse a further reason for downgrading the Torah (Sinaitic covenant) in contrast to the Abrahamic. For instance, Dunn suggests that since the Torah was given through the agency of angels, and since the Judaisms of Paul's day understood the angels to be appointed to look after the nations (in contrast to Israel who was guarded by God Himself), "to submit to the law's demands was a form of slavery to the elemental forces,"⁷¹ a lowering of Israel to the level of the nations.

From my point of view, nothing could be further off the mark. The presence of angels at the giving of the Torah was, from the viewpoint of 1st Century Judaisms, most likely a mark of the great ceremony which accompanied the event, and therefore worked to glorify the Torah, not diminish it. Paul is not going to win his argument in this section by downgrading the Torah! His approach is not to indicate that the Torah is bad, or that it is inferior to the Abrahamic covenant, but to show how the Torah works in concert with the Abrahamic covenant, and thus supports rather than nullifies the promise to the nations (Gentiles). The Torah is given as a means to realize the promise which is granted to Abraham's offspring, and (in Paul's argument here) specifically to the Seed Who is Messiah. His point is not to degrade the Torah, but to show its proper use in the overall scope of God's covenant promises.

It may be that the phrase "but God is one" has actually tripped up the commentators. It is obviously from Deuteronomy 6:4, and was at the time of Paul, as it is now, the primary confession of monotheism by all who claim God to be the only true God. But in the course of time, especially within the polem-

70 For a fuller discussion of the Royal Grant and Suzerain-Vassal Treaties, see my paper, "The Covenant of Grant and the Abrahamic Covenant" available at www.torahresource.com (Articles in English).

71 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 192.

ic of the Christian Church, the phrase “God is one” took on a purely ontological significance. That is to say, in the early centuries of the emerging Christian Church, the controversies over the multiplicity within the godhead gave rise to the dogmatic theology of the Trinity. The orthodox conclusion of these controversies is contained in the Athanasian Creed, in which the doctrine of the Trinity is philosophically delineated. Yet with such an emphasis upon the multiplicity within the godhead, the Christians were accused by their Jewish counterparts as being polytheists—believing in and worshipping more than one god. This, of course, was flatly denied, for even in the newly founded Christian Church, monotheism was a primary mark of orthodoxy. Thus, the phrase “God is one” began to be interpreted as “God is a unity” (one, אֶחָד , *echad*, being understood as a single union of a plural number). Thus, “God is one” became an ontological statement about the nature of God’s person or being. “God is a unity” fit the philosophical argument of Athanasius perfectly. For instance, the third paragraph of the Athanasian Creed reads: “And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship One God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity.” The concept of “one” had been defined ontologically as “unity.”

This argument still persists in our day among those who attempt to use the Shema as proof of multiplicity within the godhead. Yet I am convinced this is not what is meant in the Shema by the word “one.” Please understand what I am saying: surely the Hebrew word “one” (אֶחָד) can mean a unity of things, as in one day (which consists of evening and morning, Gen 1); one people (which consists of many persons); one in marriage (consisting of male and female, Gen 2:24), and so on. But while the Judaisms of Paul’s day were doubtlessly affected by the Hellenistic thought and culture of their times, the Hebrews were not nearly as concerned with matters of ontology as were the Greeks and Latins. Indeed, it was not until the emerging Christian Church felt the necessity to approach Christological questions from an ontological perspective that the questions (and problems) of the nature of God’s being surfaced. But it is not surprising that this was the case: the emerging Christian Church arose under the leadership of predominately Greek and Latin clerics.

It should be remarkable to us that not once in all of the Apostolic Scriptures do we have the problem of God’s being, or of Yeshua’s essential nature, brought forward from an ontological frame of reference. In the closest thing we have to such an issue, the matter is still thoroughly Hebrew in viewpoint. I speak of Yeshua’s pointed question to the disciples: “Who do men say that I am?” and His still more penetrating question to them, “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:27f; Matt 16:13ff). Yet here, Yeshua is asking if the people have understood His message of the Kingdom, and specifically if they have realized His messianic claim. Do they say that He is the Messiah or not? And what response does Yeshua elicit from the disciples? That they have reckoned with the fact that He is, in fact, the long-awaited Savior of Israel.

This is not an ontological question, but a question of mission, function, and office. So once again, the phrase in our verse “but God is One” will bring all manner of variations in understanding if it is deemed necessary to interpret it from the perspective of Greek ontology. But if the meaning found in its original source (Deut 6:4) is applied, it seems to me that the meaning is not only obvious but very germane to Paul’s present argument. For in the Shema, the most obvious contextual meaning is that of “unique”

or “the only one.” Surely this is a statement of monotheism, but it is even more suited to Paul’s present argument in which he is contrasting the two differing types of covenant. Even as in the Shema in which the declaration that God is the “only one” (the only God), so when Paul connects this reality to the Abrahamic covenant, it means quite simply that He is the only one able to bring the covenant to fruition. But what is even more, He alone took the oath relative to the Abrahamic covenant, and thus is the only one within the covenant structure itself to accomplish its goals. There is no need to mediate the Abrahamic covenant between two parties of the covenant, because the success of the covenant depends entirely upon God alone.

We may conclude, then, that Paul’s point here is simply a buttressing of his original statement: a covenant made later cannot add to nor annul a previously ratified covenant. And since that previously ratified covenant, by its very nature, is dependent solely upon God’s faithfulness and omnipotence, we may be certain that it will, in fact, be completed. This means that God has set Himself to bring in the Gentiles as a matter of His grace (promise), not through them becoming Jews through a rabbinic ritual.

But it means even more than this: it means that the Torah is given as a “helper” to the Abrahamic covenant. The Torah’s purpose (as Paul will now show) is not to set aside the promise of the Abrahamic, nor to add stipulations to it, but to assure its success (cf. Genesis 18:17). In this way, the Torah is not contrary to the Abrahamic promise, nor does it in any way change the promise, but it comes to assist in bringing the promise to fruition. If we were to couch this in theological terms, we would parallel the Abrahamic promise to Paul’s teaching on justification, while the Mosaic covenant would be parallel to sanctification. The Influencers had these two confused: they were teaching the Gentile believers that entrance into the covenant of promise (justification) can only be achieved through adherence to their form of the Mosaic covenant (sanctification): they had the cart before the horse. But Paul would not have ever ventured to express a downgrade of sanctification! Growing in holiness is the result of justification, and a means of realizing covenant membership in its fullness. Sanctification is the inevitable result of justification, not the means of obtaining it.

----- *End of the Excursus* -----

21 Is the Torah then contrary to the promises of God?⁷² May it never be! For if a Torah had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on Torah.

Here Paul makes his point clear: his teaching about the Torah should not be received as saying that the Torah and the promise are somehow at odds. As Dunn remarks,

The response indicates clearly that Paul would deny the very antithesis between law and promise which so many infer from verse 20. On the contrary, the role of the law is consistent with, integrated into that of the

⁷² There is a variant in the Greek here: some manuscripts include “of God” and others do not. The majority of the oldest manuscripts include it, but Vaticanus (B) does not. The UBS editors include “of God” in the text but in brackets to show that it is questioned.