



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

GALATIANS 1

DECEMBER 2021

THE PEOPLE OF PROMISE

*We are people of promise.
The Law did its part. We honor it.
Now we glorify His glorious grace.*

According to the biblical narrative, people are designed to live in the blessing of the good and sovereign Creator. That blessing includes the consciousness of His presence, the abundance of His provision, the guarantee of His protection, and the privilege of working as His partners in the development of creation. When the first humans chose to yield to the seduction of the devil, the blessing was forfeited and a curse came on them as well as the creation they were assigned to manage. But the same God who graciously created all things was there to make promises that would reverse the curse and ultimately produce a people who exult not only in the unimaginable greatness of His power, but also the

unsearchable beauty of His grace. He would redeem that which had been lost, restore that which had been broken, and make all things better than before. The story of the Bible tells how He accomplished this.

It is a fantastic story and seems too good to be true. By the middle of the first century AD, the good news of the fulfillment of God's promise had reached into the regions of Galatia. A significant group of people had heard the world-changing announcement that God had recently acted to fulfill His original promise and that a new creation was under way. There was a new people on earth defined only by faith in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and the Lord over all. There were

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some having a difficult time making sense of the story as it relates to the identity of God's people and role of the Law that had been given to Israel through Moses. They were claiming that some of the identity markers of Jewish uniqueness were still required for inclusion in the new people of God such as circumcision, dietary laws, sabbaths, and observance of feasts. The "gospel" they were preaching was not the same as Paul had first preached. It would not bless but curse the hearers. In summary, the gospel originally proclaimed would reverse the curse of sin and bring the blessings of the fulfilled promise. The gospel promoted by the Judaizers from Jerusalem would bring the curse, and anyone who preached it would be accursed.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

Galatians 1:6-8 ESV

To counter the false gospel being presented and to address the con-

fusion, Paul reminds the Galatians of the time-line of the biblical story. The point he makes is that the promise of redemption and restoration preceded the Law. He is very clear that the covenant made with Moses, which governed the life of Israel, played an important role in the drama, but that it was not the central issue. Everything was pointing toward and moving toward the fulfillment of the promise in Jesus. The big promise begins with Abram. God promised to bless all nations through the Seed of Abram. He began with the natural seed of natural inheritance and natural boundaries to the land. The natural seed (family) of Abram served as a type and prototype of the ultimate family who would receive the promise. God's promise was not contingent upon Abram's qualifying behavior. Genesis 15 tells about the covenant between God and Abram. Abram asked for assurance that God would keep His promise as stated. God offered a covenant of grace. Animals were split and laid in a pattern where the two covenanting partners would walk and make their commitments. It was the customary way of binding commitments. But in this case, God put Abram into a deep sleep and then walked through the ceremony for both of them. God is taking responsibility for Himself

and for Abram. The assurance Abram is looking for is based on the faithfulness of God alone.

God kept His promise to that family by delivering them from the slavery to Egypt as a nation. They had been there 400 years. It seems that God employs time as His servant to prepare His people to see that He alone is the deliverer. For instance, He waited until Abram and Sarai were too old to have a son before He miraculously brought forth Isaac. He waited 400 years before He delivered Israel from slavery. He wants to reveal his miraculous mercy. He knows that our greatest pleasure comes from praising His glorious grace, so He sets us up to see clearly how good He is and how much He is in charge. Though we chaff under the wait, He insists that it is His glory that will satisfy us most.

After God established His family covenant with Abram (Abraham), God then prepared this people to be the vessel of blessing to the nations by giving them His Law. The Law contained clear instructions about how to live in God's ordered world with things, people, and Him. The Law was good. It reflected God Himself. The Law appealed to the motivation that all humans have to want to be blessed, to gain, to be

better, to succeed. God guaranteed blessings for total obedience and curses for disobedience. At this stage, the people didn't yet grasp how deeply sin had penetrated into the human heart. The Law exposed that. With every good intention, Israel committed to live by the covenant of Law. They couldn't. Sin had rendered them incapable of living selflessly. Sin had infected every aspect of their lives. The Law required that they love God with all their hearts. They tried to obey without a heart that loves like that, and it can't be done. The Law was serving as a tutor to prepare this people for the day when they would trust Jesus' obedience as their own as His gracious gift (see Galatians 3:19-29). It took some time. Their failure to live according to the covenant brought the curse of exile. They lost their land, their nation, their temple. It was not the Law that was the problem, but their untransformed hearts. After 70 years, God acted to move toward fulfilling His promise. Some of the Jews returned to their land, but another 400 years passed as He waited for the perfect day of fulfillment.

In that day of fulfillment, the patterns of the Old Testament are seen: Another David comes out to fight another Goliath. Now that

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Goliath was clothed in the power of Rome and the deception of apostate Judaism. The greater David took the symbol of oppression that Rome championed - the cross - and embraced it. In doing so, He took the curse of exile upon Himself. After three days he came out of the tomb with the new Goliath's head in His hands. He defeated sin, flesh, and Satan. He began a whole new creation. Those who simply trust Him as their representative are included in the family. Jesus took the most feared symbol of oppression in the world and turned it into a necklace worn by millions who don't even know what it means.

Trusting Him alone for inclusion into the family of God is the only identity marker that is legitimate. All other aspects of our being don't matter. The previous distinctions that defined us and divided us are unimportant. We heard and we believed. We trust His promise. He made and fulfilled the covenant. We are the people of promise. We have been given a down payment to assure our hearts. The Holy Spirit has regenerated our hearts and poured the same love that caused Jesus to come for us into our hearts. We now share the very life of Jesus. The same Spirit that filled Him in His time on earth and raised Him from the dead

now lives in us. His witness that we are children of God is knowable, and His working of miracles among us testifies that we live in a new creation that is moving toward the final restoration, including the resurrection of the body.

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