

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 4:13

Student Notes

Last time: The Mosaic Law separates the Jews and Gentiles, resulting in only the Jews having covenant with God

Paul continues his argument about Abraham's justification.

Verse 13: "It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith."

- **The Antithesis of Law and Promise**

"It was not through the Law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise..."

A switch in strategy: The previous method of questions and answers are gone. Instead, Paul is making one uncompromised statement: "Justification does not come by works nor circumcision; it doesn't come by the Law either."

The root of Paul's assertion: God's promise to Abraham that he would be the "Father of Nations" was not given in the context of the Law. (The Mosaic Law did not come until 430 years later.)

The context: 15:5-6: "He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

God gave Abraham a free promise – that did not come in the context of any human requirement. And Abraham's response was faith.

- **“The Heir of the World”?**

A statement that is definitely NOT in the Genesis 15 account: “Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world ...”

In Genesis 15, God says nothing about Abraham being the heir (inheritor) of the world – only that his posterity would be as numerous as the stars – if they could be counted. See also: Genesis 13:14ff

How, then, did Canaan in Genesis 13 become “the world” in Romans 4? There possible explanations:

1. The fulfilment of biblical prophecy has always encompassed more than the context it originally encompassed.

2. After promising the territorial boundaries of Canaan, God made it clear that through Abraham the world would be blessed. Genesis 12:3:

“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

3. The statement that Abraham would inherit “the world” is based on Messianic promises. Galatians 3:16:

“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ.” -- Galatians 3:16

Christ, being Abraham’s seed – is expected one day to rule the world.

Next Time: Three reasons Paul emphasize God’s promise was received and inherited by faith, and not the Law – 1. History 2. Language 3. Theology.