

From the G-d of Israel to the G-d of the world

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A brief recap before Jesus

- G-d reveals himself many times to mankind We will briefly summarise the Old Testament revelations of G-d to three specific timelines.
- Abraham:
 - Genesis 17:1-2 “When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.”

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- Moses:
 - Exodus 6:2-4 “God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners.”
 - With Moses we see a deeper revelation of G-d’s essence than with Abraham.

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- The Prophets:
 - Hebrews 1:1 “ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.”

A brief recap before Jesus

- What did all these revelations have in common?
 - They all involved covenants between G-d and the people. “The Abrahamic Covenant, The Mosaic Covenant etc...”
 - They were not made available to all mankind, but rather specific people G-d had chosen.
 - They were specific in their scope, Israel being the focus.
 - The Abrahamic covenant was subject to his descendants only. Through Genesis it gets narrowed down to Isaac and then Jacob, who is also called Israel. And then his children, the Children of Israel, who became the nation of Israel.
 - The Mosaic covenant, which encompassed the Torah, was an agreement between G-d and Israel, which Gentiles could only really take part in if they joined to Israel.
 - There were other covenants which were more general in scope, such as the Noahide covenant, but knowledge of the One who made these promises was diluted in the various polytheistic ideologies of the nations.

A brief recap before Jesus

- However, even amongst the Israel-centric focus of the Old Testament, there was scope and even a hope that the revelation of G-d would be poured out on all people.
 - Isaiah 56:1-8 “Thus says the Lord: Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed... Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely separate me from his people”; and let not the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.” For thus says the Lord: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD...these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer, their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.”

Did Jesus reveal himself to the world?

- As we know, the Old Testament paints a hope that one day, the greatest revelation of G-d would come, in the form of the Messiah.
- But where was Jesus' mission directed? Arguably, also centred amongst Israel:
 - Jesus seems mainly to associate with Jews, even though there were Gentiles in his midst. There are a few exceptions, and these are strongly highlighted, mainly because they were so rare.
 - However, we do see glimpses of a greater revelation of G-d to the world.
 - A good cases to review, which illustrates all this, is the case of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15.

Did Jesus reveal himself to the world?

- Matthew 15: 21-26 shows Jesus initially resistant to reveal Himself to a non-Jewish woman:
 - “And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.”

Did Jesus reveal himself to the world?

- Matthew 15:27-28 shows Jesus warming up to this woman, moved by her faith.
 - ...She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed.

The Great Commission

- Jesus then commissions his followers to help reveal G-d to all nations.
 - Matthew 28:16-20 “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The work of Paul

- However, the real work of bringing the G-d is Israel to the nations was accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit through Paul.
 - While we read a pattern of Paul travelling around the Mediterranean, approaching the local Jews first, he also gave Gentiles equal access to his message.
 - We also see many times that Paul fights to allow Gentiles to come to G-d as they are, without having to attach themselves to one of the previous Old Testament covenants. This occasionally put him at odds with the other leaders.
 - He advocates for the Gentiles' access to G-d, maintain they only need to come to G-d through faith in Jesus, and they are accepted as equals in the congregation of Messiah. This is depicted in no clearer terms than in the Book of Galatians.

The important lessons of Galatians

Galatians 3:10-29 “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

The important lessons of Galatians

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. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

The important lessons of Galatians

- Firstly, this is not a criticism of the Law for its own sake. Paul is actually giving the Law high praise, he is saying that if a law could bring people to G-d, it would be this Law.
- However, Paul is agonising upon this point: adherence to the Law cannot bring salvation and closeness to G-d by itself. The reason most people give is because “salvation is by faith, not by works.” This is far too simplistic.
- Paul is recognising that adherence to the Law, from a Jewish perspective, was part of adherence to their side of a covenant which they made with G-d, the Mosaic Covenant. Paul also knows that within this covenant, Gentiles cannot approach the G-d of Israel on equal terms with Israel. While the covenant makes provisions for Gentiles, they do not have equal access to the observances of the covenant, and hence equal access to G-d. The only way to ensure equal access, was to convert and then their *descendants* would be someday fully accepted into the assembly (the number of generations depended on which nation the convert was originally from).

The important lessons of Galatians

- Paul established a better way. Through faith in Jesus alone and by accepting his sacrifice, we enter a new covenant which supersedes the Mosaic covenant. By faith alone, everyone has equal access to the G-d of Israel, both Jews and Gentiles. He illustrates this by comparing this new situation to the previous situation under Abraham, where he was able to approach G-d by simple faith and obedience, not by accessing Him through acceptance of a national covenant.
- However, as reward for Abraham's faith and obedience, G-d does make a covenant with him, to reward his descendants with the Promised Land, to make them multiply and to bless all nations through his Seed-the Messiah.
- Paul brings this narrative full circle by showing by acceptance of this Seed, through faith, we enter into the faith of Abraham, accessible to all people. The signs of this covenant would be the outpouring of the Holy Spirit onto all mankind, for those who believe and obey.

Important lessons for us

- All people are important to G-d, He does not play favourites.
- While it is important to have a mission to the Jews (for too long, Jews were ignored in evangelism), I think there is a threat of overcompensating, focusing on the Jews at the expense of the rest of mankind.
- We must not forget the message of Paul. All people have equal access to G-d as they are, through simple acceptance of Jesus, through Abrahamic-style faith.
- How this plays out in our congregation is critical. Amongst brothers and sisters we must continue to manage our relationships by using Paul's measuring stick, "there is no Jew or Greek in the Messiah." The wall of partition has indeed been broken down.