

Some Complicated Arguments

Some of the arguments that Paul uses in Galatians are difficult to follow. Perhaps these simplified reconstructions will help.

Christ Became a Curse (3:10–14)

The Bible teaches that anyone who does not keep all things written in the law is under a curse (see Deut. 27:26). So, Paul reasons, everyone is under this curse. But scripture also says that anyone who “hangs on a tree” is cursed (see Deut. 21:23). This means that when Jesus was crucified (hung on a tree) he became a curse, and when he died, the curse died with him. In this way, Christ redeemed those who were under the curse of the law.

Christ Is the Sole Beneficiary (3:15–18, 27–29)

The Bible says that God made covenant promises to Abraham and his offspring (Gen. 12:7; 22:17–18). The word *covenant* can also refer to a person’s “last will and testament,” and the collective noun *offspring* (referring to all descendants of Abraham) can also be read as a singular noun referring to one particular individual. So, with a bit of wordplay, Paul proposes that God’s covenant with Abraham is like a person’s will and that the beneficiary of that will is only one person, Jesus Christ. The law of Moses was given long after Abraham and does not annul Christ’s inheritance as the sole beneficiary of the promise to Abraham. Furthermore, although Christ is sole heir to these promises, people who trust in Christ can be clothed with Christ through baptism (3:27) and become one in Christ (3:28). By virtue of being “in Christ” they too become Abraham’s singular offspring and heirs of the promise (3:29).

Two Mothers Stand for Two Covenants (4:21–31)

The Bible reports that Abraham had children by two different women: his son Isaac was born to his wife, Sarah, and was his heir; another son, Ishmael, was born to the slave woman Hagar and so was not his heir (see Gen. 16:15; 21:2, 9–10). These women, Paul suggests in Galatians, provide an allegory for understanding two covenants. People who trust in the covenant of the law (given by Moses on Sinai) are like the child of Hagar: they are physically descended from Abraham but are not heirs to the promise; indeed, they are enslaved to the law (4:25; cf. 2:4; 5:1). But those who trust in Christ are children of a new covenant, and they are like Isaac, true heirs for whom God’s promises to Abraham are being fulfilled.