

The Everlasting Gospel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 4:2; Ps. 130:3, 4; Luke 15:11–32; Rom. 3:24–26; Heb. 10:1–4; Rev. 14:12.*

Memory Text: “The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you’” (*Jeremiah 31:3, NKJV*).

In our study of James, we have looked at a number of issues connected with the gospel and made some comparisons with other biblical authors. It is not always easy to understand clearly how what James says fits with other parts of Scripture, especially when it comes to something as central as the gospel itself, but as we saw, it does. And this is very important, too, because the gospel is the foundation of our last-day commission to preach “the everlasting gospel . . . to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6*).

In this our final week, we will focus on basic questions regarding “the everlasting gospel,” which is salvation by faith, a belief taught all through the Bible, including in the book of James.

The crucial point to remember is that the Bible does not contradict itself, especially on something as basic as salvation. By finishing the quarter with a look at how the gospel appears in the Bible, we can better see how James fits this larger picture of God’s plan of redemption.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 27.

The Gospel in the Old Testament

“For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith” (Heb. 4:2, NIV).

This verse is startling in its implications. Foremost is that the gospel, not simply “good news” but *the* good news, was preached in the Old Testament. Second, it was preached then just as in New Testament times. There is no hint that there was any difference in the message itself. The problem, therefore, was not with the message but with the way it was heard. Today, too, different people can hear the same gospel message very differently. How crucial, then, that we surrender ourselves in utter faith to the teaching of the Word so that when the gospel is preached we hear it correctly.

Look at the following verses and summarize the gospel message in each:

Gen. 3:15 _____

Exod. 19:4–6 _____

Pss. 130:3, 4; 32:1–5 _____

Isa. 53:4–11 _____

Jer. 31:31–34 _____

Did you notice a common refrain? God intervenes to save us; He forgives our sins and puts “enmity” in us toward sin so that we can be “willing and obedient” (*Isa. 1:19*). One (Jesus) died for the many, bore their (our) iniquities, and justifies the undeserving. The new covenant is different from the old covenant because the law is written in the heart, and sins are “remember[ed] no more” (*Heb. 8:12*). In short, forgiveness and the new birth are a package: justification and sanctification represent God’s solution to the sin problem. These passages could be multiplied, for the message is the same throughout the Bible: despite our sin, God loves us and has done all that is possible to save us from it.

How can we, as people who believe in the importance of keeping the law, protect ourselves from the error of believing that law-keeping is what justifies us? Why is that not always so easy to do?

The Gospel Made Flesh

Some have a very hard time finding the gospel in the Gospels! The teachings of Jesus can seem legalistic but only if we fail to hear the rest of the story. Most people in Israel at the time of Jesus considered themselves to be in a good position before God. They supported the temple by paying the required tax and offering the appropriate sacrifices. They abstained from unclean food, circumcised their sons, kept the festival days and the Sabbaths, and generally tried to keep the law as taught by their religious leaders. Then John came and cried “Repent,” and he baptized. Furthermore, Jesus said a new birth was needed (*John 3:3, 5*) and that “except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 5:20*). In other words, Jesus was saying, “You need what you do not have. Your works are not good enough.”

Read Luke 15:11–32, 18:9–17. How do these parables illustrate the gospel?

In the parable of the prodigal son, the son is lost and does not know it. Eventually, he begins to see his father’s love in a new way and longs to return. His pride is gone. Hoping for acceptance as a servant, he is astonished to be lavished with honor by his father. The relationship is not just restored. It is transformed. A similar reversal of expectations appears in the second parable. The “righteous” Pharisee is ignored by God, while the “sinful” tax collector is not only accepted but leaves justified, forgiven, and free from guilt.

Both stories help us to see God more clearly, as a Father and as a Justifier of the ungodly. When He describes the cup of crushed grapes as “My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins,” Jesus suffers as the real Passover Lamb, the death that should have been ours (*Matt. 26:28, NASB; compare Mark 10:45*). Thus, salvation is free to us because He, Jesus, paid the full price for it.

What hope can you take from each of these parables for yourself? In what ways can you relate to some of the people in them, and what should your answer tell you about what you might need to change in your spiritual life?

The Gospel in Paul

Like many of his countrymen, Paul thought he was in good spiritual standing. But then he saw Jesus as “the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me” (*Gal. 2:20, NASB*). Suddenly, he saw himself not saved but lost; not God’s servant but God’s enemy; not righteous but the chief of sinners. The scales fell from his eyes, in other words, in his reading of the Old Testament. God’s revelation, to him personally and through the Scriptures, transformed his heart and changed his life forever. We will not understand Paul’s epistles until we recognize these basic facts, which produced them.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:14–16 in this light and then verses 2–6. What does Paul identify here as the crucial step?

The meaning of the old covenant becomes clear only “when one turns to the Lord” (*vs. 16, ESV*). Jesus is the way to salvation. It all begins and ends in Him. Israel—by trusting in their own obedience, as Paul did before his conversion—experienced the old covenant as a minister of death. Why? Because “all have sinned” (*Rom. 3:23*), including the people of Israel, and so the commandments could only condemn them (*2 Cor. 3:7*). By contrast, believers in Corinth were “a letter of Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (*vs. 3, NASB*).

Read Romans 1:16, 17; 3:24–26. How does Paul define the gospel? What do we receive through Christ by faith?

The gospel is the power of God to save all who believe. Righteousness is based not on what we do but on what Christ has done for us, which we claim by faith. It is a belief that grows “from faith to faith” (*Rom. 1:17*). What Paul means by this is unpacked in the rest of Romans, the heart of which is found at the end of chapter 3. Through Christ we have *redemption* (God has bought us back by paying for our sins), *justification* (we are cleared of guilt and cleansed by grace), and *forgiveness* (God accepts us back and “forgets” our past sins). Amazingly, God, through the sacrifice of Christ, proves Himself to be just in justifying the ungodly who have put their faith in Jesus.

The “New” Covenant

The book of Hebrews describes the new covenant as “better” than the old covenant (*Heb. 8:1, 2, 6, NRSV*). The obvious question, then, is Why did God establish the old covenant if it was faulty? The problem, however, was not with the covenant but with the response of the people to it.

Read Hebrews 7:19, 8:9, 10:1–4. What problems with the old covenant are mentioned?

The people “did not remain faithful” to the covenant (*Heb. 8:9, NIV*) but were disobedient and rebellious. This, together with the fact that the animal sacrifices of the old covenant could never take away sins (*Heb. 10:4*), meant that the sin problem remained. Only “the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” could atone for sins, including those committed under the old covenant (*Heb. 10:10, NKJV; 9:15*). And that was because “the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God” (*Heb. 7:19*) through the promise of the new covenant.

In one sense, the new covenant is not new at all because—since the promise in Eden of the Seed who would bruise the serpent’s head—the plan of salvation has always been predicated on the death of Christ, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (*Rev. 13:8; see also Jer. 32:40; Heb. 13:20, 21; John 13:34*).

“The covenant of grace is not a new truth, for it existed in the mind of God from all eternity. This is why it is called the everlasting covenant.” —Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 77.

On the other hand, as we saw with Paul, something special happens when we turn to the Lord. God promised, in connection with the everlasting covenant, “I will put into their hearts reverence for Me, so that they do not turn away from Me” (*Jer. 32:40, NJPS*). Without faith, bringing animal sacrifices was almost like making payment for sins. Gazing at Jesus instead, who “endured the cross, despising the shame,” and “who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself” (*Heb. 12:2, 3, NKJV*), reveals the immeasurable cost of sin and the good news that the cost has been paid by Someone else “through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (*13:20, NKJV*). This “new” covenant transforms how we look at everything, such as the commandment to love one another. It’s not really new (*Lev. 19:18*), except in that we are not just to love our neighbor as ourselves, but “as I [Jesus] have loved you” (*John 13:34*).

How can we ever learn to love others as Jesus has loved us?

The Climax of the Gospel

“But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets” (Rev. 10:7, NASB).

Significantly, Revelation 10:7 is the only other verse in Revelation (besides Revelation 14:6) that specifically refers to preaching the gospel (the Greek word translated “preached” is *euangelizō*, “to proclaim good news”). These two chapters are special for Seventh-day Adventists, because we find our calling and commission described in them. In other words, God has specifically commissioned us, in a way He has no other group, to proclaim the “everlasting gospel.”

As we have seen, the gospel is the same from Genesis to Revelation. The law is the same. The covenant is the same. Jesus, Paul, and James all affirm that the gospel is the same one believed by Abraham (*John 8:56, Rom. 4:13, James 2:21–23*). Some have difficulty with this assertion only because they define the gospel more narrowly than Scripture. Abraham’s obedient faith, however, originated through his foreseeing Jesus’ sacrifice. We do not need to balance faith with works in order to be saved. Faith alone is sufficient, but it must not be an intellectual faith as the devils have, nor a presumptuous faith that claims the promises of God without complying with the conditions of salvation; rather, it must be a faith that works.

Why are the references in Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 14:12 to keeping the commandments, and to the testimony and faith of Jesus, significant in the context of the everlasting gospel?

The decisive issue at the end of time is: Whom will we worship and obey? The God who “made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (*Rev. 14:7*)? Or the beast and his image? Obedience to the commandments (including the Sabbath) through the faith of Jesus signifies those who remain faithful to the end. True religion demands both faith and obedience.

“Though often in the midst of reproach and persecution, a constant testimony has been borne to the perpetuity of the law of God and the sacred obligation of the creation Sabbath.

“These truths, as presented in Revelation 14 in connection with ‘the everlasting gospel,’ will distinguish the church of Christ at the time of His appearing. For as the result of the threefold message it is announced: ‘Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 453, 454.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Loud Cry,” pp. 198–202, in *Last Day Events*.

“We need to come up to a higher standard, to go forward and claim our exalted privileges. We should walk humbly with God, make no proud boasts of perfection of character, but in simple faith claim every promise in the word of God; for they are for the obedient, not for the transgressors of God’s law. We are simply to believe the testimony of God, and have entire dependence on him, and all possibility of self-glory or pride will be removed. We are indeed saved by faith, not by a passive faith, but by the faith which works by love, and purifies the soul. The hand of Christ can reach the veriest sinner, and bring him back from transgression to obedience; but no Christianity is so lofty that it can soar above the requirements of God’s holy law. This would be beyond Christ’s power to help, it would be outside of his teachings and his example; for he says, ‘I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love,’ and all who follow Christ will render obedience to God’s holy law.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*[®], March 31, 1890.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the various gospel emphases in the teachings of Jesus, James, and Paul, including similarities and differences between them. How, by placing them together and seeing the whole picture, can we protect ourselves from falling into either legalism or a cheap grace?
- 2 When feeling discouraged about your spiritual state, what gospel promises can you claim to help keep you from discouragement? Why, even in the darkest times, must you never give up, and why is the promise of Christ’s righteousness as a gift to undeserving sinners the key to protecting you from giving up?
- 3 The three angels’ messages connect Creation very closely to Redemption and salvation. So does John 1:1–14. Why are these two topics so closely related? How does this close connection help explain why the Sabbath is such a central component of God’s law? How does this close tie help us understand the centrality of the Sabbath in the final conflict of the last days?

Under Arrest! Part 2

GIOVANNI ZALDIVAR

At the detention center, we were searched, and police took our remaining invitations. Then the police officer took our names and addresses, and the names of the schools we attended. He hinted that our arrest would be reported to our school and could end our chances to attend college one day.

Meanwhile, the woman returned to the church and told the members what had happened. The choir practice immediately became a prayer meeting as the believers sought God's protection for us.

My mother and the pastor went to the park and tried to find us, but no one knew where we had been taken. Then they went to the central police station and demanded to know where we were. At first, the police said they didn't know, but the pastor insisted that the police find us immediately. After a few phone calls, the officer told them that we were in the juvenile center a mile away.

Inside the room at the juvenile center some of the girls began to cry. We had been kept locked up for several hours without food or water. It was almost sunset, and so we started singing, and our courage grew. Then, from down the hall, I heard my mother's voice arguing with the officer who had arrested us.

After several minutes, another police officer came in and told us we were free to go. But when we asked for the invitation cards, the police said we couldn't have them.

As we started walking toward the church, I stopped and pulled some invitation cards out of my sock, where I had quickly hidden them. I explained to my mother and friends that when the police weren't looking, I put invitations on the desks at the police station.

Everyone laughed, and on the way back to the church we gave out the remaining cards.

When we arrived back at the church, we were surprised at how many members had gathered to pray for us. Everyone listened as we told them what had happened. Then the group prayed once more, thanking God for keeping us safe. We especially prayed for the officer who arrested us and the police who guarded us, that God would direct them to come to the church and hear His message of freedom in Christ.

GIOVANNI ZALDIVAR was a senior in high school at the time of this writing. He would like to study engineering and help build churches in Cuba.

While many books of the Bible are filled with deep spiritual and theological truths, the book of Proverbs is filled with practical advice for daily living. Brief, well balanced, poetic, and often humorous, the Proverbs are universal, easy to memorize, and make their points well, sometimes even more efficiently than do eloquent speeches and rigorous argumentation.

From our first quarter 2015 study guide entitled *Proverbs*, by Jacques Doukhan, we will learn how to be wise in practical ways. Proverbs answers questions such as, What should I teach my children, and how? How can I be happy and successful? Why do I have money problems? How can I get a promotion in my job? How can I resist sexual temptations? How should I cope with my anger or my tongue?

Proverbs is deep and rich, and it deals with many topics. However, given the limitations of space, we have had to pick and choose which material we could cover. We can't cover it all, but all that we have is, indeed, worthy of our prayerful study.

Lesson 1—The Call of Wisdom

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Beginning of Wisdom** (*Prov. 1:7*)

MONDAY: **True Education** (*Prov. 1:8–19*)

TUESDAY: **The Call of Wisdom** (*Prov. 1:20, 21*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Benefit of Wisdom** (*Prov. 2:6–9*)

THURSDAY: **Do Not Forget** (*Prov. 3:13–18*)

Memory Text—*Proverbs 1:7, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Proverbs is all about helping us to make right choices, to choose the way of God and not that of the deceiver.

Lesson 2—From Ears to Feet

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Hear!** (*Proverbs 4*)

MONDAY: **Protect Your Family** (*Proverbs 5*)

TUESDAY: **Protect Your Friendship** (*Prov. 6:1–5*)

WEDNESDAY: **Protect Your Work** (*Prov. 6:6–8*)

THURSDAY: **Protect Yourself** (*Prov. 6:12–15, 6:16–19*)

Memory Text—*Proverbs 4:26, 27*

Sabbath Gem: It's not enough just to know about right and wrong; we need to know how to choose right and not wrong. Training in wisdom consists in hearing proper instruction and in following and obeying what we have learned so that we don't end up walking in the wrong direction.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.