

Old Testament Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 3:1–14, Rom. 1:2, 4:3, Gen. 15:6, 12:1–3, Lev. 17:11, 2 Cor. 5:21.*

Memory Text: “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’” (*Galatians 3:13, ESV*).

A little boy had made a little boat, all painted and fixed up beautifully. One day someone stole his boat, and he was distressed. In passing a pawnshop one day he saw his boat. Happily he ran in to the pawnbroker and said, ‘That is my little boat.’ ‘No,’ said the pawnbroker, ‘it is mine, for I bought it.’ ‘Yes,’ said the boy, ‘but it is mine, for I made it.’ ‘Well,’ said the pawnbroker, ‘if you will pay me two dollars, you can have it.’ That was a lot of money for a boy who did not have a penny. Anyway, he resolved to have it; so, he cut grass, did chores of all kinds, and soon had his money.

“He ran down to the shop and said, ‘I want my boat.’ He paid the money and received his boat. He took the boat up in his arms, and hugged and kissed it, and said, ‘You dear little boat, I love you. You are mine. You are twice mine. I made you, and now I have bought you.’

“So it is with us. We are, in a sense, twice the Lord’s. He created us, and we got into the devil’s pawnshop. Then Jesus came and bought us at awful cost—not silver and gold, but His precious blood. We are the Lord’s by creation and by redemption.”—William Moses Tidwell, *Pointed Illustrations* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1951), p. 97.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 29.

The Foolish Galatians

Read Galatians 3:1–5. Summarize what Paul is saying to the Galatians. In what sense could we be in danger of falling into the same spiritual pitfall of starting out right and then falling into legalism?

Several modern translations have tried to capture the sense of Paul’s words in verse 1 about the “foolish” Galatians. The actual word Paul uses in Greek is even stronger than that. The word is *anoetoi*, and it comes from the word for mind (*nous*). Literally, it means “mindless.” The Galatians were not thinking. Paul, though, does not stop there; he says that, because they are acting so foolishly, he wonders if some magician has cast a spell on them: “Who has bewitched you?” (*Gal. 3:1, NKJV*). His choice of words here may even suggest that the ultimate source behind their condition is the devil (*2 Cor. 4:4*).

What baffles Paul so much about the Galatians’ apostasy on the gospel is that they knew salvation was rooted in the cross of Christ. It was not something that they could have missed. The word translated “portrayed” or “set forth” (*KJV*) in Galatians 3:1 literally means “placarded” or “painted.” It was used to describe all public proclamations. Paul is saying that the Cross was such a central part of his preaching that the Galatians had, in effect, seen in their mind’s eye Christ crucified (*1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2*). In a sense, he’s saying that, by their actions, they are turning away from the Cross.

Paul then contrasts the current experience of the Galatians with how they first came to faith in Christ. He does this by asking them some rhetorical questions. How did they receive the Spirit? Or how did they first become Christians? And from a slightly different perspective, Why did God give the Spirit? Was it because they did something to earn it? Certainly not! Instead, it was because they believed the good news of what Christ already had done for them. Having begun so well, what would make them think that now they had to rely upon their own behavior?

How often, if ever, do you find yourself thinking, *I’m doing pretty well. I’m a pretty solid Christian, I don’t do this and/or I don’t do that . . .* and then, even subtly, thinking you’re somehow good enough to be saved? What’s wrong with that picture?

Grounded in Scripture

So far, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul has defended his gospel of justification by faith by appealing to the agreement reached with the apostles in Jerusalem (*Gal. 2:1–10*) and to the personal experience of the Galatians themselves (*Gal. 3:1–5*). Beginning in Galatians 3:6, Paul now turns to the testimony of Scripture for the final and ultimate confirmation of his gospel. In fact, Galatians 3:6–4:31 is made up of progressive arguments rooted in Scripture.

What does Paul mean when he writes about the “Scripture” in Galatians 3:6–8? Consider *Rom. 1:2, 4:3, 9:17*.

It is important to remember that at the time Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians there was no “New Testament.” Paul was the earliest New Testament writer. The Gospel of Mark is probably the earliest of the four gospels, but it likely was not written until around the time of Paul’s death (A.D. 65)—that is, about fifteen years after Paul’s letter to the Galatians. So, when Paul refers to the scriptures, he has only the Old Testament in mind.

The Old Testament scriptures play a significant role in Paul’s teachings. He does not view them as dead texts but as the authoritative and living Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16 he writes, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” The word translated “inspiration” is *theopneustos*. The first part of the word (*theo*) means “God,” while the second half means “breathed.” Scripture, therefore, is “God-breathed.” Paul, then, uses the scriptures to demonstrate that Jesus is the promised Messiah (*Rom. 1:2*), to give instruction in Christian living (*Rom. 13:8–10*), and to prove the validity of his teachings (*Gal. 3:8, 9*).

It is difficult to determine exactly how many hundreds of times Paul quotes the Old Testament, but quotes are found throughout all his letters, except his shortest ones, Titus and Philemon.

Read carefully Galatians 3:6–14. Identify the passages from the Old Testament that Paul quotes from in these verses. What do his quotes tell us about how authoritative the Old Testament was?

Do you at times find yourself thinking that one part of the Bible is more “inspired” than other parts? Given Paul’s statement in 2 Timothy 3:16, what’s the danger of going down that path?

Reckoned as Righteous

Why do you think Paul first appeals to Abraham as he looks to the scriptures to validate his gospel message? *Gal. 3:6*.

Abraham was a central figure in Judaism. Not only was he the father of the Jewish race, but Jews in Paul's time also looked to him as the prototype of what a true Jew should be like. Many not only believed that his defining characteristic was his obedience but that God had declared Abraham righteous because of that obedience. After all, Abraham forsook his homeland and family, accepted circumcision, and was even willing to sacrifice his son at God's command. That's obedience! With their insistence on circumcision, Paul's opponents certainly argued along these same lines.

Paul, however, turns the tables by referring to Abraham—nine times in Galatians—as an example of faith instead of law-keeping.

Consider Paul's quotation of Genesis 15:6. What does it mean when it says that Abraham's faith was "counted . . . to him for righteousness"? See also *Rom. 4:3–6, 8–11, 22–24*.

Whereas justification was a metaphor taken from the legal world, the word *counted*, or *reckoned*, is a metaphor drawn from the domain of business. It can mean "to credit" or "to place something to one's account." Not only is it used regarding Abraham in Galatians 3:6, but it occurs another 11 times in connection with the patriarch. Some Bible versions translate it as *counted*, *reckoned*, or *imputed*.

According to Paul's metaphor, what is placed into our accounts is righteousness. The question is, however, *On what basis does God count us as righteous?* It surely cannot be on the basis of obedience, despite what Paul's opponents claimed. No matter what they said about Abraham's obedience, Scripture says that it was because of Abraham's *faith* that God counted him as righteous.

The Bible is clear: Abraham's obedience was not grounds for his justification; it was, instead, the result. He didn't do the things he did in order to be justified; he did them because he already *was* justified. Justification leads to obedience, not vice versa.

Dwell on what this means—that you are justified not by anything you do but only by what Christ has done for you. Why is that *such* good news? How can you learn to make that truth your own; that is, to believe it applies to you, personally, no matter your struggles, past and even present?

The Gospel in the Old Testament

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed’” (*Gal. 3:8, ESV*). Paul writes that not only was the gospel preached to Abraham, but it was God who preached it; so, it must have been the true gospel. But when did God preach the gospel to Abraham? Paul’s quotation of Genesis 12:3 indicates he has in mind the covenant God made with Abraham when He called him in Genesis 12:1–3.

Read Genesis 12:1–3. What does this tell us about the nature of the covenant that God made with Abraham?

The basis of God’s covenant with Abraham centered on God’s promises to him. God says to Abraham four times, “I will.” God’s promises to Abraham are amazing because they are completely one-sided. God does all the promising; Abraham promises nothing. This is the opposite of how most people try to relate to God. We usually promise we will serve Him if only He will do something for us in return. But that is legalism. God did not ask Abraham to promise anything but to accept His promises by faith. Of course, that was no easy task, because Abraham had to learn to trust completely in God and not in himself (*see Genesis 22*). The call of Abraham illustrates, therefore, the essence of the gospel, which is salvation by faith.

Some mistakenly conclude that the Bible teaches two ways of salvation. They claim that in Old Testament times salvation was based on keeping the commandments; then, because that did not work very well, God abolished the law and made salvation possible by faith. This could not be farther from the truth. As Paul wrote in Galatians 1:7, there is only one gospel.

What other examples can you find in the Old Testament of salvation by faith alone? *See, for instance, Lev. 17:11, Ps. 32:1–5, 2 Sam. 12:1–13, and Zech. 3:1–4.*

We often hear the phrase “cheap grace.” Yet, it’s a misnomer. Grace isn’t cheap—it’s free (at least for us). But we ruin it when we think that we can add to it by our works or when we think we can use it as an excuse to sin. In your own experience, which one of these two ways are you more inclined to lean toward, and how can you stop?

Redeemed From a Curse (Gal. 3:9–14)

Paul’s opponents were no doubt stunned by his bold words in Galatians 3:10. They certainly did not think themselves to be under a curse; if anything, they expected to be blessed for their obedience. Yet, Paul is unequivocal: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them’” (NKJV).

Paul is contrasting two completely different alternatives: salvation by faith and salvation by works. The covenant blessings and curses outlined in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 were straightforward. Those who obeyed were blessed, and those who disobeyed were cursed. That means if we want to rely on obedience to the law for acceptance with God, then the whole law needs to be kept. We do not have the liberty to pick and choose what we want to follow; we also should not assume that God is willing to overlook a few mistakes here and there. It is all or nothing.

This is, of course, bad news not only for Gentiles but for Paul’s legalistic opponents as well, because we “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). No matter how hard we try to be good, the law can only condemn us as lawbreakers.

How did Christ deliver us from the curse of the law? See Gal. 3:13 and 2 Cor. 5:21.

Paul introduces another metaphor to explain what God has done for us in Christ in Galatians 3:13. The word *redeem* means “to buy back.” It was used to refer to the ransom price paid to release hostages or the price paid to free a slave. Because the wages of sin is death, the curse of failing to keep the law was often a death sentence. The ransom paid for our salvation was not insignificant; it cost God the life of His own Son (John 3:16). Jesus ransomed us from the curse by becoming our sin-bearer (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23). He voluntarily took our curse upon Himself and suffered in our behalf the full penalty of sin (2 Cor. 5:21).

Paul cites Deuteronomy 21:23 as scriptural proof. According to Jewish custom, a person was under God’s curse if, after execution, the body was hung on a tree. Jesus’ death on the cross was seen as an example of this curse (Acts 5:30, 1 Pet. 2:24).

No wonder, then, that the Cross was a stumbling block for some Jews who could not fathom the idea that the Messiah was accursed by God. But this was exactly God’s plan. Yes, the Messiah bore a curse, but it was not His own—it was ours!

Further Thought: “Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father’s mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father’s reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

“Luther now entered boldly upon his work as a champion of the truth. His voice was heard from the pulpit in earnest, solemn warning. He set before the people the offensive character of sin, and taught them that it is impossible for man, by his own works, to lessen its guilt or evade its punishment. Nothing but repentance toward God and faith in Christ can save the sinner. The grace of Christ cannot be purchased; it is a free gift. He counseled the people not to buy indulgences, but to look in faith to a crucified Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 129.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Even today in our own church, some still have a hard time accepting salvation by faith alone—that God’s grace, through Christ, saves us apart from our works. What’s behind the hesitancy of some to accept this crucial truth?
- 2 Paul spoke very strongly about the theological error of salvation by works. What does that tell us about the importance of good theology? Why should we, as a church, stand up, forcefully if need be, when error is being taught among us?

Summary: From start to finish in the Christian life, the basis of our salvation is faith in Christ alone. It was because of Abraham’s faith in God’s promises that he was counted as righteous, and that same gift of righteousness is available for anyone today who shares Abraham’s faith. The only reason we are not condemned for our mistakes is that Jesus paid the price for our sins by dying in our place.

David's Amazing Discovery: Part 2

One couple, the Sircars, were members of the same church that David and Swarna had attended. They, too, were excited about the truths they discovered. "We never knew such things were in the Bible," they said.

One of the things they learned was that God could be approached in personal prayer, without the help of a priest or a prayer book. This news was thrilling to them, for they had long wished to speak directly to God.

One night the Sircars were awakened by the cries of their 13-year-old daughter. She had terrible pain in her chest that wouldn't go away. Her groans and cries made the worried parents wonder if she was dying.

"What shall we do?" Mrs. Sircar worried. "There's no way for us to get medical help now, and by morning she may be dead."

"We can pray for her," her husband suggested. "We've learned that we don't need the priest; we'll just tell Jesus about this and ask Him to heal her."

The couple knelt beside the sick girl's bed and cried out to God to save their daughter. Tears ran down their cheeks as they begged Him to touch their precious girl.

Suddenly they realized that their daughter had stopped groaning. By the time they said Amen, she was asleep. Her parents were convinced that God had led them to the Bible studies at David Pan's house. They continued to attend and were among the first group baptized.

In a nearby village a man named Victor and his wife were praying for someone to come and help them understand the Bible.

One day someone invited the couple to attend the Bible studies in David and Swarna's home. Victor and his wife were sure that God had sent this visitor in answer to their prayer. The next Saturday they went to the meeting in David's home. "Amazing!" Victor commented as he listened to the teaching. "I'm finding answers to Bible questions that I've struggled with for years. I'm so happy."

The message spread rapidly among the villages around David and Swarna's home. People came knocking on their door asking them to come and teach what they had learned.

Some years ago David and Swarna attended a Global Mission Pioneer training class and became one of 20 Global Mission Pioneer teams that were sent out to towns and villages with the gospel. As a result of their work, and those of other Global Mission Pioneers, thousands of people have come to know the truth as it is in Jesus and have been baptized.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Galatians 3:13*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Outline the foundation for understanding redemption and justification by faith in the Old Testament.

Feel: Sense the sorrow and agony of the curse of separation from the Father that Christ endured for our sake.

Do: Accept and appreciate the depths of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, and, in faith, ask for His righteousness to forgive our sins and cover us.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Redemption in the Old Testament

A How was the theme of Redemption illustrated throughout the Old Testament in the sacrificial system?

B What Old Testament stories develop the theme of a Substitute bearing a tragic cost in order to save others?

II. Feel: He Bore Our Curse

A Why did God go to so much trouble to illustrate the substitutionary death of Christ long before Christ ever came to this earth?

B Why is it critical for us to identify with Christ's humiliation and shame in the arrest, accusations, nakedness, and sense of abandonment from the Crucifixion?

III. Do: Accepting the Cost

A The Old Testament sacrificial system was a daily physical reminder of the costs Christ bore on our behalf. How do we keep these images fresh today?

B What do we need to do to share in Christ's death and, by faith, accept His gift of life?

► **Summary:** Through the sacrificial system, the Old Testament illustrated the terrible cost of sin and the offering of a perfect substitute to take the place of the sinner in death.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Faith in Christ alone is what makes us sons and daughters of God.

Just for Teachers: In this lesson teachers are encouraged to follow Paul's example in Galatians 3 in presenting and pursuing thought exercises that encourage and assist the class in breaking out of the pervasive thought that our works save us. We are asked to reorient our minds continually to focus on the astonishing concept that grace through faith in Christ alone saves us.

In Galatians we find an interesting paradox: Paul, a man trained in the law, deploys his considerable persuasive reasoning skills to argue that faith, not logice or reason, is what connects us to God.

Discuss With the Class: Ask the class to honestly assess the degree to which they can relate to the Galatians. The Galatians may be called “foolish,” but we live in a time in history that defines “truth” as that which can be empirically known through logical reasoning, tested hypotheses, evidence from statistical analysis, and so on. How do we share in the Galatians' struggle to step out in faith and believe in something and Someone we cannot “prove” outside of our own experience?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The story of Abraham is familiar to us all. Yet, our very familiarity with this story also poses the biggest barrier to encountering it as if for the first time and feeling astounded by its audacity: both in the impossibility (from a human perspective) of God's promises to Abraham and also in the concurrent epic struggle of faith revealed through Abraham's life. This lesson is an opportunity to rediscover the story of Abraham, which has the potential to function as a script for how to live a life of absolute faith and trust in God.

Bible Commentary

Knowing we are saved by grace through faith in Christ should make Abraham's story a touchstone for each of us, a tool to reorient ourselves to living faith-centered lives. According to Paul's letter to the Galatians, Abraham's story provides a timeless blueprint for faith.

Three salient aspects of that story will help us to focus on what it means to live a life of faith.

Delve into the details of what the Bible tells us about (a) how God reveals Himself to Abraham, (b) the progressive nature of God's promises to Abraham, and (c) the journey of Abraham in living a life centered on the belief in God's promise. If critiqued by any standard other than faith (e.g., reason, human experience, etc.), that journey appears downright ludicrous.

I. The Three Lessons of Faith That the Story of Abraham Teaches (*Review with your class Genesis 12:1–8, 13:14–18, 15:1–10.*)

Implicit in Paul's use of Abraham as the singular example of true faith is the idea that this is a possibility for all of us. Indeed, not just a possibility, but something that God longs to engage in with each of us. The story of Abraham helps us learn about how to engage with God in a personal faith journey in which God can reveal Himself, His promises, and His expressed desire for each one of us.

Three Teachable Moments: The Bible says that God spoke to Abraham (*Gen. 12:1, 4; 13:14*), appeared to Abraham (*Gen. 12:7*), and came to Abraham in a vision (*Gen. 15:1*). In these passages we find the methods of revelation, the increasing progression of information revealed, and also Abraham's struggle to accept the astonishing promises he was given.

1. The central and critical element revealed in Abraham's story about living the life of faith is that it is more than just belief in God; it is a relationship *with* God. Faith is an opening of your mind and heart to have a personal relationship with the Divine. It is being open to the idea that God speaks to each one of us in ways that we are best equipped to hear, whether through nature, counsel, signs, dreams—however He chooses to communicate with us. It is a journey and relationship that may defy human logic and expectations and cannot be authenticated by scientific reasoning, rationale, or the shared learning of human experience.

2. We find in Abraham's story that, over time, God reveals increasingly specific information about His promise. Initially, God promises land and descendants, content that grows in specificity over time, soon resulting in knowledge that Abraham will be the father of a son born to Sarah. We can ask many questions regarding this story, which may guide us in our efforts to live a life of faith: (1) What does Abraham's story demonstrate about continuing revelation? (2) Why do you think that God's promises are revealed piecemeal over time?

3. God's promise that Abraham will be a father of a great nation

born of a son through his wife whose womb has long since lost its reproductive capacity defies human logic and reason. Yet, Abraham has the audacity to believe. Most of the time, anyway. We see our own experiences in faith through Abraham's life. As the years wear on, Abraham struggles. He makes bad decisions that are not the result of faith. For example, he lies to Pharaoh about his relationship with Sarah, because of his fear of dying despite God's promise that he would live to be the father of a great nation. Furthermore, he takes matters into his own hands by conceiving a son with Hagar. He interrogates God's promises when it seems to him that God is all talk and no action. In this element of the story, there is great hope for us. Despite all of these "failings," Paul cites Abraham as the stellar example of faith. We can take a lot of courage from this, knowing that we are called to keep returning to faith, even after we struggle and fail.

Consider This: The first aspect to focus on in the story is the dynamic between God and Abraham. What can we learn from Abraham about being open to God's voice? The second aspect of interest is the progressive way in which God reveals Himself and His promises to Abraham. We can see clearly that God's promises to Abraham grow in specificity and content over time. What might this show us about living a life of faith in relationship to God? The third teachable moment and element in this story is the witness of Abraham's life in living with God's promises. What can we learn about Abraham's openness to believe, which seemed equally matched by his struggle to believe? After all, he was given something which, when looked at from a rational or dispassionate perspective, would be foolhardy if not impossible to believe.

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the simple but profound truth that faith is more than a one-time acceptance of God. Our affirmation of God is just walking through the open door; the rest of faith constitutes the lifetime of living with God in a relationship of faith.

Thought Questions:

- 1 In addition to reading Scripture and praying, what practices do you employ to cultivate listening to God's voice? How does God reveal His will and His unique promises for your life? When was the last time you felt the distinct voice of God in your heart or mind? What enabled you to follow through with what you heard?
- 2 In your spiritual community, do you spend enough time sharing about individual faith journeys? What methods can be used to affirm and

encourage each other to engage more directly with God in a relationship of faith?

Application Questions:

What can be done to create actual “communities of faith”—safe harbors to affirm that God speaks to all of us in many different ways? How can we affirm that, just as God knows the number of hairs on our heads, so He has plans for each of our lives that He is waiting to reveal to us if we are willing to embark on a faith odyssey with Him?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Faith is an initial leap into the unknown for us, but our heavenly Father promises to catch us in His holy arms. Imagine being held in His arms, as a newborn to faith. Now continue the metaphor of growth in faith by comparing it to the growth of a child. God’s invitation to make that first leap comes with a promise that He will give us a lifetime of opportunities to grow in a special relationship to Him.

① If you are feeling the absence of a meaningful faith practice, resolve to spend at least one evening during the following week doing something new to cultivate your faith experience. Ask God to open your heart to the ways He is already speaking to you, which you perhaps are missing.

② If you feel deeply enriched in your own spiritual faith walk, resolve to step out in service as a mentor or support to others in your circle of friends, family, and faith community. Ask for inspiration and God’s leading about how your experience best might serve His purposes to strengthen the faith of others.

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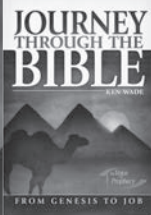
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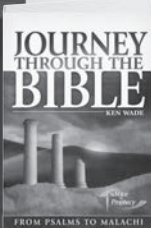
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