Abraham, the man of faith Galatians 3:7-9

What do you know about Abraham? What makes him a significant figure for the Jewish people? What is his significance to us as Christians?

This week we look at just three verses from Galatians, but they lead us to Abraham, and to the heart of the controversy at Galatia. Jewish believers had come to the church that Paul founded and were telling Christians there that their faith in Christ was not enough to save them: they needed to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses. This teaching had very little to do with legalism, or with an attempt to subvert the gospel of grace by making people rely on human effort or good works. The issue turned on the question of how non-Jews could become children of Abraham, and if so, how.

Read Genesis 17:1-14. What do these verses say about the relationship between Abraham and the nations of the world, and how those nations could be included in God’s covenant with Abraham? How does this passage shed light on the reasons why the Jewish teachers were saying that Gentile believers had to be circumcised?

Paul probably did not talk too much about Abraham when he preached the gospel in Galatia: why would he? But he would have used the scriptures to disciple the believers and now the Jewish teachers had put Abraham firmly on the agenda. God’s covenant was with Abraham and with his descendants, and the sign of that covenant was circumcision. But Paul recognised that circumcision brought with it an obligation to keep the Jewish law (Galatians 5:3), and he was also utterly convinced that the only way people could be out right with God was by faith in Jesus Christ and not by adhering to the works of the law (2:16). So this was a vital gospel issue for Paul: he had to grapple with the question of how Gentile believers in Christ could be members of God’s covenant people, and children of Abraham, without being circumcised. He does so by pointing to Abraham as a man of faith.

Paul starts by referring to Genesis 15:1-6: here Abraham believes God’s promise that he would have more children than there are stars in the sky, and God counts Abraham’s faith as righteousness. This is a key text for Paul, and he uses it to show that people are righteous in God’s sight if they believe and trust God as Abraham did. Then Paul turns back to God’s first encounter with Abraham, and notes that this includes a promise than in Abraham all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). In the light of these texts from Genesis, take another look at Galatians 3:6-9. Does Paul’s argument make sense to you? You might want to take a look at Romans 4:1-12, where Paul explores this question in greater detail: how has he developed and improved his argument in this passage?

The upshot is that we, as people of faith, are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Galatians 3:9). Looking back at the passages in Genesis about Abraham, what blessings did God promise to give him? In what ways do you think that the nations of the world have been blessed through Abraham? Can you think of any ways in which they have not been blessed? What blessings come to us, as children of Abraham by faith? In what ways are we called to communicate God’s blessing to the nations of the world? Can you think of ways in which the church has made a good or a bad job of this? Spend some time praying for our missionaries, who have been called by God to bring the blessings of Christ to other nations ([Brighton Road Baptist Church : Mission](https://www.brbc-horsham.org.uk/Groups/343508/Brighton_Road_Baptist/What_we_do/Mission/Mission.aspx)).

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men.

We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we may shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days.

*Book of Common Prayer*