

[Exodus 18:3 (NIV84), when Moses reunites with his family after the exodus and explains why he named his son Gershom:] One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have become an alien in a foreign land."

1. The word *alien* nowadays is often associated with extraterrestrial. You know: Area 51, Star Wars, and stuff like that. But the word *alien* itself simply means stranger or foreigner. Maybe because of the modern association with extraterrestrials, most modern Bible translations avoid the word *alien*: the NIV11 changed *alien* from the passage I just quoted to foreigner. Why would it be so urgent to change that word? I'm going to use the word in the old way because there is such a cool theological term which uses the word *alien*: it is *alien righteousness*.
2. Why not use amazing terms like *alien righteousness*? In our Gospel Lesson, Jesus shocked the world by giving the people amazing teachings. True to form, God's Word has an amazing teaching before us today as well in Romans 3. {Read verses 21-24.}
3. This section deals with the topic of how we get right in God's eyes. The amazing setup to this section is that it doesn't matter what our background is, we can't get right with God. Yet no matter what our background is, we still do get right with God. Amazingly, this was God's plan all along! The Law and the Prophets is a Jewish way of calling what we now call the Old Testament. The Old Testament tells us that a righteousness not our own would come to us. This righteousness had to come from outside of us because we cannot be righteous on our own. For example, Isaiah 53:11 prophesies about Jesus, After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Jesus did that for us on the cross. He bore our sin—all of the imperfections we have, any single one of which disqualify us from heaven. Instead He justifies us, declaring us not guilty by giving us His righteous life. The perfect life of Jesus Christ given to us we call *alien righteousness* because it comes from outside of us.
4. There's a picture God uses to talk about our alien righteousness. The word is redemption in verse 24. God buys us back from our sin. And the price was His righteous life in our place. By nature we think the opposite is true. We think that God owes us something. We think that we can "pay the price" to make God happy with us. We're always trying to stack the game in our favor when it comes to approaching God on the basis of our own righteousness. *God, you've gotta listen to me: I've been doing so good lately!* But what about not lately? Does God really owe me anything, especially since I'm trying to limit how He looks at me, and in so doing, I make myself look bad anyway? No, I'm still in my sin. I always want to compare myself to someone or something that makes me look better. Not just better, but righteous: that's how I want to look. But God's holy Word shows us that we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Our righteousness won't work in God's eyes.
5. So, God takes the righteousness that Christ won for all people of all time and makes it our very own by leading us to believe that God did it for us. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus to all who believe. Our righteousness is given. We don't earn it. Since it comes from God, our alien righteousness is distinctive from all the other

attempts at righteousness that we humans try to present to God on our own. Alien righteousness is distinctive because it works.

6. This is such an important fact because it's the certainty of our salvation! We *need* alien righteousness, not our own. It actually works! It even wipes away all the times we've tried to bargain with God on the basis of our righteousness, which—remember—we always try to stack in our favor. What does that look like? It looks like, *God, if you'd just answer this one prayer ...* or, *God, if you love me ...* These prayers come from a different place than Jesus' prayer of yet not my will, but yours be done (Luke 22:42).
7. Thank God, His will is done. He saves us from our boastful requests. When we dare to on our own ask God to do something, it is a form of boasting because we are saying that He owes us for what we've done. He owes me alright! He owes me for my sin which I've ignored as I make my demands of God. Instead of giving me what I deserve, God gives me the salvation He wants to give because He is a loving God. He brings us back to Him, making us at one with Him. This concept is atonement. {Read verses 25a,27.}
8. Here's where our alien righteousness really shines! Where did our boasting go? The use of the word *law* here is a play on words. The Law and Prophets (the Old Testament), gave us the *law* of God's will in the Word (which we have not kept), and here the *law* is a principle which God reveals to us. If we want righteousness, it does not come from what we do. We need an alien righteousness. Alien righteousness is distinct because it works. God's gift of faith clings to the fact that Jesus is our righteousness. Our boasting that God should do something for us because of who we are is replaced with trusting that God does what's best for us because of Who He is. {Read verse 28.}
9. This thinking is—you guessed it—alien to us by nature. It only comes to us from God. That's what makes it distinctive. And that's what makes it work. It works in so many ways. We are not motivated by guilt to appease God so we get something from Him. Instead, we are motivated by love to live for God out of thankfulness. We don't have to question whether God loves us when things end up working out differently than we planned. Instead, we see His plan to save us and trust that His plan for the rest of our life is good too. That mentality is from an alien righteousness. So, I guess that makes us aliens in this world, even though we aren't extraterrestrials. But our alien righteousness sure makes us out of this world. Amen.