

## Wednesday Evening Bible Study

February 8, 2023

Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*

*The Letter to the Romans*

*The Righteousness of God*

Text – Romans 4:13 – 25 – *Abraham – The Father of the Faithful*

### Introduction

In the second part of chapter four, Paul is continuing to prove the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from any works of the Law. He introduced this subject in Romans 1:17:

*"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."* (Romans 1:17)

He then proceeded to demonstrate, in Romans 1:18 – 3:20, that no man could possibly be saved (justified) by keeping the Law because no man had successfully kept the Law; all had fallen short:

*"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and **all the world may become guilty before God.** Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."* (Romans 3:19-20)

In Romans 3:21, after having thoroughly proved that no man could be justified through works, Paul then began again to explain in detail the doctrine of justification by faith:

*"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, **being witnessed by the law and the prophets;** Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:"* (Romans 3:21-22)

Notice the phrase above in v. 21 "being witnessed by the law and the prophets". This means that the Old Testament taught the doctrine of justification by faith just as much as Paul was preaching it in the time of the New Testament. In chapter four, Paul expanded on this thought by examining some people from the Old Testament. In vs. 1 – 5, we saw the example of Abraham; in vs. 6 – 8, we read of the exhortation of David quoted from Psalm 32:1 – 2; and finally, we saw that justification by faith existed before the institution

of circumcision. Abraham had righteousness “accounted” (counted, imputed, reckoned) unto him at least 13 years before he was circumcised.

In this second half of chapter 4 the focus is on God’s Promise to Abraham and his seed. Notice the word “promise” in vs. 13, 14, 16, 20, & 21. The specific promise referred to here is found in Genesis 15:1 – 5, and it involved Abraham having a son, and through that son he would have “seed” that would be in number like the stars in heaven.

*"And he believed (אָמַן - 'aman) in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."  
(Genesis 15:6)*

Interesting note - The word “believed” is the verb form of the word “amen”. When you say “Amen,” you are telling the preacher, “I believe that”.

#### I. The Promise Was Made to Believers, Not Behavers (vs. 13 – 17)

*"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." (Romans 4:13)*

The emphasis here is on “not through the law, and “through the righteousness of faith”. Meaning that Abraham did not believe and receive this promise because he behaved, but rather, because he believed.

Notice the phrase “should be the heir of the world”. Hebrews makes it clear that Abraham didn’t receive all of the things that God had promised him in his lifetime, though he did receive the promised son, Isaac:

*"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of [them], and embraced [them], and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13)*

*"For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression." (Romans 4:14 - 15)*

In other words, God is saying here that no man could be an heir because he kept the law, because no man kept the Law. The promise would be void because there would be no heirs “through the law”, because the law only condemned men, and thereby eliminated them from eligibility to receive the promise. The Law brought commandments, and wherever there are commandments, there will be transgressions. Because all men have

transgressed and fallen short of God's Law, no man could receive a promise from God that necessitated adherence to the Law.

*"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,"* (Romans 4:16)

For the promise to be "sure" to "all the seed", the eligibility to receive the promise had to be through faith. Anybody can believe, but nobody could keep the Law perfectly. In fact, no man could even come close.

Notice – "not to that only which is 'of' (not 'through') the law" – This refers to those who were under the Law, namely the Jews. This means that Abraham's seed includes more than just those who were Israelites:

*"Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee."* (Genesis 17:5)

*"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. ... And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* (Galatians 3:6-7, 29)

Abraham's seed includes all believers, whether they are Israelites, or not.

*"(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were."* (Romans 4:17)

In other words, Abraham believed that God could do the impossible. God is the only One who can "quicken" (give life to) the dead. He's the only One who can make something out of nothing or bring into existence something that was not previously known. And Abraham believed that God could and would do what He said. This statement is a transitional phrase that links us to the next section.

## II. Abraham Was Fully Persuaded That God Would Perform (vs. 18 – 22)

*"Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be."* (Romans 4:18)

Notice the phrase – “who against hope believed in hope” – This means that Abraham hoped (anticipated) something that he had no human reason to hope for:

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*  
(Hebrews 11:1)

He specifically trusted that even though he and Sarah were too old to have children, God would miraculously fulfill His promise.

*“And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.”* (Romans 4:19-21)

Notice the phrases – “not weak in faith”; “staggered not ...through unbelief”; “strong in faith”; “being fully persuaded”. When Abraham was younger than 86 (He was 86 in Genesis 16:16.), he believed that God would give Him a son. (See Genesis 15:6) Thirteen years plus later, he still believed, though it was even more physically impossible at that time than it was when He was 86 and Sarah was in her 70’s.

J. Vernon McGee put it this way:

He was not double minded. That’s the whole thought here. He looked away from his circumstances to the promise. He believed the promise, although the circumstances nullified it. He put confidence in the promise because of the One who gave it, thus giving worship to God. You see, man was created to glorify God, but by disobedience he did the opposite. And, my friend, the only way *you* can glorify God is to believe Him.<sup>1</sup>

How can we have that kind of faith today?

1 Faith comes through hearing the Word of God:

*“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* (Romans 10:17)

2 Faith grows through obedience to small steps of faith.

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<sup>1</sup> McGee, J. V. (1991). *Thru the Bible commentary: The Epistles (Romans 1-8)* (electronic ed., Vol. 42, pp. 83–84). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

David fought a lion and a bear, and God delivered him. He later fought and conquered a giant.

*"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." (Luke 16:10)*

3 Faith is encouraged through observation of others who are faithful.

Elisha observed Elijah, and it encouraged him to trust God to do even more miracles.

*"And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over." (2 Kings 2:14)*

4 Faith is strengthened through answered prayer.

*"And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour." (Matthew 8:13)*

To ask God for something demonstrates a level of faith, but when the prayer is answered, faith is increased.

***"And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness." (Romans 4:22)***

Abraham's faith in God's promise is what God imputed (reckoned, counted, accounted) for righteousness.

III This Principle Applies to All People Who Believe (vs. 23 – 25)

***"Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."***

**(Romans 4:23-25)**

In these last three verses of chapter 4, Paul transcends in time from Abraham's day to the present. Not only was Abraham justified by faith, but so are we today. Here Paul tells us the method of justification: faith; and he also tells us specifically what we are to have faith in: the gospel, which includes the death and shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, His burial, and His resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15:1 – 4)

There is a wonderful picture here in the story of Abraham that points to the resurrection. Sarah's womb was like a tomb as there was no living child there. God miraculously brought life out of that womb, just as He brought the Lord Jesus out of the grave.

## Conclusion

Abraham, and everybody else in the Old Testament who were saved, were saved the same way as you and I were saved: by faith.

Dr. Harry Ironside, for eighteen years pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, told of visiting a Sunday School class while on vacation. The teacher asked, "How were people saved in Old Testament times?"

After a pause, one man replied, "By keeping the Law."

"That's right," said the teacher.

But Dr. Ironside interrupted: "My Bible says that by the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified."

The teacher was a bit embarrassed, so he said, "Well, does somebody else have an idea?"

Another student replied, "They were saved by bringing sacrifices to God."

"Yes, that's right!" the teacher said, and tried to go on with the lesson.

But Dr. Ironside interrupted, "My Bible says that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin."

By this time the unprepared teacher was sure the visitor knew more about the Bible than he did, so he said, "Well, *you* tell us how people were saved in the Old Testament!"

And Dr. Ironside explained that they were saved by faith—the same way people are saved today! Twenty-one times in Hebrews 11 you find the same words "by faith."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 526). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.