

## Romans Chapter 4

### *Verses 1-12*

Paul now continues his theme from the last chapter regarding the grace of God and how God saves by His grace alone through faith in Jesus alone and not by anything we do. Paul looks at the life of Abraham and David to convince his Jewish audience that Abraham, as the father of the Jews, was justified by faith alone, and if he can convince them then this will confirm his earlier argument. The Jewish belief is that Abraham was justified by his obedience and faithfulness to God. However, Paul is trying to demonstrate to them through scripture that Abraham had nothing to boast about (3:27), because Gen. 15:6 (read) proves that God counted Abraham as righteousness through his faith and not by his obedience to the law.

Paul argues in Vs. 4 that wages are earned through working, they are not a gift from an employer. Gen. 15:6 doesn't mention any works on Abraham's part, only the trust he had in God. Abraham contributed nothing to his salvation, his righteousness was a gift from God. Faith requires us to actively believe and works as the instrument, or the means, for our justification, it is not something we do, or can do, faith is given to us purely by God's grace. So then, the righteousness God counted to Abraham was through his God given faith and not earned by any works. In fact, Paul characterises God as the one "*who justifies the ungodly,*" and by including Abraham Paul is making a bold contradiction to the Jewish tradition regarding Abraham's righteousness, and he supports his argument by citing Gen. 12, where we find the narrative of God's call on Abraham's life. To further support of his claim, Paul cites David's words in Psalm 32:1-2 where David says, "*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*" Being blessed includes fellowship with God together with salvation, again, this fellowship is not earned but is an effect of God's gift of forgiveness. It is by the works of Jesus that we are justified and not by anything we do, even the works we do by the Holy Spirit are excluded in our justification.

In Vs. 9-12 Paul provides an answer to any critics who may have thought Paul had forgotten that Abraham was the father of the circumcised and not the uncircumcised. Interestingly, Paul points out that Gen. 15:6 describes Abraham before he was circumcised, which means that his circumcision came after his calling and served as a seal to the righteousness he received while he was still uncircumcised. Therefore, Abraham serves as the prototype, or forerunner, for all believer's, both Jew and Gentile! How? Because for the Jew Abraham's circumcision points back to his justification, and for the Gentile Abraham received justification apart from circumcision.

### *Verses 13-25*

Paul now steps up his argument by saying that the promise to Abraham was that he would be the father of the multitude who would possess the land of Canaan and, in addition to this, God promised Abraham that he would be the source of blessing for all nations (see Gen. 12;1-9). Paul interprets God's promise to Abraham as having a wider meaning. God's original intention for Israel was that they would be faithful and show God's presence in the world. They were meant to reflect God's presence, and His presence would then radiate from the temple, which is the focal point for Judaism, outwards throughout the land of Canaan and beyond into the wider world. Therefore, the whole world would be dominated by the active presence of God living with His people. This also parallels the words spoken by Jesus in Acts 1:8 when He says, "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*"

Expanding on Vs. 13, Paul explains how Jesus is the offspring of Abraham and the true Israel (see Gal. 3:16). Jesus has already inherited the whole world and is saving His own people through the preaching of the gospel (see Ps. 2:8 & Matt. 28:18-19). Paul goes on to explain that this promise was received by Abraham through faith, not by the law, since the law came 430 years after the promise.

Therefore, Abraham and his descendants cannot be dependant on the law because if the inheritance was dependant on obedience to the law, then faith would have no part in the lives of the believer and the promise would be null and void. Since the law requires perfect obedience to it, and since man is unable to be obedient to the law because of our sinful nature, “*the law brings wrath.*” It is therefore impossible that the promise could be received on the basis of keeping the law. Likewise, if the promise was based on works it would fail there too, and if the promise was based on circumcision then only the Jews would receive it. But because the promise is received through faith that rests on God's grace, then it is guaranteed to come to all the true offspring of Abraham, that is all believer's, both Jew and Gentile. Again Paul relies on scripture to back up his claim and refers to Gen. 17:5, where God says that He will make Abraham the father of “*a multitude of nations*” not just the Jews.

It is clear from Genesis that Abraham was the spiritual patriarch of all believer's and that the promise was to be received by both Jew and Gentile through faith. We can see the character of God from the account of the life of Abraham in Genesis. We see how God gives life to Sarah's lifeless womb (Vs. 19 & Gen. 16:1-2; 17:17-19), and in the life He gave back to Isaac who was sentenced to death (Gen. 22), and, of course, in the life restored to the resurrected Jesus (Vs. 24-25).

God's Creative power is also highlighted in Vs. 17 (see also Gen. 1; Isaiah 41:4; 48:13), it may also be a reference to Sarah giving birth to Isaac, who in turn gave birth to a nation, or Paul may be referencing Hosea 1:10 & 2:23, or indeed all of these.

In the Genesis account of Abraham we see how he trusted God to fulfil His promise and how true faith is directed to God and not our circumstances. In terms of the natural, God's promise that Sarah would conceive a child was foolish, they were both old and Sarah was way past her child bearing years, but in terms of the supernatural, we know anything is possible with God. Although their initial reaction was laughter, they didn't waver in their faith and Isaac (*‘one who laughs’ or ‘one who rejoices’*) was conceived. Abraham's faith is marked by his giving glory to God which should be the hallmark of every Christian life because we depend on God's power and trust Him, knowing He will do as He promises.