

## Romans Session 52

### Abraham Justified by Faith 1

*Romans 4:7-18 (NASB77)*

<sup>7</sup> " **BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.**

<sup>8</sup> " **BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."**

<sup>9</sup> *Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, " FAITH WAS RECKONED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

<sup>10</sup> *How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;*

<sup>11</sup> *and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them,*

<sup>12</sup> *and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.*

<sup>13</sup> *For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.*

<sup>14</sup> *For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;*

<sup>15</sup> *for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation.*

<sup>16</sup> *For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,*

<sup>17</sup> *(as it is written, " A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.*

<sup>18</sup> *In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, " SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."*

If there is any doctrine that the chief enemy of man and of God desires to undercut and distort, it is the doctrine of salvation.

If Satan can cause confusion and error in regard to that doctrine, he has succeeded in keeping men in their sin and under divine judgment and condemnation, which the unredeemed will one day share with Satan and his demonic angels in the eternal torment of hell.

Every false religion of the world whether a heretical branch of Christianity, a highly developed pagan religion, or primitive animism, is founded on some form of salvation by works.

Without exception, they teach that, by one means or another, man can become right with deity by attaining righteousness in his own power.

The entire fourth chapter of Romans is devoted to Abraham, whom Paul uses as an illustration of the central biblical truth that man can become right with God only by faith in response to His grace, and never by works.

Verses 6-8 pertain to David, but Paul is simply using David as an illustration to substantiate what he is teaching about Abraham.

Now we can assume several reasons for Paul's choosing Abraham as a supreme example of salvation by faith. First, Abraham lived about 2000 years before Paul wrote this letter, demonstrating that the principle of salvation by faith rather than by works was not new in Judaism.

Abraham was the first and foremost Hebrew Patriarch

He lived more than six hundred years before the Old Covenant was established through Moses.

He therefore, lived long before the law was given and obviously could not have been saved by obedience to it.

Second, Paul used Abraham as an example of salvation by faith simply because he was a human being.

Until this point in Romans, Paul has been speaking primarily about theological truths in the abstract.

But in Abraham he gives a flesh and blood illustration of justification by faith.

Third, and this one is the most important reason, was that by using Abraham as an example of justification by faith, he was using a person who by rabbinical teaching and popular Jewish belief, was the one in which they all agreed was a supreme example of a godly righteous man who is acceptable to the Lord. He is the biblical model of genuine faith and godliness.

The majority of Jews in Paul's day believed that Abraham was made right with God because of his own righteous character.

They believed God chose Abraham to be the father of His people Israel because Abraham was the most righteous man on earth during his time.

Like many cults today, they took certain scriptural passages and twisted or interpreted them out of context in order to support their preconceived ideas.

The rabbis for example, pointed out that the Lord told Isaac,

**Genesis 26:4-5 (NASB77)**

**<sup>4</sup> "And I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed;**

**<sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws."**

They pointed out that the Lord called Abraham, "My Friend" (*Isa 41:8*)

*Habakkuk 2:4* was rendered, "***The just shall live by his faithfulness***" rather than by his faith.

They had the notion that justification could be earned through one's efforts to be faithful.

In the same way, the rabbis interpreted Genesis 15:6 as referring to Abraham's faithfulness rather than to his faith.

**Genesis 15:6 (NASB77)**

**<sup>6</sup> Then he believed (or had faith) in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.**

They interpreted it to say he was faithful to the Lord, and that then God reckoned his faithfulness as righteousness.

Several Jewish apocryphal books taught that Abraham was justified by keeping God's Law.

In *Ecclesiasticus* (also known as *the wisdom of Sirach*). Abraham is said to have become right with God because of his obedience.

*The prayer of Manasseh* even asserted Abraham's sinlessness: "*Therefore thou, O Lord, God of the righteous, has not appointed repentance for the righteous, for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who did not sin against thee*"

In the book of *Jubilees*, the writer says, "Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life . . ."

Some rabbinical writings claimed that Abraham was so inherently good that he began serving God when he was three years old and that he was one of seven righteous men who had the privilege of bringing back the Shekinah glory to the Tabernacle.

By using Abraham as the supreme scriptural example of justification, or salvation, by faith alone, Paul was storming the very citadel of traditional Judaism.

By demonstrating that Abraham was not justified by works, the apostle demolished the foundation of rabbinical teaching that man is made right with God by keeping the law, that is, on the basis of his own religious efforts and works.

If Abraham was not and could not have been justified by keeping, the law, then no one could be. Conversely, if Abraham was justified solely on the basis of his faith in God, then everyone else must be justified in the same way, since Abraham is the biblical standard of a righteous man.

#### ABRAHAM WAS NOT JUSTIFIED BY HIS WORKS

*Romans 4:1-2 (NASB77)*

<sup>1</sup> *What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?*

<sup>2</sup> *For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God.*

Paul begins by asking, **what then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?** He was asking in effect, "because we agree that **Abraham** is the peerless example of a justified man in God's sight, why don't we look at him carefully in order to determine the basis of his justification?"

In this context **what then** is the equivalent of *therefore*, tying the discussion of Abraham to all that Paul has said in the preceding chapter.

As we have already said, after asserting that both Jew and Gentile are justified by faith (3:30), the apostle brings **Abraham** into the picture because he knew that this greatest of Jewish patriarchs, their **forefather according to the flesh**, was used by the rabbis as the ultimate example of man's being justified by works.

Paul will demonstrate that, to the contrary, Scripture clearly teaches that Abraham was saved by his faith alone.

**Abraham** was the human **forefather** of God's first covenant with His chosen people. He was therefore, **according to the flesh**, the human standard of a genuine Jew and of a man who is right before God.

The whole Hebrew race came from his loins, and what was true regarding his relationship to God must therefore be true of all his descendants.

**According to the flesh**, refers first of all to physical lineage. But in this context it also suggests human effort in regard to justification.

Paul has already asserted that Jew and Gentile alike are justified by faith.

So **according to the flesh**, here also refers to the human effort or to justification by reliance on human works.

In a hypothetical syllogism, Paul says, **for if Abraham was justified by works, then he has something to boast about.** The major premise is that, if a man could be justified before God by his own human efforts, then he has ground for boasting in himself.

The minor premise is that Abraham, as a man, was justified by works.

The necessary conclusion would be that Abraham therefore **has something to boast about.**

**The major premise** is true: if a man could be **justified by works**, he then would indeed have something to **boast about**, because he would have merited his own salvation.

But Paul goes on to demonstrate that the minor premise is not true: Consequently, the conclusion is untrue. Abraham did not have anything in himself to boast about **before God.**

### ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED BY HIS FAITH

*Romans 4:3-5 (NASB77)*

<sup>3</sup> *For what does the Scripture say? "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

<sup>4</sup> *Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due.*

<sup>5</sup> *But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness,*

On the positive side of his argument, Paul first appeals to Scripture, the divine and infallible truth upon which all of his arguments are based.

He quotes:

*Genesis 15:6 (NASB77)*

<sup>6</sup> *Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

In this passage declaring how Abraham received his righteousness.

Early in the Genesis account of Abraham, which begins with chapter 12, Moses was inspired to write of the patriarch that he was made right with God only because of his faith.

Because Abraham believed God and on no other basis was he made right with God.

In his letter to the Galatian Church the apostle cites the same verse from Genesis and then goes on to say;

*Galatians 3:7 (NASB77)*

<sup>7</sup> *Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.*

Later in verse 9 we read;

*Galatians 3:9 (NASB77)*

<sup>9</sup> *So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.*

Jesus said;

*John 8:56 (NASB77)*

*<sup>56</sup> "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."*

All of this through faith in God.

The writer of Hebrews declares;

*Hebrews 11:8-10 (NASB77)*

*<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.*

*<sup>9</sup> By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;*

*<sup>10</sup> for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

Like Paul who wrote this epistle to Rome, Abraham was sovereignly and directly chosen by God.

Neither Abraham nor Paul was searching for God when they were divinely called and commissioned.

Abraham had probably never heard of the true God, whereas Paul knew a great deal about Him.

Abraham was seeming content with his idolatrous paganism, and Paul was content with his traditional, but false, Judaism

When Abraham was first called by God, he lived in Ur of Chaldea (Gen 11:31; 15:7), a thoroughly pagan and idolatrous city.

Archeologists have estimated that it consisted of perhaps 300,000 inhabitants during Abraham's time, it was an important commercial city, located in Mesopotamia on the lower Euphrates River, a little more than a hundred miles northwest of the Persian Gulf.

The people were highly educated, being proficient in such diverse areas as math, agriculture, weaving, engraving, and astronomy.

Contrary to the claims of modern liberal scholars, it has been proved that by Abraham's time the Chaldeans had developed a system of writing.

These people were polytheistic, having a multitude of gods, the foremost of which was call Nanna, the moon god. Because his father, Terah, was an idolater (Josh 24:2) Abraham obviously was reared in paganism.

How and why did this man get the attention of God? Why was he chosen? We will talk about that in the next study.