



A STUDY OF
THE BOOK OF
**ROM
ANS**

upgrade



CHAPTER 4

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Romans 4

God's Great Salvation Plan

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Introduction

In Romans 4–8, Paul explained how God’s great plan of salvation was in complete harmony with the Old Testament Scriptures. He began first with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation.

Justification Illustrated (Romans 4:1–25)

The Jewish Christians in Rome would immediately have asked, “How does this doctrine of justification by faith relate to our history? Paul, you say that this doctrine is witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets. Well, what about Abraham?”



Paul accepted the challenge and explained how Abraham was saved. Abraham was called “our father,” referring primarily to the Jews’ natural and physical descent from Abraham. But in Romans 4:11, Abraham was also called “the father of all them that believe,” meaning, all who have trusted Christ.

(see Galatians 3:1–18)

Paul stated three important facts about Abraham’s salvation that prove that the patriarch’s spiritual experience was like that of believers today.



1. He was justified by faith, not works.

ROMANS 4:1–8 (NKJV)

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?

² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.



⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

⁶ just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered;

⁸ Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.”



1. He was justified by faith, not works.

Paul called two witnesses to prove that statement:

- Abraham (Gen. 15:6)
- David (Ps. 32:1–2)

In Romans 4:1–3, Paul examines Abraham's experience as recorded in Genesis 15. Abraham had defeated the kings (Gen. 14) and wondered if they would return to fight again. God appeared to him and assured him that He was his shield and “exceeding great reward.”

But what Abraham wanted most was a son and heir. God had promised him a son, but the promise had not yet been fulfilled.



1. He was justified by faith, not works.

It was then that God told him to look at the stars. “So shall thy seed [descendants] be!”

God promised, and Abraham believed God’s promise. The Hebrew word translated “believed” means “to say amen.” God gave a promise, and Abraham responded with “Amen!” This faith was counted for righteousness.

The word *counted* in Romans 4:3 is a Greek word that means “to put to one’s account.” It is a banking term. This same word is used eleven times in this chapter, translated as “reckoned” (Rom. 4:4, 9–10), “imputed” (Rom. 4:6, 8, 11, 21–24), and “counted.”



When a man works, he earns a salary, which is put into his account. But Abraham did not work for his salvation; he simply trusted God's Word. It was Jesus Christ who did the work on the cross, and His righteousness was put into Abraham's account.

Romans 4:5 makes a startling statement: God justifies *the ungodly!* The Law said, "I will not justify the wicked" (Ex. 23:7).

The Old Testament judge was commanded to "justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked" (Deut. 25:1).



1. He was justified by faith, not works.

When Solomon dedicated the temple, he asked God to condemn the wicked and justify the righteous! (1 Kings 8:31–32) But God justifies the ungodly—*because there are no godly for Him to justify!*

He put our sins on Christ's account so that He might put Christ's righteousness on our account.

In Romans 4:6–8, Paul used David as a witness, quoting from one of David's psalms of confession after his terrible sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 32:1–2).



David made two extraordinary statements:

1. God forgives sins and imputes righteousness apart from works.
2. God does not impute our sins. In other words, once we are justified, our record contains Christ's perfect righteousness *and can never again contain our sins.*

Christians do sin, and these sins need to be forgiven if we are to have fellowship with God, *but these sins are not held against us.* God does keep a record of our works so that He might reward us when Jesus comes, but He is not keeping a record of our sins. (1 John 1:5–7)



2. He was justified by grace, not Law.

ROMANS 4:9–17 (NKJV)

⁹ Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.

¹⁰ How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.

¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,



¹² and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

¹³ For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

¹⁴ For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect,



15 because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.

16 Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, 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

17 (as it is written, “I have made you a father of many nations”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;



2. He was justified by grace, not Law.

As we have seen, the Jews gloried in circumcision and the Law. If a Jew was to become righteous before God, he would have to be circumcised and obey the Law.

Paul had already made it clear in Romans 2:12–29 that there must be an *inward* obedience to the Law and a “circumcision of the heart.” Mere external observances can never save the lost sinner. But Abraham was declared righteous when he was in a state of uncircumcision.

From the Jewish point of view, Abraham was a Gentile. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised (Gen. 17:23–27), more than fourteen years after the events in Genesis 15.



2. He was justified by grace, not Law.

The conclusion is obvious: circumcision had nothing to do with his justification.

Then why was circumcision given? It was a sign and a seal (Rom. 4:11). As a sign, it was evidence that he belonged to God and believed His promise. As a seal, it reminded him that God had given the promise and would keep it.

Believers today are sealed by the Holy Spirit of God (Eph. 1:13–14).



They have also experienced a spiritual circumcision in the heart (Col. 2:10–12), not just a minor physical operation, but the putting off of the old nature through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Circumcision did not add to Abraham's salvation; it merely attested to it. **Abraham was also justified before the Law was given, and Paul discusses this fact in Romans 4:13–17.**

The key word here is “promise.” Abraham was justified by believing God's promise, not by obeying God's Law, for God's Law through Moses had not yet been given.



2. He was justified by grace, not Law.

The promise to Abraham was given purely through God's grace. Abraham did not earn it or merit it. So today, God justifies the ungodly because they believe His gracious promise, not because they obey His Law.

The Law was not given to save men but to show men that they need to be saved (Rom. 4:15).

The fact that Abraham was justified by grace and not Law proves that salvation is for all men.



Abraham is the father of all believers, both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:7, 29).

Instead of complaining that Abraham was not saved by the Law, the Jew ought to rejoice that God's salvation is available to all men and that Abraham has a spiritual family (all true believers) as well as a physical family (the nation of Israel).

Paul saw this as a fulfillment of Genesis 17:5: "I have made you a father of many nations."



3. He was justified by Resurrection power, not human effort.

ROMANS 4:18–25 (NKJV)

¹⁸ who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.”

¹⁹ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb.

²⁰ He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,



21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

22 And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

23 Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him,

24 but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,

25 who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.



3. He was justified by Resurrection power, not human effort.

These verses expand on one phrase in Romans 4:17: “who gives life to the dead” Paul saw the rejuvenation of Abraham’s body as a picture of resurrection from the dead and related it to the resurrection of Christ.

One reason why God delayed sending Abraham and Sarah a son was to permit all their natural strength to decline and then disappear.

It was unthinkable that a man ninety-nine years old could produce a child in the womb of his wife who was eighty-nine years old! From a reproductive point of view, both of them were dead.



But Abraham did not walk by sight; he walked by faith.

What God promises, He performs. All we need to do is believe. Abraham's initial faith in God, recorded in Genesis 15, did not diminish in the years that followed. In Genesis 17–18, Abraham was “strong in faith.” It was this faith that gave him strength to produce a son in his old age.

The application to salvation is straightforward: God must wait until the sinner is “dead” and unable to help himself before He can release His saving power. As long as the lost sinner thinks he is strong enough to do anything to please God, he cannot be saved by grace.



3. He was justified by Resurrection power, not human effort.

It was when Abraham admitted that he was “dead” that God’s power went to work in his body. It is when the lost sinner confesses that he is spiritually dead and unable to help himself that God can save him.

The Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16) because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Romans 4:24 and Romans 10:9–10 parallel each other. Jesus Christ was “delivered up to die on account of our offenses, and was raised up because of our justification” (Rom. 4:25, literal translation).



This means that the resurrection of Christ is the proof that God accepted His Son's sacrifice and that now sinners can be justified without God violating His own Law or contradicting His own nature.

The key, of course, is “if we believe” (Rom. 4:24). There are over sixty references to faith or unbelief in Romans. God's saving power is experienced by those who believe in Christ (Rom. 1:16).

His righteousness is given to those who believe (Rom. 3:22). We are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1).



3. He was justified by Resurrection power, not human effort.

The object of our faith is Jesus Christ, who died for us and rose again.

All of these facts make Abraham's faith that much more wonderful. He did not have a Bible to read; he had only God's simple promise.

He was almost alone as a believer, surrounded by heathen unbelievers. He could not look back at a long record of faith; in fact, he was helping to write that record. Yet Abraham believed God.



**People today have a complete Bible to read
and study.**

**They have church fellowship and can look
back at centuries of faith as recorded in
church history and the Bible.**

Yet, many refuse to believe!



3. He was justified by Resurrection power, not human effort.

If you are a Jew, you are a child of Abraham physically, but are you a child of Abraham *spiritually*? Abraham is the father of all who believe in Jesus Christ and are justified by faith.

If you are a Gentile, you can never be a natural descendant of Abraham, but you can be one of his *spiritual* descendants.

Abraham “believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”



Romans 4

God's Great Salvation Plan