

Abraham Already Believed

2 Corinthians 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh,

2 Corinthians 10:4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

2 Corinthians 10:5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

2 Corinthians 10:6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

Last week we started Romans chapter 4. We encountered a peculiar rhetorical question specific to the book of Romans. It is part of the ongoing argument of Paul on his quest to convince the reader of the need for God's righteousness and the method of acquiring it by faith alone in Christ alone.

Romans 4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

We saw that "forefather" is the preferred reading of the Greek text, not "father." The reasoning seems to point to the fact that while Abraham is physically the father of the Jews (and also many Arabs) that spiritually,

Abraham Already Believed
Romans 4:1-3

Abraham is the father of all who believe. That is because he provides the paradigm (the template, the example) of justification by faith. We touched on Abraham as an unbeliever. It was as an unbeliever that Abraham “discovered” or encountered faith in his spiritual journey this principle of justification by faith alone.

Romans 4:2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

In previous weeks, it was pointed out that in Romans chapter three, specifically Romans 3:27-31, Paul illuminates the principle of faith alone without works and without the Law. It is in chapter 4 that Paul provides an illustration from Abraham of that principle. The giants of the Old Testament, including Abraham were “great” because they put their trust, their faith dependence on God (Hebrews chapter 11). In spite of being human with a sin nature and often failing in their spiritual lives, the greats of Hebrews chapter 11 were great because of faith.

Here in Romans 4:2, Paul, in his illustration from Abraham points back to:

Romans 3:27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.

Romans 3:27 (boasting excluded) → Romans 4:2 (boasting not before God)

**Romans 4:3 For what does the Scripture say?
“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”**

Abraham Already Believed
Romans 4:1-3

Here we are again about to delve into Genesis 15:6, one of the most important verses in the Bible. As a result, we will spend some time here.

There are two topics that I will go into some detail about:

1. The seed of Genesis 3:15 and His importance for salvation.
2. When did Abram/Abraham believe in the Lord? Was it in Genesis 15 or was it some time before?

Both have important theological implications. In other words, doctrines concerning these two topics answer important questions for the believer. The “first gospel” is found in Genesis 3:16 if the reader understands that “her seed” refers to Jesus Christ.

If Abram first believed in the Lord in Genesis 15 as a result of the promise in Genesis 15:1-3 then why did Abram leave Haran at God’s request? How can Abram demonstrate faith in the Lord by following God’s request and then believe at a later date?

Important to our study is Paul’s question, “For what does the Scripture say?” He appeals to the reader’s understanding that Scripture is the ultimate authority. We believe the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. That is why we teach it. The Scripture is God’s love letter to the human race. New Testament writers use “Scripture” as THE authoritative word from God. There is no higher authority.

**Genesis 15:6 Then he believed in the Lord;
and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.**

There are a number of questions that need to be addressed.

1. When did Abraham first believe? Was it in Genesis chapter 15 or before even Genesis chapter 12? Context is an important consideration. How do we determine the context of his belief? Was it within the context

Abraham Already Believed
Romans 4:1-3

of Genesis 15:1-3 or is Genesis 15:6 pointing back to Genesis 12 and saying “Abram already believed?”

2. How is Genesis 15:6 used in that chapter (chapter 15)? We need to look at the grammar of the verse. Is the verse a “parenthesis” or is it part of the flow of the passage? This is really an expansion of the first point.

Before we get to Abraham, we have to trace his ancestors. Abram is a descendant, “a seed” of Adam, Seth, Noah. It is through Abram’s seed that Jesus Christ is descendant. An important theme throughout the Old Testament is the “seed.” That is one reason the genealogies are so important. They trace the promise of the seed or descendant of the woman from Eve in Genesis 3:15 all the way to the genealogies of Jesus Christ in Luke and Matthew.

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Her seed. This is identified by conservative theologians as the “first gospel.” You may hear this said as “protoevangelium” from the Latin in theological circles. This is a promise from God of a victor in the Angelic Conflict who would be our savior.

We are familiar with the narrative of Cain and Abel. Neither of them were the “seed” that God identifies. We have to wait for “Seth.”

Genesis 4:25 Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, “God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain killed him.”

Abraham Already Believed
Romans 4:1-3

Offspring. This is literally “seed.” So a question often asked, did Eve think that Seth was the promised seed? The Bible only answers with her rationale for calling her son “Seth.”

Seth. Names in the Bible have meanings. Look at Seth. It means “appointed,” “to set,” “to place.”

“**Usage:** The name Sheth (Seth) is used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to the third son of Adam and Eve. Seth is considered a replacement for Abel, whom Cain killed. His name is often interpreted as "appointed" or "granted," reflecting Eve's belief that God had appointed another offspring in place of Abel.¹”

Let me briefly touch on Cain and Abel. They factor into this.

Genesis 4:1 Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord.”

Manchild. What is a manchild? In my world a male is either a man or a child. I know some women think their husbands never grew up. But here in this text is the word for “man.” Even so, she gave birth to a “man?” Here is one of those words that seems to be out of place. It is meant to get our attention. Here is a very interesting comment by Dr. Bruce Waltke:

“The woman is the first to use the covenantal name. However, although acknowledging the Lord’s role in procreation here, the naming betrays a synergism (God does his part; I do mine). Essentially Eve says, “I have done this.” The reader is signaled to expect problems in the life and line of Cain.²”

1 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8352.htm>

2 Waltke, B.K. and Fredricks, C.J. (2001). *Genesis: a Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan. 96

Abraham Already Believed
Romans 4:1-3

Cain. The name means “to acquire, get, possess.” As the first born did Eve think this was the promised “seed” who would fulfill the prophecy of Genesis 3:15? Was he going to possess it? The Bible doesn’t clearly answer that.

Abel. The name means “vapor, breath.” From a human perspective, Cain embodies the idea of human “work.” But Abel is just vapor from a human perspective. Abel is actually grace oriented. From a human perspective, grace is “vapor.” There is no human work involved. So did Eve get it backwards. Abel was the grace person while Cain was the “works” person?

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks

Where do we first encounter Abraham in the Bible?

Initially Abram shows up in Genesis chapter 11 in the genealogies.

Genesis 11:31 Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there.

There is no mention of God in that chapter. But, they were on their way to Canaan. If God didn’t direct them as a family to Canaan, why were

Abraham Already Believed
Romans 4:1-3

they going so far out of Ur of the Chaldees? I don't have a good answer for you today. Maybe the Holy Spirit will reveal that later.

Dr. Bruce Waltke suggests that Terah made a family decision to leave Ur of the Chaldees and travel to Haran on the way to Canaan. But the family only made it to Haran. The Bible does not explain Terah's decision to travel to Canaan and then only travel as far as Haran. Abram's decision to leave Haran was prompted by the Lord directing Abram to leave.³

God singles out Abram in Genesis chapter 12. First God makes a promise to Abram.

Genesis 12:1 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you;

Genesis 12:2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

Genesis 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Abram demonstrates his faith by following the Lord's instructions. At this point, Abram is a believer. The Bible does not specifically identify when and where Abram became a believer. But, it is evident that if Abram is responding to God, he is a believer. He demonstrated his faith.

³ Waltke, B.K. and Fredricks, C.J. (2001). *Genesis: a Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan. 201

Abraham Already Believed
Romans 4:1-3

Genesis 12:4 So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Per Robby Dean:

“In the beginning of Genesis 12 , God has already made the promise to him. He has reiterated the land promise in Genesis 12:7 , and He reiterates again in Genesis 13 , 14. These promises get restated again and again by God. They are just not formalized in a formal covenant ceremony until the last part of Genesis 15. This cannot be when Abraham is justified.⁴”

So now, let us look at the context of Genesis 15:6.

Genesis 15:1 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.”

Reward.

“**Usage:** The Hebrew word "sakar" primarily refers to the concept of wages or reward. It is used in the context of compensation for work done or services rendered. In the Old Testament, "sakar" can refer to both literal wages paid to workers and metaphorical rewards given by God for righteousness or obedience.⁵”

Abram didn't work for the reward. It was in recognition for Abram's faith which he demonstrated.

⁴ <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/romans-menuitem/message/2010-romans-040b/read>

⁵ <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/7939.htm>

Abraham Already Believed
Romans 4:1-3

Genesis 15:2 Abram said, “O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”

Genesis 15:3 And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.”

Genesis 15:4 Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.”

Genesis 15:5 And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

In Genesis 15:5, “and said,” and “And He said” are imperfect tense (continuing action) preceded by the “and” which shows consecutive action. But in Genesis 15:6 the verb changes to a perfect tense (completed action).

Now, in verse 6 there is an interpretive problem. Some would say that Abram first believes here in verse 6. But, as we have seen, Abram has already demonstrated his faith. Robby Dean adds supporting documentation to this view from the Hebrew grammar.

“Furthermore, the grammar of this passage is very different from that which surrounds it. In the verses before, you have a standard Hebrew narrative construction. When you start off in beginning Hebrew, you read

Abraham Already Believed **Romans 4:1-3**

Genesis and other narrative literature because it is very simple type of Hebrew. The way it is written would not be good English. “This happened, and he said, and he said, and they did this, and they did that.” It almost always begins with the Hebrew vav consecutive which is the “and”. That is not how we write in English, but that is how they write in Hebrew. It would be followed by usually a verb in the imperfect tense. Suddenly when you want to change and get out of the flow of events and break that pattern, then you change from an imperfect tense verb to a perfect tense verb. What that means is that now all of a sudden this new structure of the conjunction plus a perfect tense verb throws that verse into a different time frame. The sense of the perfect tense has to do with completed action.^{6”}

“When you have this kind of a structure with a vav plus perfect tense, it indicates completed action. Because it is out of order, out of sync with the flow of the events here, it tells us that verse six is not describing something that happens as a result of verses four and five, but it is taking us out of this flow of events and reminding us of something that had already taken place. That Abraham had already believed in the Lord, and it was already accounted to him as righteousness. The perfect tense can either emphasize the fact that it was completed in the past or can emphasize the present ongoing results from a completed past action. That is how, I believe, it is being used here. It is emphasizing that this is present results of an action that was in the past.^{7”}

“So Abraham is still believing God. He still has imputed righteousness from that completed event that occurred in the past. The reader is being reminded of this. This timeframe, when Abraham believed God, had to have preceded the events of even Genesis 12. God says to him in verses 1-3 “... Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s

6 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/romans-menuitem/message/2010-romans-040b/read>

7 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/romans-menuitem/message/2010-romans-040b/read>

Abraham Already Believed
Romans 4:1-3

house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing [you are to be a blessing—it is a command]. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you [will curse harshly those who treat you with disrespect]; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

“When you look at this promise from God, it is not given to Abraham as an unbeliever but as a believer. God is giving him a reward for faithful service. One reason we know that is if Genesis 15:6 is parenthetical, the next thing that is said is verse seven. “Then He said to him, ‘I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.’” God is reminding Abram of what had occurred in Genesis 12:1. This shows that the event of verse six goes back to an earlier time and precedes God’s bringing Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees. It is a time frame from verse six that goes back to the time when Abram originally became a believer. We do not know when that was. There is some Jewish tradition it was around 50, but it could have been much earlier. It is uncertain. We do know that by the time he was 75, the beginning of verse 12, he was clearly a believer and already justified.⁸”

Something Robby did not refer to was Hebrews chapter 11, the faith heroes hall of fame.

Hebrews 11:8 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.

8 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/romans-menuitem/message/2010-romans-040b/read>

Abraham Already Believed
Romans 4:1-3

Points on why Abram is considered to have believed before promise of Genesis 15 was given:

1. Demonstrated faith. Genesis 12
2. Working of Hebrews 11:8
3. Hebrew construction of Genesis 15:1-4, 5
4. Logic: Reward is given to Abram based upon faith. Genesis 15:1

Extra: The Curse of Jeconiah

From GotQuestions.org

“The curse of Jeconiah is found in Jeremiah 22. First, the LORD likens the king to a signet ring on God’s hand—a ring that God will pull off (verse 24). Then, God pronounces a curse: “Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah” (verse 30).⁹”

⁹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/curse-of-Jeconiah.html>