

On the Beginning

19. Faith for Righteousness

NOTE ESPECIALLY Genesis 15:1-21

How were people in the Old Testament saved? We know that now sinners can only be saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” (Acts 10:43)

But what about *before* Jesus came? We get a clear answer to this question in Romans 4, and the Old Testament character used there as an example is the one we have been studying: Abraham (Abram). The Old Testament chapter emphasized in Romans 4 in relation to Abraham is the one we are examining this week: Genesis 15. Read all of Romans 4 yourself, and then let’s travel through Genesis 15 together.

1. God’s **Promise**.

Abram questioned God about His promise. See this in verses 1-3. The promises of the Lord’s covenant with Abram were these:

- A. To show him the land He would give to his seed (Genesis 12:1, 12:7, 13:14-16),
- B. To make him a great man (Genesis 12:2),
- C. To make him a blessing (Genesis 12:2-3),
- D. To bless the world through his seed (Genesis 12:3),
- E. To multiply his seed greatly (Genesis 13:16).

Of course, several of these promises have to do with Abram’s offspring, his “*seed*.” But this man could say to God, “*Behold, to me thou hast given no seed.*”

2. The **Word** of the LORD.

God’s answer is in verses 4 and 5. He said in His Word that Abram would have innumerable descendants. These would be physical as well as legal descendants, regardless of the fact that Abram and Sarai had waited a long time for children, and were getting old. God was calling on Abram just to believe His Word. This is what we ought to do, too.

3. The **Faith** of Abram.

Verse 6 is the verse quoted in Romans 4.

“And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

Abram’s faith was “*counted*” or reckoned by God as righteousness. Abram did not have righteousness by performance; his righteousness before God was imputed or reckoned righteousness, obtained by his faith. This is how Old Testament saints were saved—just as we are, by faith.

Remember that the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant had to do with salvation as well as with the nation Israel and the land of Canaan. The Seed of Abraham through Whom all the families of the earth would be blessed is Christ! Old Testament people were saved by faith in the *promised* Savior. We are saved by faith in the Savior Who *has come*! Their faith looked forward to Christ and Calvary, just as our faith looks back. But it has always been *simple faith* that saves the soul.

Romans emphasizes the fact that men must have righteousness in order to find acceptance with God (See Romans 1:16-17, 3:10-20). However, men don't have any righteousness of their own. God has provided His own righteousness for our salvation (Romans 3:21-26) which we can have by trusting Christ for it.

See how Romans 4 describes the saving faith of Abraham:

“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. 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. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.” (vs. 18-22)

4. The Sign from God.

Although he believed God's Word, Abram asked for a sign (Read vs. 7-21). God miraculously set fire to the sacrifices He ordered Abram to prepare, and spoke a prophecy to him about the future of his descendants. The Canaanite (Amorites) were not ripe yet for judgment, and so the Lord was not going to remove them for several generations in order to give their land to Abram's seed. But eventually God would keep this promise!