

## **ABRAHAM, THE FATHER OF ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE**

### **TEXT: ROMANS 4:9-17**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. Romans 3:21 says that justification by faith, without the law is manifested, "being witnessed by the law and the prophets."
2. "The law and the prophets" (3:21) refers to the testimony of the Old Testament. The book of Romans teaches that the New Testament doctrine of justification by faith is in perfect harmony with the teachings of the Old Testament (cf. Romans 4:1-8).
3. Having proved that justification is by faith, and not by works, Paul goes on to prove that Gentiles are justified the same way Jews are justified (4:9-11).
4. This was already stated in Romans 3:29 and 30 but now Paul explains that Abraham was justified long before he was circumcised (4:10, 11).
5. Therefore, uncircumcised Gentiles are justified the same way uncircumcised Abraham was justified (4:11).
6. The great patriarch Abraham is mentioned by name seven times in this chapter (4:1, 2, 3, 9, 12, 13, 16).
7. Also he is referred to many other times throughout the chapter (4:10, 11, etc.).
8. Abraham is called "the father of all them that believe" (4:11), and "the father of circumcision" and "our father Abraham" (4:12), and the "father of us all" (4:16), and "father of many nations" (4:17, 18).

#### **I. ABRAHAM'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (4:9-12)**

#### **II. ABRAHAM'S INHERITANCE (4:13-16)**

#### **III. ABRAHAM'S POSTERITY (4:17-25)**

#### **I. ABRAHAM'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (4:9-12)**

1. Romans 4:9 says, "Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision (Jews who were circumcised) only, or upon the uncircumcision (Gentiles who were not circumcised) also?"
2. "This blessedness" (4:9; cf. 4:6, 7, 8) refers to the blessings of salvation, particularly justification by faith.
3. The LORD said to Abraham, "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3; cf. Romans 4:9).
4. "For we say that faith was reckoned (counted) to Abraham for righteousness" (4:9b).
5. And "how was it then reckoned?" (4:10) or "counted"?

6. By circumcision?
7. No, because Abraham was justified by faith at least fourteen years before he was circumcised.
8. Genesis 15:6 says, "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."
9. Then later on, we read in Genesis 17:10, "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised."
10. Therefore, Abraham's righteousness came to him, not as a circumcised Jew, but as a Gentile. William MacDonald said, "In a very real sense, Abraham was justified while on Gentile ground."
11. The proud Jews taught that a Gentile had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Here the apostle Paul (who was a very proud Jew before his conversion) says that the Jews need to come to God the same way Abraham did -- by faith.
12. James Stifler wrote, "Paul has turned the Jews' boast upside down. It is not the Gentile who must come to the Jew's circumcision for salvation; it is the Jew who must come to a Gentile faith, such a faith as Abraham had long before he was circumcised" (*The Epistle to the Romans*).
13. Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised" (4:11).
14. Circumcision is symbolic. God wants the Jews to have their hearts circumcised (2:28, 29).
15. Abraham was not circumcised in order to be saved. He was saved in order to be circumcised.
16. The same can be said about baptism. It is symbolic, and cannot save anyone. Baptism is an outward testimony of an inward change.
17. The point being made is that religious externalism cannot save anyone. Jews and Gentiles alike must walk in the steps of faith (4:12).
18. Back in Romans 3:1, Paul asks the question, "What profit is there of circumcision?" The answer: it confirmed the righteousness of God. It was not a means of righteousness, but a "seal" (4:11).

## **II. ABRAHAM'S INHERITANCE (4:13-16)**

1. The promise: Abraham and his seed "should be the heir of the world" (4:13). The word "world" means the entire world, Gentiles as well as Jews (cf. John 3:16, 17, 19).
2. W.H. Griffith Thomas said Abraham is "a representative of the human race. Consequently, it is pointed out that this universal dominion comes not through law, but through faith. The fact that the world includes Gentiles as

well as Jews demands a principle of faith, not of works, and the way in which, in verses 11, 12, Abraham is described as 'the father of all them that believe' shows that he is here regarded not as an example of faith, but as the founder of a household of faith" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*).

3. "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).
4. Then later in Genesis 22, we read, "And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time...That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:15-18).
5. Abraham received this promise through faith (4:13b).
6. Works-righteousness is deeply ingrained in the mind of man, and so the Bible must often refute it (4:14). If the blessing comes by the law, there is no room for faith.
7. The law cannot earn the promises of God (4:15). "Because the law worketh wrath" (4:15). "Wrath" means judgment, condemnation, punishment, etc.
8. The "law worketh wrath" because the law exposes transgression, and transgressions must be judged (4:15).
9. Obedience to the law must be perfect, because the law demands perfect obedience. James 2:10 says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."
10. "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace..." (Romans 4:16).
11. "To all the seed" (4:16) refers to all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile. Those who believe are Abraham's spiritual seed.
12. In I Corinthians 3:21, Paul says, "For all things are yours." This means all believers -- whether Jew or Gentile receive Abraham's inheritance because he is "the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16b).
13. First Peter 1:4 says our inheritance is "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" for us.

### **III. ABRAHAM'S POSTERITY (4:17)**

1. In Genesis 17:5, the LORD said, "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee" (cf. Romans 4:17).
2. Abraham's name means, "a father of many nations."
3. God chose the nation Israel, but this does not mean His grace and His mercy are only for the physical seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

4. It has always been God's intention to honor faith wherever He found it. Abraham's posterity is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. First Corinthians 6:2 says "the saints shall judge the world."
5. Abraham's blessing is our blessing. Abraham's inheritance is our inheritance. This blessing comes through faith "before Him whom he believed, even God" (Romans 4:17).
6. God was the object of Abraham's faith. "Abraham believed God" (4:3). I mentioned last week I do not approve of all this talk about "people of faith." These so-called "people of faith" are often very religious and sincere, but they often have the wrong object of faith.
7. We believe in "the God who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were" (4:17).
8. In other words, we believe in the omnipotent God who created this world, and quickeneth (made alive) the dead.
9. It is God who calls those things which do not exist as though they did exist (4:17). God calls them into existence.

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. Paul had to contend with Jews who thought they were saved by circumcision. Today we often meet nominal Christians who think they are going to heaven because they were baptized.
2. But circumcision was only an outward sign or symbol, both to Abraham and to the world about him. It signified that Abraham was separated from the world unto God.
3. Just as baptism today is an outward sign that we are separated unto the Lord Jesus Christ. We identify Him in His death, burial, and resurrection (cf. Romans 6:1-6).
4. But just as circumcision did not produce righteousness, baptism cannot produce regeneration.
5. Baptism must follow conversion. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15, 16).