

# EXPLANATION OF 45<sup>TH</sup> BIBLEBOOK

## ROMANS 4:1-17a (April A.D. 67)

### INTRODUCTION

In Romans 3, Paul said that the gospel method of salvation is justification by faith. In Romans 4, he proves that justification by faith has always been the only true method of salvation in the Bible, thus also the method of salvation during the Old Testament period.

### OUTLINE

#### Theme. The Bible gives examples of justification through faith

The intention of Romans 4 is to affirm the doctrine of justification by faith only.

In Romans 3:21-31 Paul explained justification by faith as the only method of salvation in the New Testament gospel.

In Romans 4:1-17a Paul proves with five arguments that justification by faith was also the true method of salvation in the Old Testament history.

(I) 4:1-17a The method of justification in the Old Testament (five arguments)

- a. Justification by faith alone is based on what the Old Testament says about Abraham (4:1-5).
- b. Justification by faith alone is based on what the Old Testament says about David and others (4:6-8).
- c. Justification by faith alone is based on the nature of physical circumcision (4:9-12).
- d. Justification by faith alone is based on the nature of God's promise (4:13-14).
- e. Justification by faith alone is based on the nature of the law (4:15-17a).

### EXPLANATION

#### (I) 4:1-17a. The method of justification in the Old Testament (five arguments)

##### a. Justification by faith alone is based on what the Old Testament says about Abraham (4:1-5).

**4:1.** What then shall we say (vifa) that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh (physical descent), found (discovered)(vnra)?

**4:2.** For if Abraham was once for all justified (viap) by (on the basis of) works, he would continually have (vipa) something to boast about; but not before God (i.e. from God's point of view).

**4:3.** For what does the Scripture say (vipa)? Abraham believed (viaa) God and it was reckoned (imputed)(viap) to him for<sup>1</sup> righteousness.

**4:4.** Now to the one who works (vppn) the wages are not reckoned (vipp) as a favour, but as an obligation (a debt).

**4:5.** However to the one who does not work (vppn), but continues to trust (exercise faith)(vppa) him who justifies (vppa) the ungodly, his faith is reckoned (imputed, attributed, ascribed)(vipp) for<sup>2</sup> righteousness.

**It is a biblical fact that Abraham was justified by faith<sup>3</sup>.** 'Justification' means to have the right relationship to God. Abraham discovered that a person enters into the right relationship with God through faith in what Jesus Christ has accomplished for him and in his place and not through his own works of (keeping) the law.

Paul makes a hypothetical argument, which he immediately refutes. If Abraham could have been justified by his works of the law, as some religions argue, he would have had something to boast about before people. As in some religions, he would have boasted before people and would have showed them how pious he was by the way he wore his religious clothes<sup>4</sup>, by the way he prayed<sup>5</sup>, by the way he fasted<sup>6</sup> and by the way he gave gifts like tithes<sup>7</sup>, etc.. But he would certainly not have anything to boast before God, because God does not justify anyone in the world by his own efforts to keep the law<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, the law was only introduced 430 (actually 645)<sup>9</sup> years *after* Abraham was justified by faith<sup>10</sup>! So he could never have been justified by keeping something that did not even exist! Paul therefore concludes that *justification by works does not apply to Abraham*.

By making an appeal to the Bible, Paul proves that Abraham was not justified by his works. He quotes Genesis 15:6. Abraham received promises from God. Although these promises were not fulfilled for a long time, Abraham believed

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<sup>1</sup> G: eis

<sup>2</sup> G: eis

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 15:6

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 23:5-7

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 18:20-33; cf. Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 18:9-11

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 5:16-18; Luke 18:12

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 14:20; cf. Matthew 6:1-4; 23:23-24

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 2:16; 3:10-14

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 3:17. The law was introduced 215 years in Canaan + 430 years exile in Egypt.

<sup>10</sup> When he was 75 years old

that God would fulfil them in God's own time<sup>11</sup>. And God reckoned Abraham's faith for righteousness. *To reckon faith for righteousness* means exactly the same as *to justify by faith only*.

The contrast in verse 2 and 3 is between justification by works and justification by faith. The contrast is not simply between the worker (the person who keeps the law) and the non-worker (the person who does not keep the law), but rather between the worker (the person who keeps the law) and the believer (the person who believes in God's promise)! Abraham was justified, not by works, but by faith!

**The word 'reckon'<sup>12</sup> has an economic and a legal sense.** This word is an important word in the book of Romans.

- To reckon in an economic sense: to credit to someone's account. For example, to credit wages to his account (4:4).
- To reckon in a legal sense: to ascribe/impute to someone. For example, to take evil into account<sup>13</sup>. To 'declare' and henceforth 'consider' and 'treat' a person according to the nature of the thing reckoned. Based on Psalm 32:2, the words 'not to reckon sin' (4:8) mean that God regards and treats a person as not being a sinner in his eyes. And the words 'to reckon righteousness' (4:5-6) mean that God considers and treats a person as being completely righteous in his eyes.

The word 'reckon' is a legal term and it means that a person's legal relationship to God and God's requirements in the law has been changed even before anything in the person's moral character has been changed. Because a person believes in Jesus Christ, something that does not actually belong to him (namely, Christ's righteousness) is reckoned (imputed, ascribed) to him (4:5-6). And because he believes in Jesus Christ, something that actually does belong to him (namely, his sin: his own unrighteousness and unholiness) is not reckoned (imputed, ascribed) against him (4:8). 'To reckon faith as righteousness' means exactly the same as 'to justify by faith only'.

Thus, the believer's legal position/state before God is that God has declared him 100 % holy and righteous and henceforth regards and treats him as 100% holy and righteous<sup>14</sup>. But the believer's moral reality in his life on earth is that he is not yet 100% holy and righteous. He still commits sin<sup>15</sup>. Throughout his Christian life he grows towards more holiness and righteousness (6:13,19)<sup>16</sup>.

**The righteousness of Abraham contrasted with the righteousness of Phinehas.**

The same statement, "It was reckoned (not: credited) to him as righteousness" is used of Abraham in Genesis 15:6 and of Phinehas in Psalm 106:31. But although the words are the same, the contexts of these sentences are completely different.

- Abraham's righteousness was in the area of justification. Abraham's *faith* (Genesis 15:6) was legally ascribed/reckoned (not: economically credited) to him as righteousness. God declared his faith in God's promise not as a righteous or good deed in the religious-ethical sense, but as a righteous response in the religious-legal sense. His response to God's promise was *in the area of justification (salvation)*. *It points to God's legal declaration*. Abraham is definitely saved (justified) by his act of faith.
- Phinehas' righteousness was in the area of sanctification. Phinehas' act of devotion (Psalm 106:31) was regarded as a righteous act. A plague had broken out amongst the Israelites because they had fallen into spiritual and moral adultery<sup>17</sup>. The Israelites worshipped idols and committed sexual immorality. Phinehas, the son of the high priest, stood up and intervened in this godless and wicked situation by punishing some of the evildoers. He executed the Israelite who committed sexual immorality. His faith in God produced devotion and zeal towards God in his heart. His act of devotion was regarded as a righteous or good deed in the religious-ethical sense. His act of devotion was performed *in the area of sanctification*. It points to man's ethical behaviour. But Phinehas was not necessarily saved (justified) by this act of devotion and zeal.

The whole argument in Romans 4 is based on the contrast between *justification by faith in God's promise* and *justification by man's works of the law*. If Paul had used the example of Phinehas instead of Abraham, he would have violated his whole argument in Romans 4. The subjects in these two contexts are completely different and therefore the conclusions must be completely different. Abraham was himself justified by faith, that is, he *became a believer* in God and God's message, while Phinehas *lived as a believer* and demonstrated his justification by doing a righteous deed.

According to Genesis 15:6, God made certain specific promises to Abraham: he himself would have a son from his own body and his offspring would be as many as the stars in the heaven. Although these promises were not yet fulfilled, Abraham believed that God would fulfil them. God's promises were received, not by unbelief, but by faith. Abraham's faith in God's promises became the means of God reckoning his (God's) righteousness to Abraham. Because Abraham

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<sup>11</sup> cf. Hebrews 11:8-13,39-40

<sup>12</sup> G: logizomai

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:5

<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:30

<sup>15</sup> 1 John 1:8-10

<sup>16</sup> Hebrews 12:10-11; 1 John 3:1-3

<sup>17</sup> Numbers 25:1-9

believed God's promise, God, in his absolute sovereignty and unmerited grace, declared Abraham righteous and henceforth regarded and treated Abraham as completely righteous in his eyes.

Abraham's faith itself was not regarded as some kind of work. Abraham's faith itself was not 'credited' to his account as his own righteous deed. Instead, Abraham's faith was *the response* that led to his justification by God. Abraham's faith was *the means* by which Abraham received God's righteousness; the *instrument* by which God reckoned his (God's) righteousness to Abraham. Abraham's faith was *the empty hand* by which he received God's undeserved gift of righteousness (5:17). God declared Abraham's response as the only right response to his sovereign and gracious promise. God declared Abraham 100% righteous and henceforth regarded and treated him as 100% righteous in his eyes.

### **The righteousness of Abraham in the letter to the Romans and in the letter of James.**

- Abraham's righteousness in the letter to the Romans was in the area of justification (Romans 4:3). God had promised that he would fulfil his covenant promise through Abraham's only son, Isaac. Abraham's response to God's original promise resulted in God justifying Abraham in the legal sense of saving Abraham!
- Abraham's righteousness in the letter of James was in the area of sanctification (James 2:23-24). After Abraham was already a believer (justified, saved) for many years, God tested Abraham's faith by commanding him to go and sacrifice his only son<sup>18</sup>! James says that Abraham was considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son<sup>19</sup>. His faith (in God's promise concerning his son) and his actions (in sacrificing his son) worked together and his faith was made complete by what he did<sup>20</sup>. Abraham's response to God's command by faith and obedience was reckoned to him as righteousness<sup>21</sup>. James concludes that a person "is justified by what he does and not by faith alone"<sup>22</sup>.

*But James is NOT speaking of justification in the legal sense of salvation (as in Romans 4:3), but of justification in the ethical sense of sanctification (as in the case of Phinehas)! James is in fact teaching exactly the same as Paul in Romans 6, namely, that justification and sanctification are inseparable! Genesis 15:6 teaches justification, but James 2:14-24 teaches sanctification!*

*James opposes the notion of justification by theoretical/historical faith prevalent among some of his readers instead of salvation faith. The act of obedience of Abraham to God's command (to sacrifice his son) is another example of being justified by faith in God's word alone! Abraham was not justified by his human act of obedience by itself, but by his response in faith (and obedience) to God's word (command)! What was important in his act of obedience was not simply the act, but that he never wavered in unbelief in God's original promise when his faith in God's promise was severely tested! His act of obedience brought his faith to its goal, made his faith more mature, more complete, more perfect<sup>23</sup>. His righteous state led to his sanctified/holy life (6:19).*

**The argument whether faith is the ground (basis) or the means (instrument) of justification.** Romans 4:3 says, "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness." Some Christians believe that this verse teaches that Abraham's faith was *the ground, reason or basis* why he was justified. But other Christians believe that this verse must be interpreted in the light of the rest of the Bible and that it does not say more than that God justified Abraham, *not as a worker of the law, but as a believer in God's promise.*

The precise relationship in which faith stands to justification, whether as *the ground (reason or basis)* or as *the means (instrument)* of justification, cannot be determined from Romans 4:3. However, the relationship between faith and justification is clearly taught elsewhere in the Bible.

'The law' in Romans 4 is the law as God's holy and righteous requirement for the condemnation (punishment) of all sin and for the salvation (justification and sanctification) of all believers. 'The law' is God's standard or rule of duty for all people. It includes the law which God wrote on the hearts of all people, the law which God gave to Adam and the written law which God gave to Moses.

- The wrong argument: faith is the ground or reason of justification. The wrong view claims that faith and obedience are works that justify. Some people argue that during the Old Testament period, God gave the law to Adam and required perfect obedience, but Adam failed. Long afterwards in Moses' time, God again gave the law to the Jews and required perfect obedience, but also the Jews failed. This view concludes that 'under the law' no one could ever render this 'perfect obedience'.

They continue to argue that during the New Testament period, God invented a new way for salvation (justification): God would regard and treat *faith in the sense of the act of believing as well as obedience to the New Testament teachings as works that justify (save)! Although no one could be justified by perfect obedience to the Old Testament law, everyone will be justified by imperfect obedience to the New Testament teachings!* This view claims that the

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<sup>18</sup> Genesis 22:1-18

<sup>19</sup> James 2:21

<sup>20</sup> James 2:22

<sup>21</sup> James 2:23

<sup>22</sup> James 2:24

<sup>23</sup> G: teleioó (viap)

*perfect* obedience to the law during the Old Testament period was replaced by the *imperfect* faith and obedience to the gospel during the New Testament period!

The justification or salvation of such people is thus dependent on *their own (free) will* and *their own work (performance)*: it is man who must choose to believe and it is man who must obey. Both are works that justify (in the sense of salvation). This view concludes that faith in the sense of a work of man is *the ground (reason or basis)* of justification (salvation).

This wrong view necessitates payment of wages. Paul's response to this is the following: "Now when a man works, his wages are not 'credited' to his account as a gift, but as an obligation" (4:4). *People who depend on works, whether:*

- *the works of obeying the Old Testament law*
- *the work of believing in the gospel/in Christ*
- *and the works of evangelical obedience*

*receive their wages as an obligation (for God) and not as a gift (from God)*. This view regards faith as the ground or reason or basis of justification (salvation). A person who works receives wages. His wages is *not a gift* from his employer, but *an obligation*. Likewise, some people argue that *God must reward a person who tries to keep the law*. They think that *God must reward him with righteousness (salvation and paradise)*. Justification then becomes an obligation, not a gracious act of God.

This teaching is found in all non-Christian religions. What man must do is regarded as a ladder that enables man to climb up to God. But this teaching is inconsistent with what the Bible teaches and must be rejected.

- The correct argument: faith is the means or instrument of justification. The correct view is that God justifies the wicked. Believers receive their justification *not as an obligation (for God), but as a gracious gift (from God)*(4:5). This view regards faith as the means or instrument whereby believers receive justification, that is, whereby the righteousness of God (Christ) and not their own righteousness, is reckoned (imputed) to them.

In the letter to the Romans the clear contrast is between the person who works for his justification<sup>24</sup> and the person who believes in God who justifies the ungodly. It is not believers who work for their own salvation, but *God in Christ who worked for the justification of believers*: he died in their place to make atonement for their sins. Thus believers are justified apart from their own works of the law (3:28)<sup>25</sup>. The ground (reason or basis) of justification is not the righteousness earned by the faith and obedience of the believer, but Christ's righteousness and obedience that is ascribed to the believer (3:24-25).

Justification (salvation) is never 'on account of faith'<sup>26</sup>, but it is always 'by means of faith'<sup>27</sup> (3:22,25,30)<sup>28</sup>. The faith of a person who believes in God's promise (God's work), namely that God justifies sinners by his grace, is reckoned for righteousness.

The contrast in verse 4 and 5 is between a deserved reward and an undeserved gift; between compensation for the worker and grace for the believer. Abraham was justified, not by God's compensation or reward for his works, but by God's free and gracious gift upon his faith. Thus, *justification by God's grace makes justification by man's faith possible! Justification by man's faith means exactly the same as justification by God's grace*.

Moreover, Abraham was justified, not by a general kind of faith in the god of any religion, but by *a specific faith in the God of the Bible*. Only the God who revealed himself in the Bible justifies the ungodly and the wicked through what Jesus Christ accomplished by his death and resurrection!

*The ground or reason or basis* of justification is always God's finished, completed and perfect work in Jesus Christ<sup>29</sup>. It is God's sovereign and unmerited grace. *The means or instrument* of justification is man's faith (4:3)<sup>30</sup>! Justification remains an unmerited gift (grace) from God.

This is the consistent teaching in the Bible and must be accepted.

b. Justification by faith alone is based on what the Old Testament says about David and others (4:6-8).

**4:6.** Just as also David pronounces (vipa) a blessing upon the person to whom God reckons (vipn) righteousness apart from works:

**4:7.** "Blessed (are) those whose transgressions are once for all forgiven (viap), whose sins are once for all covered (viap).

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<sup>24</sup> Religions that teach a ladder which one may climb up to God: Judaism teaches keeping the law. Hinduism teaches the way of yoga. Buddhism teaches the eightfold path of Buddha. Islam teaches keeping the five pillars of Islam and the sharia. Humanism teaches doing good works. Etc.

<sup>25</sup> Titus 3:5

<sup>26</sup> G: dia pistin

<sup>27</sup> G: dia pisteos

<sup>28</sup> Galatians 2:16: 3:14,26; Ephesians 2:8

<sup>29</sup> John 19:30

<sup>30</sup> John 1:12-13

**4:8.** Blessed (is) the man whose sin the Lord will *never*<sup>31</sup> reckon (impute)(vsad) against him.”

It is a biblical fact that God forgives sinners. Paul quotes David in Psalm 32:1-2. God’s gracious forgiveness of sins means the same as God’s reckoning (imputing) righteousness to a person or as God justifying a person by faith.

David speaks of God, who graciously forgives unworthy people and does not reckon their sins against them. *What David expresses negatively as the non-reckoning of sins (the forgiveness or covering of sins), Paul interprets positively as the reckoning (imputation) of righteousness. Although forgiveness of sins is a part of justification, justification consists of more: it consists of the forgiveness of sins, the acceptance into God’s family and being loved by God*<sup>32</sup>.

But because this passage speaks of not reckoning a person’s evil works against him, Paul can use this passage to prove that people during the Old Testament period were also justified by faith and not by works of the law! This passage does not call a person blessed because of his good works. On the contrary, it calls a person blessed because God has forgiven his evil works! A person is blessed, not because he has good works ‘reckoned’ to him, but rather because his transgressions and sins are not ‘reckoned’ against him! In the final judgement day he will not be punished by God! What the Bible regards as a real blessing is not the *deserved reward for works*, but the bestowment of *undeserved grace through faith!*

c. Justification by faith alone is based on the nature of physical circumcision (4:9-12).

**4:9.** (Is) this blessing then (pronounced) only for the circumcision (the circumcised people)<sup>33</sup>, or also for the uncircumcision (the uncircumcised people)<sup>34</sup>? For we are saying (viap): “To Abraham his faith was *once for all* reckoned (viap) for<sup>35</sup> righteousness.”

**4:10.** How (i.e. under what circumstances) then was it reckoned (viap)? Being (vppa) in (the state of) circumcision (i.e. *after* he was circumcised) or in (the state of) uncircumcision? (i.e. *before* he was circumcised?) Not in (the state of) circumcision (i.e. not *after* he was circumcised), but in (the state of) uncircumcision (i.e. *before* he was circumcised)!

**4:11a.** And he *once for all* received (viaa) the sign<sup>36</sup> of circumcision, a seal<sup>37</sup> of the righteousness by faith in (the state of) uncircumcision (i.e. while he was still uncircumcised),

**4:11b.** so that he might be (vnpa) the father of all who believe (exercise faith)(vppa) in (the state of) uncircumcision (i.e. have faith, but have not been circumcised), in order that righteousness *might once for all* be reckoned (vnap) to them;

**4:12.** and also the father of the circumcision (i.e. to those who have been circumcised), to them who not only (are) from the circumcision, but also *continue* to walk (follow) (vppa) in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham in (the state of) uncircumcision (i.e. *before* he was circumcised).

**Circumcision in the time of Abraham (2167 - 1992 B.C.).**

- *Circumcision came much later than justification.* It is a biblical fact that Abraham was justified many years *before* he was physically circumcised! Abraham exercised faith in God’s promises for 24 years *before* he was physically circumcised at the age of 99 years<sup>38</sup>! This fact proves that physical circumcision was not a necessary condition (requirement) for justification and also not the method of justification, as the Jews in the New Testament time taught. Physical circumcision contributed nothing to the exercise of Abraham’s faith and nothing to his justification by faith, simply because circumcision did not yet exist among God’s people!
- *Circumcision was a sign and a seal of faith.* But when physical circumcision was instituted<sup>39</sup>, circumcision did have a relationship to faith. Circumcision was not a secular or religious social rite marking racial identity, but had spiritual significance and value. Physical circumcision was instituted by God as *a sign and seal of his covenant of grace* with Abraham and all Abraham’s descendants. God’s everlasting covenant of grace says: “I (the God of the Bible) will be your God and you (Abraham and his descendants) will be my people”<sup>40</sup>. Because Abraham believed this covenant promise of God<sup>41</sup>, God gave physical circumcision to him as *the sign and seal* that he was justified by faith (4:11). Justification means that the sin of the believer has been forgiven and he has come to stand in a right relationship to God. The cutting away of the foreskin in a physical sense was a symbol or sign that his sin has been cut away in a spiritual sense.

<sup>31</sup> G: ou mé. The double negative strengthens the negation

<sup>32</sup> Psalm 103:10-13; Psalm 32:10

<sup>33</sup> G: peritomé

<sup>34</sup> G: akrobustia

<sup>35</sup> G: eis

<sup>36</sup> G: sémaion

<sup>37</sup> G: sfragida

<sup>38</sup> Genesis 12:4; 17:24-27

<sup>39</sup> Genesis 17:7,11

<sup>40</sup> Genesis 17:7; Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; 2 Corinthians 6:16

<sup>41</sup> Genesis 15:6

- *Abraham is the father of all believers, whether circumcised or not.* Abraham received circumcision as a sign and seal in order that he should become ‘the father’ or representative head of all believers. Abraham is the father or representative of all the believers coming from the uncircumcised (Gentiles). Because the Gentiles believe, righteousness is reckoned to them (4:11b). Abraham is also the father or representative of all believers coming from the circumcision (Jews) if they continue to follow the faith of Abraham.

The fact that Abraham was justified by faith before he was physically circumcised is a guarantee that the faith exercised by uncircumcised believers will certainly justify them. Not the fact that believers are circumcised, but the fact that they walk in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham is a guarantee that also the faith exercised by circumcised believers will justify them.

The fact that Abraham was justified by means of faith long before he was physically circumcised, makes him the father or representative of all believers in the Old Testament, whether they had originally not been circumcised or circumcised. In Romans 4:12, Paul clearly teaches that faith and not circumcision is the all-important thing. The people who have been physically circumcised must also walk in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham.

**Circumcision in the time of Moses (1527 - 1407 B.C.).** Only 430 (actually 645) years after Abraham<sup>42</sup>, God gave the Law to Moses, not as a replacement of the covenant of grace, but as *an addition to* the covenant to help the Jews see that they were not able to keep God’s laws and needed a Saviour<sup>43</sup>!

While at the time of Abraham God made circumcision *a sign of faith*, that is, *a sign of justification by faith*, at the time of Moses God made circumcision also a part of the Law as *a sign of obedience*, that is, *a sign of sanctification, but not a sign of justification*<sup>44</sup>. If religious people make physical circumcision a requirement or condition for justification, then they are obligated to obey the whole law (100%). If any religious person tries to be justified by law, he has alienated himself Jesus Christ and he has fallen away from grace<sup>45</sup>!

Chronology of the period the Israelites sojourned in Egypt. The calculation of time and dates is a part of the historical context of the Bible. It shows how people with limitations calculated periods of time and dates: sometimes using different kinds of calendars; sometimes making use of the calculations of others, who may not have had all the facts, and sometimes making a mistake when they copied the numbers from an old manuscript into a new manuscript.

- *The sojourn according to Abraham’s vision or dream*<sup>46</sup>. God revealed to Abraham that his descendants in the future would be strangers in a country not their own. They would be enslaved and mistreated 400 years. In the fourth generation his descendants would come back to the land Canaan. Then only would the sin of the Canaanite nations (the Amorites) be full and then God would use Israel to punish the godless Canaanite nations<sup>47</sup>.

This is an announcement concerning the time Israel would sojourn in Egypt. The 400 years must be a round figure, because in Exodus 12:40, the duration of the sojourn is set more precisely as 430 years. In the beginning there was a friendly relationship between the Egyptians and the Israelites. Later a Pharaoh, who did not know Joseph, arose and he began to oppress the Israelites<sup>48</sup>. ‘The fourth generation’ must also be taken as a round figure, one generation representing 100 years (note Abraham’s age when Isaac was born), because generally about three generations went into every century. According to Exodus 6:16-20 and Numbers 26:58b-59, there were also only four generations between Levi and Moses (Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses). Thus, the Bible does not intend to record the names of all the generations, only the most important ones, as a way to remember them.

- *The sojourn according to Moses’ statement*<sup>49</sup>. According to the Hebrew (Masoretic) text of Exodus 12:40-41, the length of time the Israelites lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, the Exodus took place. This shows that the ‘400’ years of Genesis 15:13 should be taken as a round number.

However, according to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (the Septuagint)(which the authors of the New Testament often used) and the Samaritan Pentateuch, “the sojourning of the children of Israel while they sojourned in the land of Egypt *and the land of Canaan* was 430 years. After the 430 years all the forces of the Lord came forth out of the land of Egypt.” Also the rabbinical exegesis and the historian Josephus reckoned the 400 or more precisely 430 years from the birth of Isaac to the Exodus, thus leaving only 215 years for the sojourn in Egypt.

According to the apostle Paul the Law was introduced 430 years after God’s covenant of grace with Abraham. Paul evidently follows the calculations of the Greek and Samaritan texts. Many old Jewish and Christian interpreters also followed this line of calculations, including Eusebius, Augustine and Calvin.

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<sup>42</sup> Galatians 3:17

<sup>43</sup> Galatians 3:17-25

<sup>44</sup> Leviticus 12:3; John 7:22

<sup>45</sup> Galatians 5:4

<sup>46</sup> Genesis 15:12-16

<sup>47</sup> Deuteronomy 7:1-12

<sup>48</sup> Exodus 1:6-14

<sup>49</sup> Exodus 12:40-41

- *The sojourn of Israel in Egypt (1877 - 1447 B.C.)(430 years).* However, to grow from 70 people<sup>50</sup> into a large nation of 600 000 men on foot, besides woman and children<sup>51</sup> would require much more than 215 years! Also Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6 speak of a round figure of 400 years. Therefore it is the best in this case to follow the Hebrew (Masoretic) text of Exodus 12:40-41 and reckon the duration of the sojourn in Egypt to be 430 years instead of 215 years. The sojourn in Egypt lasted from 1877 - 1447 B.C.
- *The Exodus from Egypt (1447 B.C.).* Taking into account the biblical facts<sup>52</sup>, the Pharaoh of the Exodus was Amenophis II who began to reign in 1449 B.C. According to 1 Kings 6:1, the Exodus took place 480 years before the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Solomon (968 B.C.). The Exodus took place in 1447 B.C.

### **Circumcision in the New Testament period after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

- *The Jews viewed physical circumcision as the necessary ground and means of justification.* The Jews during the New Testament period taught that unless someone was physically circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, he could not be saved<sup>53</sup>. They held to the teaching that if a man was physically circumcised and remained within the theocracy of Judaism, he might be punished for his sins, but he would ultimately be saved! *Salvation was guaranteed by being a member of Israel.* This teaching was not correct.

Later, some churches transferred this teaching to Christianity. They hold to the teaching that if a person is baptised with water and remains within that specific denomination, he may suffer for his sins now on earth and later in purgatory, but he will ultimately be saved! *Salvation is guaranteed by being a baptised member of that church.* Also this teaching is not correct.

According to Genesis 12:1-4, 15:6, 16:16 and 17:24-25, Abraham was justified by faith many years *before* he was physically circumcised! When he was justified, he was like any other uncircumcised Gentile. Therefore, physical circumcision can never be the condition or means of justification or salvation! Likewise, the sacraments of baptism with water or the Lord's Supper may never become the condition or means of justification or salvation. No religious ritual can ever become the condition or means of justification or salvation!

- *The New Testament teaches that ceremonial law has been fulfilled, cancelled and abrogated.* Jesus taught that he had come to fulfil the law<sup>54</sup>. Paul taught that the ceremonial law has been cancelled<sup>55</sup> and abrogated<sup>56</sup>.

Physical circumcision during the Old Testament period was a type or symbol pointing to and preparing people for the spiritual circumcision of the heart during the New Testament period (2:28-29)<sup>57</sup>.

Paul argues that justification by faith is based on the nature of circumcision. Justification by faith is for believers who have been physically circumcised as Jews and also for Gentiles that have never been physically circumcised. Paul proves that physical circumcision is neither the condition nor the means of justification. In Romans 4:11-12, Paul still made a distinction between the believers in Christ who came from uncircumcised Gentiles and believers in Christ who came from circumcised Jews. But in Romans 4:16-17, he dispenses with even this distinction between Gentiles and Jews and speaks of just believers in Christ: "not those who originally are only of the law", but "to those who also are of the faith of Abraham"! The covenant promise of God comes by God's grace and is received by man's faith, so that God's promise may be guaranteed to "all Abraham's offspring". "Abraham is the father of us all" and "God made Abraham the father of many nations." Thus once again Paul emphasises that there is no distinction (difference) between Jews and Gentiles anymore (3:22; 10:12-13). Both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith only.

**Physical circumcision was a sign also given to children and other dependants.** God gave physical circumcision as the sign and seal of his covenant of redemption or grace to both believers *and their children and other dependants*. "Every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised" and every dependant servants "born in your household or bought with money ... must be circumcised"<sup>58</sup>. *God thus dealt with people, not simply as individuals, but as a community!* The faith of Abraham as an individual justified Abraham himself. But the faith of Abraham as the father of his family and head of his household (thus as their representative) brought his children under age and the servants in his household into God's covenant of grace. Therefore, *children and other dependants of believers should be regarded and treated as belonging to God's covenant, as belonging to God's people*, until they embrace God's covenant by their personal faith or reject God's covenant by their personal unbelief and disobedience<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Genesis 46:27

<sup>51</sup> Exodus 12:37

<sup>52</sup> Genesis 15:13; Exodus 12:40; Judges 11:26; 1 Kings 6:1

<sup>53</sup> Acts 15:1

<sup>54</sup> Matthew 5:17

<sup>55</sup> Colossians 2:14

<sup>56</sup> Ephesians 2:15

<sup>57</sup> Colossians 2:11-12; Galatians 6:12-16

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 17:9-14; cf. Leviticus 12:3; Luke 1:59; John 7:22

<sup>59</sup> Hebrews 3:7-11; 4:1-2,6

Thus, in the Old Testament period, on the one hand, children of believers who were physically circumcised were regarded and treated by God as belonging to his people<sup>60</sup>, *unless their unbelief and disobedience eventually proved otherwise*. On the other hand, all Jews who were physically circumcised but did not believe in God's covenant of redemption, but instead depended on their performance of obeying the law, are not justified. They are called "not Jews" (2:28), "not my people"<sup>61</sup>. If (Gentile) adults let themselves be circumcised, Jesus Christ will be of no value to them – they are alienated from Christ<sup>62</sup>.

And those religious leaders and teachers after the death and resurrection of Jesus who continue to physically circumcise their adherents are called 'the mutilators'<sup>63</sup>.

Thus, neither in the Old nor in the New Testament does God teach that physical circumcision was the necessary condition or means of justification. The only necessary condition and means of justification was and still is faith!

d. Justification by faith alone is based on the nature of God's promise (4:13-14).

**4:13.** For it was not through law that Abraham and his seed (offspring) (received) the promise that he would be (vnpa) heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by (i.e. resulting from) faith.

**4:14.** For if those (who live by the law) (are) heirs, faith is made invalid (emptied, deprived from its value)(virp) and the promise is made ineffective (powerless)(virp).

God made a promise to Abraham and all his spiritual children that together with Jesus Christ they would be heirs of *the whole world*. According to Genesis 15:5-7 and 22:17-18, God's promise to Abraham consisted of the title only to the land of Canaan, the assurance that the number of his descendants would be uncountable and the guarantee that in his offspring (seed) all the nations of the earth would be blessed. *The first two parts of God's promise were already fulfilled when Joshua conquered the land of Canaan<sup>64</sup>. But the third part of God's promise only began to go into fulfilment with the first coming of Jesus Christ!*

Abraham believed God's promise. He believed that through one of his offspring God would bless all the nations on earth! According to Galatians 3:16, this meant that *Abraham believed in the future coming Saviour, Jesus Christ*. Abraham's faith in the coming Saviour Jesus Christ was *the means* by which God justified Abraham.

The Jews, however, believed that God's promise was made to the physical 'seed' or offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and that only ethnic Jews fulfilled this description.

However, if the people who try to keep the law (the moral, ceremonial and civil laws) would be the heirs of all these blessings of God, then God's promise to Abraham would be nullified (ineffective) and faith in that promise would be empty (invalid)! Paul contrasts human righteousness through law (that is, righteousness attained, earned, gained through a person trying to keep the moral, ceremonial and civil laws) with divine righteousness through faith (that is, the righteousness of Christ which he earned by his death and resurrection and which is reckoned to the believer in Christ). Human righteousness through law was not even possible in Abraham's time, because the written moral, ceremonial and civil laws were only introduced very many years later<sup>65</sup>.

The New Testament revelation explains and fulfils the Old Testament revelation. Galatians 3:16 says that the 'seed' of Abraham was Jesus Christ. And Galatians 3:28-29 says that if any people, whether Jews or Gentiles, belong to Jesus Christ they are Abraham's seed and heirs of God's promise. Thus, *God's promise was not made to Abraham's physical offspring, but to his spiritual offspring*. It was first of all made to Jesus Christ and secondly to all people belonging to Jesus Christ. The words "Abraham and his offspring" (4:13,16) refers only to Jesus Christ and to all people who believe in Jesus Christ, whether they originally are ethnic Jews or ethnic Gentiles.

People must consider Abraham. Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned (imputed) to him as righteousness. People must understand that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Old Testament Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith<sup>66</sup>. Believing Jews and believing Gentiles are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. They are all one in Christ Jesus. If any people belong to Christ, then they are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise<sup>67</sup>.

The Jews believed that only the Jews would be the heirs of the Promised Land<sup>68</sup>. But Romans 4:13 says that God promised to Jesus Christ and to all who believe in Jesus Christ, not only a small piece of Promised Land in the Middle East, but *the whole world!* This promise will have its literal fulfilment, when Christ, at his second coming, will establish

<sup>60</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 7:14

<sup>61</sup> Hosea 1:9

<sup>62</sup> Galatians 5:2-4

<sup>63</sup> Philippians 3:2

<sup>64</sup> Joshua 21:43-45; cf. 23:14-16

<sup>65</sup> Galatians 3:17-18

<sup>66</sup> Galatians 3:6-9

<sup>67</sup> Galatians 3:26-29

<sup>68</sup> Genesis 15:18; Joshua 21:43-45; cf. 23:14-16



his Kingdom in its final glorious form on the new earth, in the East, the Middle East, the West, the North and the South! Then, according to Daniel 7:27, the uttermost parts of the world will be the possession of Christ, then the true religion will fill the earth, and then the kingdoms of the world will be given to the saints of the Most High God<sup>69</sup>.

e. [Justification by faith alone is based on the nature of the law \(4:15-17a\)](#).

**4:15.** because the law continually produces (vipn) wrath, but where there is (vipa) no law, there (is) also no transgression.

**4:16.** Therefore (for this reason), (what God promised came) by faith, namely in order that<sup>70</sup> it might (be) a matter of grace, and in order that the promise might be (vnpa) certain (of fulfilment, permanent, firm)<sup>71</sup> for all the seed (spiritual offspring), not for those who only (are) of the law (i.e. who only live by the law), but for those who also (are) of the faith of Abraham (i.e. who also live by the faith of Abraham), who is (vipa) the father of us all.

**4:17a.** As it is written (virp): “I have made<sup>72</sup> (vira) you father of many nations” before (in the sight of) the God in whom he (Abraham) believed (viaa).

Paul argues that justification by faith is based on the nature of the law, namely: the law can only bring God’s wrath and consequently, the law cannot bring justification or salvation. Thus, justification can never be by keeping the law, but only by faith!

**God’s law brings transgression and consequently God’s wrath.** The ‘law’ is here the holy and righteous requirement of God for the judgement (condemnation and punishment) of all sinners on the ground of their sins and for the salvation (justification and sanctification) of all believers on the ground of Christ’s perfect righteousness.

If there were no law, sin would not spring alive (7:8), there would be no sin (transgression of the law)(4:15) and sin would not be punished (would not be taken into account (5:13). If there were no law, there would be no sin by man and consequently no condemnation by God. And where there is no transgression, there would consequently be no wrath of God.

Paul does not intend to say:

- that there are people in the world who do not possess the law
- or that there are people in the world who have never transgressed the law

and consequently are exempt from God’s wrath.

Paul emphasises exactly the opposite: there is law!

- All people in the world possess either God’s moral laws in their heart (2:14-15) or in the written Old Testament (3:10-20).
- And the law takes sin into account, not only outward acts of people, but also their inner thoughts, motives, attitudes and feelings and even their unconscious sin (7:7).

If the law condemns all lack of conformity to its own inflexible standard of complete obedience and complete perfection, then the law must destroy everybody’s hope of being justified by the law! Because the law demands perfect obedience and no one can keep God’s law perfectly, the law can never justify anyone!

Because everyone human being transgresses the law, the law brings God’s wrath on everybody. Where there is law, there is God’s judgement and wrath (condemnation and punishment)(cf. 2:12b). *Because the law produces God’s wrath, it cannot produce God’s grace.* But grace is absolutely indispensable for justification (salvation), because it is the ground of both God’s promise and man’s faith. Thus, *wherever religious people try to be justified by doing the works of the law, they set God’s grace aside, make God’s promise null and void and cause faith in that promise to be useless!*

Paul himself had once tried hard to be saved by doing the works of the law and he failed miserably<sup>73</sup>. Now Paul understood that the law produces God’s wrath. The law holds everyone in the world accountable to God and silences everyone’s arguments in self-defence (3:19). The law pronounces a curse on all who do not keep the law perfectly<sup>74</sup>. The breaking of just one law makes a person guilty of breaking the whole law<sup>75</sup>! The law demands perfect obedience and condemns everyone who is not perfect. That is why the law by its very nature cannot impart life, but instead causes death! The law does not bring God’s justification, but brings God’s wrath, which condemns all people in the world as unrighteous by nature.

**God’s law is excluded by God’s grace as a means of righteousness.** Paul contrasts man’s works of the law with man’s faith in God’s work and God’s promise! In the matter of justification man’s works of the law and man’s faith in God’s work and in God’s promise are *mutually exclusive*. All religious people, who still try to be justified by their own works of the law (their circumcision, prayers, fasting, giving, pilgrimages, religious dress and clean food, etc.), can

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<sup>69</sup> cf. Daniel 2:44

<sup>70</sup> G: hina

<sup>71</sup> G: bebaios

<sup>72</sup> G: tithémi

<sup>73</sup> Acts 22:3-4; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:4-7

<sup>74</sup> Galatians 3:10-14

<sup>75</sup> James 2:10

never become the heirs of God's promise! All their efforts to keep the law produces no righteousness (justification, salvation), but only God's continued wrath against them.

For non-Christians, who are trying to be justified by keeping the law, God says, "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue *to do everything written in the Book of the Law*.'" Clearly no one is justified before God by the law<sup>76</sup>.

And for Christians, who still try to be justified by keeping the law, God says, "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace"<sup>77</sup>!

God's promise is given by God's grace and received by man's faith. Faith is not man's *working* hand producing salvation, but man's *empty* hand that receives God's undeserved gift, that is, God's completed and perfect work of salvation through Jesus Christ.

**God's grace is the only thing that makes man's faith possible.** People who never possessed the written law (the Gentiles) may become God's people, because they are of the faith of Abraham. And people who possessed the written law (i.e. "people who are of the law", the Jews) may also become God's people, provided that they also become "people who are of the faith of Abraham".

**God's grace is for all Abraham's seed (spiritual offspring).** God's promise was made to Abraham and to all his 'seed' or 'offspring' (singular). Only in the way of grace and faith does Abraham become 'the father' of many nations. In the context of the book of Genesis Abraham's 'seed' or offspring must be the collective seed or offspring of Abraham. But this seed or offspring does not refer to all his natural offspring, but to his spiritual offspring. Whether people originally possessed the written Old Testament or not, *Abraham's seed or offspring refers only to the believers* among his natural offspring (4:12) and to the believers in Jesus Christ among the other Gentile nations (4:11)!

Abraham is the father, *not of two groups* of people, namely:

- those who are circumcised Jews<sup>78</sup> that do not believe in Jesus Christ
- and those who are Gentiles that do believe in Jesus Christ.

No, Abraham is rather the father of *one group* of people, namely, of all believers in Jesus Christ, whether they originally come from the circumcised Jews who possess the written law or whether they originally come from the uncircumcised Gentiles who do not possess the written law. Because these believers come from every nation in the world, Abraham becomes the father of many nations. In God's eyes, Abraham is the father of all believers in the God of the Bible in all nations.

In the context of the New Testament<sup>79</sup> Abraham's 'seed' or 'offspring' refers only to Jesus Christ!

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<sup>76</sup> Galatians 3:10-11

<sup>77</sup> Galatians 5:4

<sup>78</sup> and Muslims

<sup>79</sup> Galatians 3:16