

## Lessons from Israel 6

### The father of Israel 2

In the New Testament, when the gospel is being challenged or twisted, we sometimes see clarification and explanation through the testimony of Abraham. We illustrated this point in our first lesson on the father of Israel, from Romans chapter 4. And also briefly touched on something similar in Galatians 3.

Let's go back to Romans chapter 4 to begin today:

1. What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?
2. For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.
3. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

This was essentially our conclusion from the first lesson on Abraham. He had faith - and that faith meant something. It was seen clearly in the Genesis 22 story of Abraham and Isaac.

That story was an illustration of the salvation that would come through Jesus Christ.

Next we see clarification, that salvation has never been by works.

4. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.
5. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

We do not have, Israel did not have a works-based salvation. There is One that "justifieth the ungodly" and we must believe in Him.

6. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,
7. Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.
8. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

The solution for our sin problem, the solution for Abraham's sin problem, the solution for David's sin problem, the solution for Israel's sin problem, the solution for Guam's sin problem is Jesus Christ. He is the One who forgives iniquities.

And we are blessed, because His righteousness is imputed to us. And now, where sin abounded, grace does much more abound.

9. Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

Is this blessing for Israel only? Or also for Gentiles? Because we say that "faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness" or that "faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness."

I read something interesting this week about the end of verse 9. I hope you'll bear with me as I read it to you:

"We saw it in verse 9b: 'Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.'

Now what does this mean? Does it mean that faith itself is the kind of righteousness we perform and God counts that as good enough to be our righteousness - or our part of the righteousness - in justification? Does he mean that justification, let's say, costs five million dollars and I can come up with one million dollars (namely, faith), so God mercifully says he will count my one million as five million and cancel the rest? That would make my faith the righteousness imputed to me - or a significant part of it. So justification would be God's recognizing in me a righteousness that he put there and that he acknowledges and counts for what it really is. Is that what Paul means when he says, 'faith is credited as righteousness?'

Or is justification something very different - not God's seeing any righteousness in me, but his crediting to me his own righteousness in Christ through faith? And if so, what does it mean to say that faith is credited as righteousness?"

The question is answered as this commentary goes on:

"When Paul says "Faith is credited to us as righteousness," he does not mean that our faith is our righteousness, or any part of our justifying righteousness. He means that faith is what unites us with Christ and all that God is for us in him. When God sees faith in Christ, he sees union with Christ. And when he sees union with Christ, he sees the righteousness of Christ as our righteousness. So faith connects us with Christ who is our righteousness and, in that sense, faith is counted as righteousness. Faith sees and savors all that God is for us in Christ, especially his righteousness. That's what faith does."

Now, what I just read to you is just from a commentary, but I think it helps.

Faith brings us into relationship with the perfect, spotless lamb of God, who was sacrificed in our place and for our sins. He is righteous. And when we know Him - through faith - his righteousness is credited to our account.

And God credited righteousness to Abraham's account through faith.

So, if the question we are left with is this: "is this blessing for Israel only?" We can confidently say no.

Let's go on:

10. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

The question now became: "was it something that was done by Abraham or by Israel that allowed them to be called righteous?"

The question is asked and answered in the verse, then explained:

11. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

It is not the things we do, or the signs that we may bear in our own bodies, or the nation that we are a part of, that allows for righteousness to be imputed.

Further explanation:

12. And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

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

You may want to stop me right here and say "I think we get the point!" Fair enough. But allow me to remind you of some practical, everyday, modern, common applications:

\* There are many on this island and every other part of God's earth that will insist that being part of something means righteousness - means salvation.

\* They will tell us we must "do," either one thing or many things to be part of their group (their something) - and this will mean righteousness - it will mean salvation.

\* Perhaps they will say that following the law of Moses - the law given to Israel will mean righteousness - will mean salvation.

\* They will minimize or reject out of hand faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone.

\* And even the children of Israel (Jewish people), by in large, in Christ's day - and in our day - reject Him.

But the father of Israel, Abraham, is cited extensively in our New Testament to illustrate and to show forth and to clarify faith as the means of salvation.

There's more if we skip down to verse 17:

17. (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

18. 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.

19. 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 Sarah's womb:

It is important that we don't overlook these things. It is not only in our teaching of salvation and in our proclamation of the gospel that we emphasize faith. For it is one of the keys to our walk of daily discipleship with Christ!

Can we take this lesson from Israel?

Do we now see - or can we imagine - a time in which the circumstances confronting us will resemble those of Abraham?

Will we understand and have the faith to believe that which God promised He is also able to fulfill?

God seems to have provided us with this reminder in Romans that the father of Israel was "not weak in faith" because He knew that there would be times in which we could not say the same thing - and that we would need an example.

20. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21. And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

22. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

I don't know why I felt it was necessary to spend two weeks discussing the father of Israel and His belief in God. But we could have went on. We could have made our way to the book of Galatians again to find the name "Abraham" and the words "believed" and "faith" and "righteousness."

We could have read the recap of his story in Hebrews 11 and emphasized faith again.

I can't help but believe that God wanted us to take this lesson from Israel and apply it to our lives today, this week, this month.

We see it in the final verses of the chapter:

23. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;
24. But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;
25. Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

I have said it multiple times in this series and will no doubt say it again. "There is, in fact, no separating Israel from the gospel and from New Testament Christianity. They are inextricably intertwined."

We have seen it again today.

This message is for us. God has provided it. He expects us to get a grip on faith and on righteousness and on how they work and where they fit. Because we need to know - for life.

And many times he teaches us, through the story and through the people of Israel.