

**6–7 Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.**

So Paul begins with Abraham, and with the central verse regarding his faith in God. He has already argued that the gospel he is proclaiming is that which was agreed to be true by the pillars. He has further argued that the experience of faith among the Galatians themselves was a second witness to the reality and truthfulness of his gospel. Now he has moved to an argument based upon the Scriptures themselves.

Covenant membership is the question, and how one becomes a covenant member. Did the Influencers reference Abraham as a model for their point of view? It is likely that they did. One could imagine that they pointed to the fact that Abraham was circumcised, and (though anachronistic in its approach) this proved that he had become a proselyte. If the Galatians were therefore to follow in the footsteps of Abraham, they would likewise become circumcised as proselytes. This might have been a powerful and persuasive argument to the Galatians.

As such, Paul cannot resist the challenge to begin with Abraham as the model of faith, not circumcision. His point is obvious: the statement of faith, and the promise of the covenant, is made before circumcision, not after it. But even more important was the fact that the Scriptures pronounced Abraham righteous, not on the basis of what he had done via circumcision (which was yet to come), but on the declaration of God based upon his faith.

But this could not have been news to the Influencers! Surely they knew the order of events in the book of Genesis. Rather, the issue that was clearly at hand was whether Abraham's "faith" should be understood as a basic "trust" in God, or whether it should be considered as "faithfulness." In fact, it was a fairly common rabbinic perspective that the statement of Gen 15:6 was simply a prophetic statement foretelling Abraham's faithfulness on Mt. Moriah (Gen 22).

Some have suggested this was James' viewpoint. For in his second chapter, he notes (v. 21) that Abraham was "justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar." Then in the immediate context (v. 23), he quotes Gen 15:6. But for James, Gen 15:6 is not a prophetic statement awaiting the faithfulness of Abraham in offering up Isaac. Rather, his willingness to obey God in the ultimate test was a proof of the faith he already had. The statement of Gen 15:6 is for James, what it is for Paul—a clear and unabashed statement of Abraham's personal faith in God and His word. The *akedah* is clear proof of that faith. For James, the two combine in the sense of faith (Gen 15:6) and works (Gen 22), a necessary combination if faith is genuine.

Nonetheless, the Jewish literature does tend to interpret Gen 15:6 as speaking prophetically of Abraham's faithfulness, demonstrated at Mt. Moriah. Note 1Macc 2:52:

Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?

Jubilees likewise presents Abraham's connection to God as based upon his faithfulness:

And it came to pass in the seventh week, in the first year thereof, in the

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first month in this jubilee, on the twelfth of this month, there were voices in heaven regarding Abraham, that he was faithful in all that He told him, and that he loved the Lord, and that in every affliction he was faithful. And the prince Mastema came and said before God, 'Behold, Abraham loves Isaac his son, and he delights in him above all things else; bid him offer him as a burnt-offering on the altar, and Thou wilt see if he will do this command, and Thou wilt know if he is faithful in everything wherein Thou dost try him. And the Lord knew that Abraham was faithful in all his afflictions; for He had tried him through his country and with famine, and had tried him with the wealth of kings, and had tried him again through his wife, when she was torn (from him), and with circumcision; and had tried him through Ishmael and Hagar, his maid-servant, when he sent them away. And in everything wherein He had tried him, he was found faithful, and his soul was not impatient, and he was not slow to act; for he was faithful and a lover of the Lord. (Jub 17:15–18)

Pirkei Avot 5:3 says:

Ten trials were inflicted upon Abraham, our father, may he rest in peace, and he withstood all of them, to show you how great is His love for Abraham, our father, may he rest in peace.

The perspective seemed to be that Abraham's close, covenant relationship with God was the result of his faithfulness under trial and not vice versa. But for Paul, the text of Gen 15:6 could not be interpreted this way, and he no doubt believed that his readers would agree with him, at least as far as the basic meaning of the Genesis text was concerned. Abraham believed in God, by which is meant that he accepted what God had said about Himself and about Abraham, and that he was willing to make his life decisions based upon that belief. As such, Abraham's faith was the kind of faith that renders a person righteous in the eyes of God, for it is a faith which is itself a gift from God. Such saving faith secures one's place in God's covenant family, and thus also secures the blessings of God.

Paul's conclusion, after quoting Genesis 15:6, is straightforward (v. 7): "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham." Here Paul comes to his primary point in this section: how does one become a "son of Abraham?" Since the language of the Abrahamic covenant was "to you and to your seed," covenant membership is tied to being reckoned as the offspring of Abraham. This, of course, was the exact same message of the Influencers, with one major difference: how one could claim the status of Abraham's descendant. For them, the means was physical lineage (birth) or becoming a proselyte. For Paul, the means was faith. Even physical descendants of Abraham who refused to be obedient to the covenant could be cut off, as he demonstrates in his olive tree metaphor of Romans 11. Faith, therefore, was the key.

But what was also very important to Paul was the sequence of events in the Genesis narrative,<sup>28</sup> which clearly shows that God's declaration of Abraham's righteousness came before the *akeidah* event that proved Abraham's utter faithfulness (obedience) to God. That Paul has sequential events in mind may be seen in verse five, dealing with the presence of the Spirit among the Galatians. In asking the question of how the evident work of the

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28 Paul makes this a central point of his argument in Romans 4.

Spirit came about, he uses the preposition ἐκ, *ek*, “out from”: “does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it out from the works of the Torah, or out from the hearing with faith?” We should understand this to mean: did the evident work of the Spirit follow (i.e., come as a result of) your experience of faith, or did it follow (i.e., come as a result of) becoming a proselyte? The question is rhetorical: surely the manifest work of the Spirit came following their genuine exercise of faith in Yeshua.

This was the pattern as described in Acts. The Spirit came upon Cornelius and those with him, not after they became circumcised, but before (Acts 10), much to the astonishment of Peter. They were constituted as covenant members by the *mikveh* of the Ruach, not by the *mikveh* of rabbinic conversion.

The same was true for Abraham, who became a member of God’s covenant as a result of God’s sovereign choice, confirmed by his faith (Genesis 15:6), not as a result of obediently following God’s commandment of circumcision (Genesis 17). The sequence of events makes this clear. And thus the only conclusion that can be reached from the Genesis 15:6 text, when viewed in the light of the Abrahamic narrative, is that he was a covenant member before he was circumcised. This, for Paul, established a clear axiom: covenant membership was possible on the basis of faith without being circumcised. And the logical conclusion to be drawn from this axiom was that Gentiles, as Gentiles, could be *bona fide* covenant members. Therefore, when one asks regarding who constitutes the “sons of Abraham,” the answer must begin with the issue of faith, not obedience to Torah.

But what does it mean to be a member of the covenant God made with Abraham? The language of Genesis 15:6 explains this in the words “reckoned” (כָּשָׂה, *chashav*; λογίζομαι, *logizomai*) and “righteousness” (צְדָקָה, *tzedakah*; δικαιοσύνη, *dikaiousune*). To be “reckoned as righteous” means to be received into fellowship with God; to be invited into His company as one acceptable in His sight. The Hebrew word means “to think” or “to consider.” Since faith lays hold of the promise of God, that He would offer a means of dealing with sin on the scale of justice, such faith also accepts the evaluation of the Judge that He will render the sinner forgiven and cleansed, that is, righteous. But God’s determination to provide a means of payment for sin is coupled with His plan to make the sinner righteous by changing his heart and empowering him through the indwelling Spirit. Those who believe are therefore accepted by God as righteous because He knows what He intends to do on their behalf, that is, to make them righteous after the pattern of His own Son.

The Greek word λογίζομαι, *logizomai*, which is translated “reckon,” comes from the world of commerce.<sup>29</sup> It means to write a value in a ledger book, to credit something to a person’s account. God is able to credit righteousness to the sinner because Yeshua’s sacrifice paid for the sin, thus balancing the debt owed. But righteousness is also credited to the sinner’s account because God has determined to make the sinner righteous, conforming him to the pattern of Yeshua Himself (Romans 8:29).

Rather than adopting the view that “righteousness” is something “reckoned” but not actual, or that “righteousness” speaks strictly of one’s personal obedience, the context of Genesis indicates a “both-and” rather than an “either-or.” God reckoned Abraham as righteous because He credited to Abraham the payment of sin made by the Seed in whom Abraham’s faith was placed. But He also reckoned Abraham as righteous because in His sovereign design He

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<sup>29</sup> BDAG, “λογίζομαι”.

purposed to produce obedience within Abraham.<sup>30</sup> And since God sees the end from the beginning, He is able to reckon as true what for us is yet future. Thus, obedience (personal righteousness) is the inevitable fruit of saving faith. But the sequence is crucial: faith precedes obedience, not vice versa. In the following context, then, Paul is not disparaging the Torah. Rather, he is showing that Torah does not produce obedience. Rather, faith produces obedience to the Torah. Those who are “out from the Torah” but who are not “out from faith” can never hope to be reckoned as righteous in God’s eyes.

**8–9 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.**

Paul has linked the crucial concepts of “faith” and “righteousness” in the pivotal quote from the life of Abraham (Genesis 15:6). Likewise, he has linked to this “righteousness by faith” the identification of Abraham’s descendants: those who participate in the same faith which Abraham possessed may, like him, be counted as covenant members. But here is one more significant link: the Abrahamic covenant envisioned the Gentiles.

However, it is to be noted that Paul does not begin this sentence with “For” (*γάρ, gar*). The sentence actually begins with the post-positive particle *δέ, de*, which is a general connective particle in this case. He is not so much offering further support for his statement that those “who are of faith are sons of Abraham” (v. 7). He is rather connecting this axiom to his next point, that the Gentiles figure into Abraham’s family as well.

The quote is synthesized from Genesis 12:3 and 18:18, but is clearly from the Lxx:

MT	Lxx	Paul
<p>וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְךָ כָּל מִשְׁפָּחַת הָאָדָמָה: (12:3)</p>	<p>καὶ ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς (12:3)</p>	<p>ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη</p>
<p>וְנִבְרַכְוּ בּוֹ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ: (18:18)</p>	<p>καὶ ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν αὐτῷ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς (18:18)</p>	<p>... in you all the nations will be blessed.</p>
<p>And in you all the families of the land will be blessed. (12:3)</p>	<p>And in you all the tribes of the earth will be blessed. (12:3)</p>	
<p>And in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed. (18:18)</p>	<p>And in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed.</p>	

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30 Cf. Gen 18:19, where “chosen” (NASB) is actually the verb *יָדַע*, “to know” – “For I have known him (Abraham)...,” which speaks in covenant terms, denoting the intention of God to bless Abraham with the promises of the covenant.

The quote is from the Lxx, but conflates the texts of Genesis 12:3 and 18:18, utilizing the second person singular “you” from 12:3 but taking the word “nations” (rather than “families” or “tribes”) from 18:18.

The Scriptures (ἡ γραφή, *he graphe*) are personified as a prophet, looking into the future and seeing when the Gentiles would flock into the covenant of Abraham. Paul gives his own interpretation of the text (Genesis 12:3; 18:18<sup>31</sup>) in the manner in which he introduces the quote: “God would justify (reckon as righteous) the Gentiles by (‘out of’) faith.” Personified as a prophet, the Scriptures “preach” the Gospel “beforehand” (προεναγγαλιζομαι, *proeuangelizomai*). The Greek verb is used only here, and describes for Paul the heart of the “blessing” promised to the nations: the Gospel, the good news of Messiah, was announced to Abraham, not only in regard to himself and his seed, but also in regard to the nations who would be blessed through him. Here is clear proof that Paul’s gospel was not something newly fashioned by him, nor something unknown in the Torah. Abraham had the same gospel proclaimed by Paul!

But we should also not overlook the significance that this text has in Paul’s theology. For not only is the Gospel evident from the very first covenant promise given to Abraham, but the covenant is equally incomplete apart from the Gentiles. God’s grace, given to Abraham, is diminished if it is not also seen to have had its effect upon the nations. Insofar as the Influencers were suggesting a change of ethnic status for the Gentiles via the ritual of proselytism, they were also proposing something that rendered the promise of the covenant unfulfilled. Without the Gentiles, the Abrahamic promise is not all that it should be.

But what is of particular importance to Paul in this context is that the Gospel, encapsulated in the Abrahamic covenant, envisioned the Gentiles. In Paul’s understanding, the “blessing” promised to the nations was nothing less than that they would be declared righteous by faith. This fits the Hebrew perspective of “blessing” (בָּרַךְ, *barach*), for far from merely words of consolation or eulogy, blessing in the Hebrew sense means to bestow grace and peace, to sustain and to cause the person to prosper. One need only consider the Aaronic blessing given to the priests to pronounce over the people (Numbers 6:24-26). This blessing envisions nothing less than God’s full provision of protection, sustenance, and covenant relationship. Thus, the promise that the nations would be blessed in Abraham is charged with covenant significance. In the same manner in which Abraham and his family are promised blessing, so the nations share in this blessing in every way.

This emphasizes the continuity in Paul’s gospel and theology. The covenant which God had made with His chosen people was the revelation of His saving purposes for mankind. There is not a hint of a “two-covenant” scheme in Paul’s teaching. From the beginning God intended to save all of His chosen ones—both from the descendants of Abraham as well as from the nations—through His Messiah, Yeshua. The plan envisioned a single host of people from every tribe, kindred, and tongue, worshipping in a unified manner, praising the One God of the universe, and carrying out His will through obedience to His Torah. As Dunn writes:

31 The five Genesis texts that describe the blessing upon the nations (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14) are mixed in the words used to describe the nations. 12:3 and 28:14 both use מְשֻׁפָּחוֹת, “families,” while the other three references use גוֹיִם, “nations.” It is possible that 12:3 and 28:14 form an *inclusio* for the whole.

The promise which constituted Israel as heirs of the promise, seed of Abraham, also placed the blessing of the Gentiles to the forefront. Paul takes the 'all the nations' seriously—Gentiles as well as Jews, not Gentiles distinct from Jews. The promise to Abraham's seed was incomplete without the Gentiles' sharing in the same blessing. Consequently, Paul did not see himself as doing anything which was contrary to the spirit and character of his ancestral faith. On the contrary, *his mission to the Gentiles was nothing other than the fulfillment of Israel's mission.*<sup>32</sup>

The force of these two Scripture quotes (Genesis 15:6 / 12:3 / 18:18) taken together offered but one conclusion for Paul: "So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer" (v. 9).

The manifestation of the Spirit among the believing Galatians had been the result of ("out from") faith, not the result of submitting to the ritual of a proselyte. In like manner, the Gospel preached to Abraham prophesied of the time that the Gentiles ("nations") would enter the covenant as a result of ("out from") faith. The experience of the Galatians has only proven what the Scriptures of Moses had promised: the nations (Gentiles) would become covenant members with Abraham and his descendants through faith in the Messiah Yeshua.

In this verse we have the the phrase "out from faith" used a third time. In this instance it is used substantively of those who have believed: "So then, those who are out from faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer." The word that describes the covenant members (οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, *hoi ek pisteos*) is the same word that describes Abraham (τῷ πιστῷ, *to pisto*, "the believer"). And even more to the point is the use of the preposition σὺν, *sun*, meaning "with." The Gentiles are not blessed in their own realm, or in their own covenant, but they are blessed *with* Abraham. One covenant, one people.

It was thus the combination of the two texts (Genesis 15:6 and 12:3/18:18) that had formed Paul's perspective. The quote from Genesis 15:6 was linked via גְּזֵירָה שְׁוּיָה, *gezeira sheva* (linking of texts that have similar words or key ideas / concepts). Paul's logic is this: Abraham was promised blessing; this blessing (according to Gen 15:6) came as result of his faith. The promise made to Abraham also included a blessing upon the nations (Gen 12:3). Thus, the conclusion is that the nations would likewise receive this blessing as a result of their faith.

It is noteworthy how Paul writes this sentence, for he uses the word "faith" as an adjective. We might translate it more literally as, "Therefore, those who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." Nearly ever time a similar construction is found in the Apostolic Scriptures (singular use of πιστός, *pistos*, "faith / faithful" with the article), it seems to describe "faithfulness" (Matt. 24:45; Luke 12:42; 16:10; Col. 4:9; 1Pet. 5:12; Rev. 1:5; 2:13; 3:14). One might think that such a construction rather hurt Paul's argument than helped it. For the Influencers would have capitalized on the fact that Abraham was counted as righteous because he was faithful, proven by his obedience to be circumcised. Paul does go to great lengths in Rom 4 to explain himself, but here he simply makes the statement. When comparing his fuller statement in Romans, it becomes clear that Abraham's faithfulness was a mark of his previous "faith / trust" in God, and that is Paul's point here. We therefore come to understand that for Paul, there was no bifurca-

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32 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 165, emphasis his.

tion between “faith” and “faithfulness.” They are two sides of the same coin. One may therefore speak of either with the full assurance that the other exists.

**10 For as many as are of the works of the Torah are under a curse; for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE TORAH, TO PERFORM THEM.”**

The abrupt shift in emphasis in this verse indicates that Paul has anticipated the polemic of the Influencers and hastens to address it. Paul had just linked the faith of Abraham with the blessing to the nations, reasoning that they too would receive this blessing by faith even as Abraham did. The Influencers would have been quick, however, to show from the same Genesis narrative that Abraham was blessed *because* he was obedient (Gen 22:15ff). The question, then, was the place of the Torah in the whole matter of blessing from God. Did obedience to Torah (in this case, accepting circumcision as a proselyte and all that came with this act) precede God’s blessing of righteousness, or did God’s blessing of righteousness come first, effecting a change of heart that resulted in obedience?

*Excursus: The Works of the Torah*

This is now the sixth time we have seen the phrase “works of the Torah” (ἔργων νόμου, 2:16(3x); 3:2,5,10) and we should stop to investigate it more closely. One of the difficulties we have when encountering the word “Torah” (usually translated “Law” because of the Greek word νόμος, *nomos*) in the Apostolic Scriptures is that we wrest its meaning away from the 1st Century context in which its meaning is derived. It is clear that in the 1st Century the Oral Torah (the rulings of the Sages that had taken on *halachic* authority) had found its place along side of the Written Torah. In some cases it was viewed as secondary to the Written Torah, but in practical measures it was received as equal or even superior. The prevailing view was that the Oral Torah gave the proper manner in which the Written Torah was to be obeyed. We must remember, then, that when we encounter the word “Law” (νόμος, *nomos*) in the Apostolic Scriptures, we can not simply presume that the Books of Moses are its referent. Such a monolithic approach to the word ignores the historical setting. We must, in every case, at least give way to the possibility that Written and Oral Torah are viewed as a unified whole (to one degree or another) in the use of the word “Law.”<sup>33</sup>

This is particularly true with the phrase “works of the Law” or “works of the Torah.” Until the discovery of the text from the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT), we had no extra biblical instances in which the phrase “works of the Law” or “works of the Torah” was used. Now that this Qumran document has been discovered, we have another source to consider, and another witness as to what Paul might have meant when he spoke of “works of the Torah.”

The document itself has been titled “*Maseket ma’asei haTorah*,” “some of the works of the Torah.” Because of its fragmentary nature, there is no complete consensus on who the author and recipients were. Stegeman<sup>34</sup> believes it was written by the Teacher of Righteousness, the Qumran leader, to the High Priest in Jerusalem, and that the “homily” is a rebuke for the lack of Torah obser-

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33 See above, p. 92, n. 56.

34 Hartmut Stegeman, *The Library of Qumran* (Brill/Eerdmans, 1998), 104ff.