



Digging Deeper

June 21, 2026

An Exploration of Galatians: Abraham Believed God

By Barbara Sande

"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. 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."

Galatians 3:6-9 NASB1995

Paul now brings in Abraham to make his case that those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. God preached the Gospel to Abraham, telling him that all the nations will be blessed in him. God counts Abraham as righteous because of his faith, not because he adhered to many laws. Enduring Word has some excellent commentary on this passage. Here is an excerpt:

Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness: Paul here quoted from Genesis 15:6. It simply shows that righteousness was accounted to Abraham because he believed God. It was not because he performed some work and certainly not because he was circumcised, because the covenant of circumcision had not yet been given.

Genesis 15:1-6 shows that when Abraham put his trust in God, specifically in God's promise to give him children that would eventually bring forth the Messiah, God credited this belief to Abraham's account as righteousness. "Abraham was not justified merely because he believed that God would multiply his seed, but because he embraced the grace of God, trusting to the promised Mediator." (John Calvin)

There are essentially two types of righteousness: righteousness we accomplish by our own efforts and righteousness accounted to us by the work of God when we believe. Since none of us can be good enough to accomplish perfect righteousness, we must have God's righteousness accounted to us by doing just what Abram did: Abraham believed God.

The NASB95 version uses "reckoned" instead of "accounted". According to the Blue Letter Bible lexicon, "reckoned" is from the Greek word λογίζομαι or logizomai with a number of meanings in Bible usages:

to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over

to take into account, to make an account of

metaph. to pass to one's account, to impute

a thing is reckoned as or to be something, i.e. as availing for or equivalent to something, as having the like force and weight

to number among, reckon with

to reckon or account

to reckon inward, count up or weigh the reasons, to deliberate
by reckoning up all the reasons, to gather or infer
to consider, take into account, weigh, meditate on
to suppose, deem, judge
to determine, purpose, decide

God accounted for Abraham's faith and determined it was righteousness. Romans 4:9-12 explains this in more detail:

"Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness." How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised."

Romans 4:9-12 NASB1995

This reckoning for Abraham was before he was circumcised. He then received the sign of circumcision (like baptism) as a seal of the righteousness of the faith he had. He was the father of all with faith, circumcised and uncircumcised.

There's a key passage, again from Enduring Word, that we need to take to heart:

Believed God: It wasn't that Abraham believed in God (as we usually speak of believing in God). Instead, it was that Abraham believed God. Those who only believe in God, in the sense that they believe He exists, are only as spiritual as demons are (James 2:19).

"Believed, of course, means more than that he accepted what God said as true (though, of course, he did that); it means that he trusted God." (Leon Morris)

Generally speaking, ancient Rabbis did not really admire Abraham's faith. They believed he was so loved by God because he was thought to have kept the law hundreds of years before it was given. For these and other reasons, when Paul brought up Abraham, it would have been a complete surprise to his opponents, who believed that Abraham proved their point. "Paul's emphasis on Abraham's faith must have come as a complete surprise to the Galatians." (Leon Morris)

However, some Rabbis had seen the importance of Abraham's faith. "It is remarkable that the Jews themselves maintained that Abraham was saved by faith. Mehilta, in Yalcut Simeoni, page 1, fol. 69, makes this assertion: 'It is evident that Abraham could not obtain an inheritance either in this world or in the world to come, but by faith.'" (Adam Clarke)

"Faith in God constitutes the highest worship, the prime duty, the first obedience, and the foremost sacrifice. Without faith God forfeits His glory, wisdom, truth, and mercy in us. The first duty of man is to believe in God and to honor Him with his faith. Faith is truly the height of wisdom, the right kind of righteousness, the only real religion... Faith says to God: 'I believe what you say.'" (Martin Luther)

So, do you believe in God or do you believe God? The former is probably pretty easy for someone to say in this secular age: "Yeah, I believe in [a] God because of what I see in this creation". That's a deistic, remote belief that has nothing to do with the living God but throws a bone in the direction of a mysterious all-powerful unseen God. Think about saying it the second way: "I BELIEVE God because I can

trust in His goodness and love for me". Even the demons believe in God, as James points out in his epistle. And Luther falls back on "belief in God", but he gets most of the point across anyway.

In light of the horrible atrocities that were committed in Israel on October 7, I have seen some of my believing friends resorting to a "replacement" theory about being "sons of Abraham" (that the church of Christ replaces the nation of Israel and we just don't have to care what happens to them). I am quite appreciative that David Guzik nips this in the bud and calls out that misapplication quite effectively in these comments. The link to Abraham is through faith alone and not through genetics or works; do recall, though, that the first believers in Christ were Jews!

Are sons of Abraham: This was a great comfort to the Gentile Christians who were regarded as "second class Christians" by others. Now they could know that they had a real, important link to Abraham and could consider themselves sons of Abraham.

Sadly, Christians have taken this glorious truth and misapplied it through the centuries. This has been a verse that many claim in support of replacement theology- the idea that God is finished with the people of Israel as a nation or a distinct ethnic group, and that the Church spiritually inherits all the promises made to Israel.

Replacement theology has done tremendous damage in the Church, providing the theological fuel for the fires of horrible persecution of the Jews. If Galatians 3:7 were the only verse in the Bible speaking to the issue, there might be a place for saying that the Church has completely replaced Israel. But we understand the Bible according to its entire message, and allow one passage to give light to others.

For example, Romans 11:25 (hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in) states clearly that God is not finished with Israel as a nation or a distinct ethnic group. Even though God has turned the focus of His saving mercies away from Israel on to the Gentiles, He will turn it back again. This simple passage refutes those who insist that God is forever done with Israel as Israel, and that the Church is the New Israel and inherits every promise ever made to national and ethnic Israel of the Old Testament.

We are reminded of the enduring character of the promises made to national and ethnic Israel (such as Genesis 13:15 and Genesis 17:7-8). God is not "finished" with Israel, and Israel is not "spiritualized" as the church. While we do see and rejoice in a continuity of God's work throughout all His people through all generations, we still see a distinction between Israel and the Church - a distinction that Paul understands well.

The Gospel goes out to the nations. The nations do not come and assimilate into Israel before they can be made righteous before God. Interestingly, expanding on the verses in Romans 11 finds these words that truly refute the "replacement" idea. Israel (or a remnant of the people of Israel) will embrace the Messiah:

"For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery--so that you will not be wise in your own estimation--that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved;

just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob." "This is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.""

Romans 11:25-27 NASB1995