

# ROMANS, CHAPTER 4

## 1) Why is Romans 4 about Abraham?

- a) All of Romans 4:1–21 is about Abraham; so far, only Rom 1:1–6; 3:21–26 is about Jesus.
- b) This, of course, does not diminish the importance of Jesus, but shows the high importance of Old Testament for understanding the gospel.
- c) Paul will seek to show that the gospel is the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption, not a contradiction or change of plans (1:2; 3:21; 4:31).

## 2) Other views on Abraham (outside the Bible)

**Here are Jewish descriptions of Abraham from outside the Bible that reflect how some people thought about the patriarch in the time of Paul:**

“Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?” (1 Maccabees 2:52, NRSV; ca. 100 B.C.).

<sup>19</sup> “Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations,  
and no one has been found like him in glory.

<sup>20</sup> He kept the law of the Most High,  
and entered into a covenant with him;

he certified the covenant in his flesh,  
and when he was tested he proved faithful.

<sup>21</sup> Therefore the Lord assured him with an oath  
that the nations would be blessed through his offspring;  
that he would make him as numerous as the dust of the earth,  
and exalt his offspring like the stars,  
and give them an inheritance from sea to sea  
and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.” (Sirach 44:19–21, NRSV; ca. 200 B.C.)

“For Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life” (Jubilees 23:10; ca. 150 B.C.)

### 3) Paul versus his contemporaries

- a) The predominant understanding about Abraham in Paul's day was that he was justified (declared righteous) on the basis of his works.
- b) Paul presents a different understanding: Scripture says that Abraham was justified (declared righteous) on the basis of faith *apart from and before any works*.

### 4) The basis of Abraham's justification (4:1-8)

- a) The testimony of Scripture makes it crystal clear that God declared Abraham righteous on the basis of his faith (4:3; Gen 15:6).
- b) David also affirms that justification (right-standing before God) is given to *sinners*.
- c) The key term is "count" (4:6, 8): God counts/imputes righteousness to the sinner and does *not* count/impute their sin to them.

### 5) The timing of Abraham's justification (4:9-12)

### 6) The reason for Abraham's justification (4:13-22)

- a) What does 4:14 mean? How would dependence on the law make God's promise null and void? See 4:15a (also 3:20).
- b) Abraham did not simply express a general belief that God exists, but he believed *the promise* of God. *That* is the reason for his justification.

### 7) Our connection to Abraham's justification (4:23-25)

Abraham believed that God *would* raise the dead, and it was counted as righteousness.

Christians believe that God *has* raised the dead, and it is counted as righteousness.