



## **ABRAHAM—JUSTIFIED BY FAITH**

### **Reading: Genesis 14-15**

We have seen from the promise that God made to Abraham (Genesis 13:14-17), that it held a glorious hope not only for him but for all those who, through baptism into the Lord Jesus Christ, share that hope with him (Galatians 3:16, 26-29).

After receiving this promise Abram moved to Hebron in the south of the land of Canaan.

### **Abram Delivers Lot from Captivity (Genesis 14:1-16)**

The events of this chapter lead up to a most interesting meeting between Abram and Melchizedek. A northern confederacy of powers had placed Sodom and other cities of the far south under tribute. After thirteen years they rebelled and the kings of the north, led by Chedorlaomer, swept down to suppress this revolt.

The ensuing battle took place *“in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea”* (v3). This area was a very fertile valley in those days (Genesis 13:10) but we are also informed that it is called *“the salt sea”* because of the catastrophe that occurred there later when Sodom was destroyed (Genesis 19:24-25). The kings of the north were victorious in the battle and led off captives, including Lot, Abraham’s nephew, who by this time was actually living in Sodom (v12).

One who escaped came and told *“Abram the Hebrew”* what had happened to Lot (v13). This is the first time that the word *“Hebrew”* occurs in the Bible. It means *“one who has crossed over”*. It was a title given to Abram because he had crossed over the Euphrates, having left his country and kindred in obedience to God (Genesis 12:1-3). Abram now, with a **small** company of his own servants, pursued and overtook this **great** army of the northern confederacy and overthrew them at night (v15). When he returned, bringing with him Lot and all the people and their goods, he was met by two kings.

The king of Sodom went out to meet Abram *“at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king’s dale”* (v17). Now we know that the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked (Genesis 13:13), and here this king of a city notorious for its immorality came to meet the God-fearing man Abram.

### **Abram Meets Melchizedek, the King Priest (Genesis 14:17-24)**

At precisely the same place, Melchizedek the king of Salem also came out to meet Abram. This king was a striking contrast to the king of Sodom and all that he stood for. Melchizedek was not only a king but was also *“the priest of the most high God”* (v18). Abram acknowledged Melchizedek, who had come to meet him with bread and wine, praising God for delivering Abram from his enemies. As High Priest he would mediate for Abram as he worshipped God (v18-20).

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews draws important lessons about the work of the Lord Jesus Christ from this incident. We see that this King-Priest Melchizedek foreshadowed Christ’s role as King and High Priest of God. In Hebrews chapters 5 to 7 he speaks of this as follows:

- 1 God had foretold that one was coming who would be *“a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek”* (Psalm 110:4). The writer shows that this prophecy was speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 5:5-6; 6:20; 7:17,21).
- 2 He shows that the name Melchizedek is very significant. It is made up of two Hebrew words, *“melchi”* meaning *“king”* and *“zedek”* meaning *“righteousness”*. Thus Melchizedek is a title—*“King of Righteousness”* (Hebrews 7:1-2).
- 3 He also shows that the word *“Salem”*, which means *“peace”*, is significant too.  
Putting these two titles together we learn that this man was not only *“King of Righteousness”* but also *“King of Peace”* (Hebrews 7:1-2). He foreshadows the Lord Jesus Christ whose reign will be renowned for **righteousness** and **peace** (Psalm 72:7).
- 4 The Lord Jesus Christ is now at the right hand of God in heaven, mediating as High Priest for those who draw near to God through him (Hebrews 7:3; 10:21-22).



5 This priesthood of Christ, which is of the order of Melchizedek, is superior to the priesthood that was given to Israel under the Law of Moses (Hebrews 7:7-10). The priesthood of the order of Aaron came to an end. The priesthood of Jesus Christ will never end, because he is immortal.

From this incident in the life of Abram we see that a greater High Priest was foreshadowed. Through this greater High Priest, Jesus Christ, those who develop a faith like Abram and are baptised into Christ have access to God in heaven.

#### **Abram Refuses the King of Sodom's Goods**

After Abram had concluded his worship with Melchizedek, the king of Sodom came forward with this proposition: *"Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself"* (v21). Abram's simple reply reveals his great faith in the living God: *"I have lift up my hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich"* (v22-23).

Abram did not want in his household anything that came from one of the most ungodly societies the world has ever known. Such was his abhorrence of that way of life, that he had vowed not to take any reward from this man. His God had given him the victory and he was content to trust in Him. Since God was *"the possessor of heaven and earth"*, as Abram acknowledged, then the King of Sodom could give him nothing that was not already God's.

Although Lot witnessed all this and heard these discussions, he went back to his home in Sodom. He should have realised that to remain with Abram would have given him and his family security and peace and kept them in God's way.

#### **Abram is Promised a Seed (Genesis 15:1-6)**

Following this incident, which shows Abram's faith in God's over-shadowing care and protection, God appeared to him again saying: *"Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward"* (v1).

Abram had declared to the King of Sodom his complete dependence upon God, and now God appeared and confirmed that He would protect him (be his "shield"), and provide for him (be his "exceeding great reward").

However Abram had a question that puzzled him greatly—God had promised the land of Canaan to him and to his seed, but as yet he had no seed. He therefore said: *"Behold, to me thou hast given no seed"* (v3).

In response, God re-affirmed His promise of a son: *"he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir"* (v4). He brought Abram outside to stand under the starry sky and told him to look toward the heavens and count the stars. *"So shall thy seed be"*, God said (v5). He not only promised him a seed but told him that his seed would be innumerable, like the stars for number.

**This next statement is among the most wonderful in the Bible. It sets forth the basis upon which God will forgive sin.** Let us look carefully at what is stated:

#### **Verse 6**

**"he believed in the Lord"** Although Abram did not know how it would happen, he did not doubt that God would fulfil His word. Humanly speaking, it was impossible for Abram and Sarai to have children (Genesis 11:30; cp Romans 4:16-22), yet Abram believed the words of God.

**"believed"** We need to understand that the words *"faith"* and *"belief"* in our Bible are interchangeable. An example of this is seen in Romans 3:22: *"the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe"*. Here the words *"faith"* and *"believe"* are derived from the same Greek word in the original text and are used interchangeably by the translators. It will help our understanding if we bear this in mind as we consider this subject further.

**"And he [God] counted it to him [Abram] for righteousness"** God counted Abram's faith for righteousness. Abram's faith honoured God and so God considered him as righteous. The apostle



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Paul, realising the importance of this, devotes a whole chapter in his letter to the Romans to explain the significance of this statement (Romans 4).

It is worth noting here, too, that the English words “just” and “righteous” are translations of the same word in the Greek. So “to justify” means the same as “to make righteous”.

#### **The Blessing of Righteousness (Romans 4:1-8)**

What is the importance of being declared “righteous” by God? It means that God has forgiven our sins. In Romans 3:10 Paul shows that “there is none righteous, no, not one”, for “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (v23). However, in His mercy, God is willing to count a man of faith ‘righteous’ and forgive his sins. If we read through Romans 4:1-8 we see this clearly set out.

The Jews lived under the Law of Moses and endeavoured to keep that Law perfectly. However, they became so engrossed in every little detail, that they often missed the point that God was teaching them. They were, in fact, not concentrating on obeying God, but on giving the appearance of being ‘righteous’. Paul says that they were really trying to “establish their own righteousness”.

But their efforts were futile, for they could not keep the Law, as it only kept highlighting their failings and sins. It showed up the fact that they were unable to keep it. So Paul wrote: “*by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified [that is, declared righteous] in his [God’s] sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin*” (Romans 3:20). Therefore because of sin, there was no hope for man to be righteous before his God by obeying laws.

Paul goes on to show that God in His grace actually judges man on a different basis. He judges him on his faith. God will impute (that is, attribute) “righteousness” to man on the basis of his “faith”, because man’s faith honours Him. He takes the expression from Genesis 15:6, and quotes it in Romans 4:3. “*Abraham **believed** God and it was **counted** unto him **for righteousness**”.* Abram had righteousness imputed to him through the grace of God because of his faith.

Paul then explains the wonderful benefit that comes from being counted righteous—the blessing of forgiveness of sins. He quotes the example of David, who wrote of this in Psalm 32:1-2: “*David describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose **iniquities are forgiven**, and whose **sins are covered**. Blessed is the man to whom **the Lord will not impute sin***” (Romans 4:6-8). In God’s great mercy He was willing to forgive David, because David was a man of outstanding faith who confessed and repented of his sins.

Here therefore we have the basis for forgiveness of sins clearly set out. It is through faith that a man is “justified”, that is, counted righteous (Romans 5:1). If we are justified or declared righteous in God’s sight, that means by His grace **He has forgiven our sins**. And this in turn means that we have found favour with God. We who are sinners are in this way reconciled to God.

Paul concludes this section with the comforting words: “*Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it [righteousness] was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe [have faith] on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification*” (Romans 4:23-25).

#### **Abram Receives a Covenant Regarding the Land (Genesis 15:7-21)**

Having received the answer to the question about his seed (15:3), Abram now asked about the promise of the land. He said, “*Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit the land?*” (v8). In response God made a covenant with Abram. In Biblical days a covenant was made by cutting an animal into parts, and the two parties involved in making the covenant walked between the pieces (cp Jeremiah 34:18-19). Abram, in obedience to God, took the animals God required and cut them in pieces and laid them out in order. All day he protected them from the birds and in the evening he fell into a deep sleep, symbolically representing death.

God then spoke to Abram, telling him the details of the covenant. After his death his seed would go into Egypt and be oppressed there and become slaves. But after 400 years they would return to the land God had promised them (v13-14). God was showing him, among other things, that the covenant would not be fulfilled in his lifetime.



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God confirmed His promise of the land with this covenant. His presence, symbolised by a lamp of fire, passed between the pieces, demonstrating that He Himself was bound to fulfil the covenant and the promise. *“In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land”* (v18). God described to him now the boundaries of the land that was promised, being *“from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates”*.

#### In this Chapter we have Seen Two Important Principles:

- Abram was justified, that is, counted as righteous, because of his faith
- God, through a covenant, confirmed His promise of the land to Abraham and his seed.

#### Summary Points

- 1 In **Genesis 15:6** we read that Abraham believed God and God counted his faith for righteousness.
- 2 When God imputed righteousness to Abraham because of his faith it meant that God was forgiving his sins (**Romans 4:6-8**).
- 3 Paul says this was written for us also. If we have faith in God’s redemptive work through Jesus Christ then we too can have our sins forgiven and be counted righteous before God (**Romans 4:23-25**). We demonstrate faith that pleases God by being baptised and committing ourselves to serve Him.
- 4 This good news by which we can be justified (or, counted righteous by God and having our sins forgiven) through faith is called the *“gospel”* in **Galatians 3:8**.

#### Lesson 9 - Questions

- 1 Who was Melchizedek?
- 2 Who is now *“a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek”*?
- 3 What was Abraham’s faith counted for? (Genesis 15:6)
- 4 What is the blessing of being counted *“righteous”* by God?
- 5 What must we show towards God if we are to be *“justified”* or have righteousness imputed to us?
- 6 What did God covenant to give to Abraham at this time?