

Romans 4

Read Romans 4:1-12: The Jews place their history of faith back to Abraham. They note that he was circumcised to declare his faith in God. Abram, was described as a traveler. He was the first Hebrew, and yet he was also a Gentile. He was a Chaldean extracted from Ur of the Chaldees. God told him that he did not belong with his ancestors in their idolatry. He also did not belong with the Canaanites, who were idolaters. He started a new family, essentially. Extracted from the world to start something new.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." ³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." ⁹ Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." (Genesis 17)

Accordingly, the Jews hang on to circumcision as the icon for adherence to the Law of Moses. In reality, the circumcision came along after Abraham's faith. It was one of many follow-on acts of obedience. It is like saying that a person has to be baptized to be saved. Not so. It is just the normal progression of obedience. Similarly, the Catholics place a huge portion the identity on good works. That gets away from God's transforming work and puts transformation on man's obedience to the cause. That is not the gospel, because it fails.

Some people have a hybrid belief. They believe that they are saved by the redeeming work of Christ on the cross; but they will still try to distinguish themselves from their brethren. They seek extra credit for going above and beyond.

⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. ⁷ You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸ This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. ⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. ¹⁰ I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear the punishment, whoever he is. ¹¹ But as for me, brothers and sisters, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been eliminated. ¹² I wish that those who are troubling you would even emasculate themselves. (Galatians 5)

It is unsatisfying to the prideful mind to have someone give you your value...and not earn anything. We want to be credible. In reality, we tend to greatly over-value our righteous acts. Abraham was declared to be righteous before he was circumcised.

Read Romans 4:13-25: God promised that Abraham and his descendants would inherit the land of Israel. This unilateral promise from God was a gift to Abraham's clan. It was to honor the effort this man made to find God and get to know him. He also promised him to father many nations. That part is not physical, but spiritual.

These Abrahamic promises are completely different than what Moses eventually offered. The Mosaic Law was not a unilateral gift of status. It was a bilateral set of conditions. The Mosaic Law required a person to live up to the Law to be saved; with animal substitutions allowed.

The Abrahamic group was a faith-based group. The Mosaic group are legalists. How do I get into the Abrahamic promise? God told Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, not just Israel. They would be known as the people of God's promises. What are the requirements? Abraham believed that God could make a baby from to very old people, who were essentially dead. Abraham believed God when he told them this. Likewise, we must believe in all of God's promises.

⁹ Then they said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." ¹⁰ He said, "I will certainly return to you at this time next year; and behold, your wife Sarah will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah

was past ^[n]childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have become old, am I to have pleasure, my lord being old also?” ¹³ But the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I actually give birth to a child, when I am so old?’” ¹⁴ Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” ¹⁵ Sarah denied it, however, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. And He said, “No, but you did laugh.” (Genesis 18)

Specifically, we are saved when we believe all of the promises that Jesus made.