# Justification

# Abram's Faith Abraham's Deeds



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# THE FAITH OF ABRAM

(GENESIS 12 TO 15)

ABRAM was justified by faith. One would suppose that, henceforth, this would be God's method with His people always. How remarkable it is to find that, until Paul writes Romans, it is practically ignored! The Hebrew Scriptures and our Lord's ministry abound with the words just and righteous, but hardly a word is said concerning faith righteousness. Paul dwells upon it at great length. It is basic in the evangel of the Uncircumcision. But after Paul it is dropped once more. In fact James denies it and says that a man is not justified by faith only (Jas. 2:24). It is only after Israel had failed utterly that the prophet Habakkuk reverts to the basic truth that the righteous by his faith is living (Hab. 2:4). And it is only in view of Israel's apostasy as recorded in Acts that God goes back to the fundamental fact made known to Abram before he was circumcised, that faith in Him is reckoned as righteousness. This great and gracious truth is no part of the evangel of the Circumcision.

The evangel of the Circumcision is occupied with righteousness (or rather the unrighteousness) of man. The righteousness imparted by faith is God's. It is His power for salvation because in it God's righteousness is revealed. Paul puts this as the foundation of the evangel for today (Rom. 1:17). It displays His righteousness, that He should be just and the Justifier of the one who is of the faith of Jesus (Rom. 3:25-26). The justification of the Circumcision is by law observance. Because they are ignorant of God's righteousness they seek to estab-

lish their own (Rom. 10:3). Even Peter, the greatest of the Circumcision apostles, who had been chosen to go to Cornelius (Acts 15:7) and who came nearer to understanding the power of grace than any other (Acts.15:11), had to be corrected and shown the truth (Gal. 2:14-16).

Faith righteousness is first found in connection with Abram. He was prepared for the righteousness of faith by his previous experience with his fellow men. Everything they do is below the strict standard of justice. Everything God does far exceeds it. There is no neutral condition such as men would deem just and right. The action of Lot in going to Sodom was wrong. The men of that city were exceedingly wicked. The war of the kings was unjust. The spoiling of Sodom cannot be defended. especially the fate of Lot. Even the rescue of Lot does not set matters right. On the other hand, the act of Melchizedek exceeds the strict line of justice. Abram refused his just due for the rescue. It is only when we come to the declarations of God that we have divine righteousness, but this far surpasses what we understand by that term. Abram's acceptance of God's unmerited favor is what constitutes his righteousness, because this is the aim and object of God's dealings with him, as it is with all of His creatures.

Faith righteousness is about to be reckoned to Abram. It is with this in view that we are given the episodes which precede it. There is a strong contrast between the unrighteousness connected with the conduct and capture of Lot, the campaign of the confederated kings, the offer of the king of Sodom, and the course of Abram in rescuing the captives, in refusing to accept a reward, and especially in paying tithes to Melchizedek, king of Salem. If we once see how wrong all of these doings were, excluding Abram's acts of faith, it will throw a flood of light upon the great truth of justification by faith, and enable us to understand what faith righteousness really

is. These incidents are not mere historical records. We must look beneath the surface to see their purpose. They are a moving picture showing that God is always right and, unless man believes His Word and accepts His righteousness, he is always wrong. Everything which is not out of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23).

The human idea of right is one of exact reciprocation. so much service for so much hire, so much protection for so much reward. Our great failure is that we carry this into our relationship with God, and thus drag Him down to our own level. Men are ever trying to pay God for His protection and give Him wages for His work. This may be considered right among men, but it is utterly wrong when applied to God. It is an insult to patronize Him. It is a shame to offer Him wages. We have nothing that He has not given us, and can do nothing for Him except in the strength which He provides. We are bankrupt when it comes to paying for His salvation and utterly destitute when we seek to settle for His services. It is absolutely wrong that we should even attempt to do these things, for they are contrary to His present place as the Deity and His future goal as our All.

When we focus our eyes upon men and their activities we are bewildered if we try to judge between them. There is no fixed standard by which to determine right No one seems to be absolutely right or from wrong. utterly wrong. The only settled standard is God's revelation. The simplest and most practical test is the consummation. Whatever directly tends to subject men to God and make Him their All, that is divinely right. Whatever tends otherwise and only indirectly effects God's intention, is wrong, even if it eventually contributes to His glory and His goal. It is only as we consider Abram's experience in the light of God's ultimate that we can understand how his faith is reckoned for righteousness. His acceptance of the Deity as His Shield and Hire was a great step toward God's goal. It was supremely right on the part of Abram although it far exceeded what we call righteousness on the part of God.

The roots of justification by faith are best seen in the early life of Abram. If we will compare his deeds and the acts of those about him with the divine standard, we will find that he is in harmony with God's goal, and that therefore his righteousness was not the neutral thing which exactly squares accounts, but, like God's, it exceeds the strict confines of justice as men see it. Abram allowed Lot to use a part of the land promised to him (to which Lot had no right), because it separated them, which was according to God's word and plan. This made it possible for God to deal with Lot apart from Abram. He refused all compensation for his efforts in rescuing Lot and in restoring to the king of Sodom what he had lost. This is far above the human idea of justice.

Abram was given the land of Canaan. From the superficial human standpoint it may appear wrong to take the land away from its inhabitants and give it to Abram and his seed. Seen from the vantage of the divine, it was supremely right, God alone is the actual Owner of the earth and its treasures, and He alone has the disposal of any part of it. The nations of Canaan not only had no title to the land they held, but they did not recognize the true Owner. They brought Him nothing for its use. Superficially again, Abram had even less claim on the land, for he was a stranger and made no improvements. The only rights he had were divine, and looked forward to the future, when Israel would bring a tenth of its produce to support His worship, and it would become a place where Jehovah would dwell and glorify His name. Neither Abram nor the nations in the land could make any material return for the use of the land. for this was also Jehovah's, and He has no need of anything that they had. Abram alone paid the proper price when he built an altar and offered a sacrifice. Worship, thanksgiving and praise, the outflow of a grateful heart,

these are the precious gems which God can use to adorn His diadem, and they are a rich rental for the promised land.

THE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF LOT

Let us consider Abram's dealings with his nephew. Lot was not the possessor of the promises, and he had no rights in the land of Canaan, either human or divine (Gen. 12:7). As there was not room for the flocks of both of them, he should rightfully have withdrawn. Abram would have been within his rights if he had driven him out. When strife arose between their herdsmen, Abram was in line with God in his desire for peace, for God will eventually reconcile all to Himself. As the younger, Lot ought to have been subject to Abram, for

that is the proper place of man in the consummation.

Abram, strange to say, although it does not belong to him, takes the place of subjection! He not only refuses to make good his rightful claim to the whole land, as promised him by God, and his rights as the elder, but gives Lot his choice. He took what was left. This Lot should never have allowed. Abram had taken God's choice for him, and was acting along the line that leads directly to the consummation. This is what counts as righteous with God. This is divine righteousness. Abram had it, not because he made a just division of the land between himself and Lot, but because he anticipated, by faith, the end that God has in view. On the other hand, Lot, though righteous among men, did not act according to faith righteousness, so he takes advantage of Abram. and appropriates the best part of God's gift for himself. His choice was soulish. He looked for physical satisfaction from the rich pastures of the Jordan valley. But when he came to dwell in Sodom, his soul was tormented by the lawlessness of his surroundings. Later, he lost all, and Abram had to come to his rescue. He was not in God's will, but served as a foil for God's dealings with Abram. His descendants fought the chosen people.

Abram's contact with the warfare of that day gives a further insight into His faith righteousness and the wrongdoing of the times. Of some of the kings, engaged in this conflict, we know that they had no right even to live, for later they were destroyed by God Himself. The rest of them were probably not so very much better. What real right did they have to the territory they claimed as their own? Did they pay Jehovah for the use of it? Did they give Him a tithe of what it produced? Did they thank and praise Him for it? And now some of them band together and subjugate the peoples about them and demand tribute, just as if they were God, the true Owner of the neighboring lands as well as their own. Had they been subject to God and acknowledged His rights, no such wrongs could have been perpetrated.

But in the righteousness of faith there is more than mere possessing. There is blessing. Abram was given a much greater gift than the land. He and his seed were to be blest in it, and, far more than this, he was to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Instead of resenting Lot's mercenary conduct and refusing to help him in his distress, he takes hold of God's promise by faith and rescues his relative and neighbors from their foes. He is confident that God will prosper him in it, for His word must be fulfilled. His land and his life are safe in Jehovah's keeping. As he has no son, he cannot die until provision has been made for the innumerable progeny which Jehovah promised. His life was insured by the Life Giver Himself. Later, the nation of Israel lost sight of this great truth. They wanted blessing for themselves. but were little concerned about the blessing of others. They implored for deliverance when in distress, but made no move to insure the well being of other nations when they needed help. In the future their blessing will rest largely on their ability to bring peace and plenty to the other nations of the earth.

Blessing, however, demands a background. Perhaps we can understand this better if we put ourselves in the place of Lot. He was probably pleased to get the grazing land near Sodom for his herds and flocks, after the strife with Abram's herdsmen, although the Sodomites would not let him enjoy it. But how much more blest did he feel after having been rescued from the captivity of the kings! In both cases Abram was a blessing. In the first case it was hardly appreciated, because Lot imagined it more or less his right. But in the latter he had no illusions, and Abram acted far above the level of mere justice. What Abram did was right from the divine standpoint, for it was in line with God's plans, and this alone determines right in His sight.

What a contrast between Abram and the kings! They had no title to their own land, yet seek to extend their unjust holdings by force of arms. He had a perfect title to all that Jehovah had given him, yet he yields to Lot when he calmly appropriates the best part that he could find. They not only robbed God of His rights, but this led to much loss and harm and woe to their fellows and probably cost them many lives besides. So it must always be. Those who do not glorify and thank the Deity as God must suffer the righteous retribution of this fundamental error by being barred from blessing themselves, and of being a blessing to others. Abram's faith led him to give God His place, and this led to restoration and blessing.

The Authorized Version gives this episode a far more sanguinary coloring than the Hebrew warrants. It speaks of arming his trained servants, as if he had surrounded himself with a fighting force in order to be able to defend the land which Jehovah had given him. And then it speaks of the slaughter of the kings, as if there had been a bloody carnage, in which all the kings were slain. This would be quite out of line with faith. As Melchizedek said, the Supreme had awarded the foe into his

hand. It was not due to his superior military might. His small band of three hundred and eighteen were dedicated to him, not trained to bear arms. It is not said that he armed them. The Revisers change to led them forth. The Hebrew uses the word empty. He emptied his establishment in order to get so many. We may suppose that the women looked after things during their absence. He smote the enemy and pursued them to the neighborhood of Damascus. He routed them by a surprise night attack, so that they fled, and left their prisoners and booty behind. It was Jehovah's doing, not Abram's, and he freely acknowledged it.

Abram had an opportunity to greatly enrich himself as a result of his successful rescue. It is always considered right and proper that an effort of this kind, with all its risks, should be liberally repaid. Once a ship at sea sends out the S O S signal, it is liable for a large salvage charge. Even the king of Sodom recognized this and considered it right to let Abram keep all the goods, but return all the souls, or living creatures. But the king of Sodom had nothing to give. He had no valid title to anything that he had. More than that, he and his people were greatly in debt to God. They were sinners excessively before Jehovah. Had Abram accepted anything from him, it would have been an acknowledgment of his ownership, which would have put him in the place of God.

# MELCHIZEDEK, KING OF SALEM

At this juncture a most remarkable character is injected, whose name and title are most suggestive, in view of our present investigation of faith righteousness. In Hebrew mulch means king. His name is king of righteousness, or righteous king, and his title is king of peace, or prosperity. He is priest of the Supreme Deity, the Owner of heaven and earth, the One Who actually rescued the captives from the kings and Who recovered the property which had been taken from Sodom and Lot.

He alone is entitled to recompense. To Him alone is due the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving which His priest will offer in behalf of those who have been saved. So Abram gives Melchizedek tithes from all. This is faith righteousness. Before Abram considers any reward for his recovery of what had been carried away, he, through the priest of the Supreme, dedicates a tenth of it to His worship.

It is worthy of note that the august title, the Supreme Deity, first appears on the pages of revelation in connection with faith righteousness. Neither one of these exalted appellations is revealed before Melchizedek, the king of righteousness, comes upon the scene. Is this not because all genuine righteousness in the universe must be based upon the acknowledgment of God's deity and supremacy? This is the divine foundation of all real righteousness, the only stable basis on which any permanent right can rest. We will never understand faith righteousness until we realize what true deity involves. and the supremacy which belongs to it. All right must be rooted in the Supreme Deity. None must be derived from any other source. Man's righteousness ignores both His deity and supremacy, hence is little more than a legal fiction, which will melt away once it enters into His august Presence. There may be a relative righteousness. man to man, but even this becomes unrighteous when it does not recognize the rights of the Deity Supreme.

The Hebrew stem al, which denotes dispose, gives us two closely related titles, Al, and Aleim (usually spelled Elohim). The Authorized Version renders both by God, indiscriminately. Aleim is used thousands of times, so is best rendered by the usual name for the Deity in English, God. But Al is used only about two hundred fifty times, especially in poetry, principally in Job, the Psalms, and Isaiah, and seems to have more exclusive and elevated usage, so our English Deity may suit very well. As to sense, God might be better rendered by Disposer, and

Deity by Arbiter, but these lack the solemn awfulness which becomes a divine title.

How few of the saints, even today, know God as the Deity! That is because they do not realize their own creaturehood. Like Abram in unbelief, they are convinced that their acts, their doings are indispensable, or else God cannot succeed in His plans. How many are seeking to forward the kingdom, yet succeed only in gendering Ishmael's that hinder rather than help! The whole of Christendom is like that. It has no real Deity, Who can walk alone without their help. They, rather than the Deity, are all-sufficient. How great have they grown in the earth! And almost all are sons of Hagar, in slavery, working, working, working, to save themselves and the world. O that God would give us a realization of His Deity and His all-sufficiency! That Abram did not fully recognize this is clear, for God immediately goes on to put him through a series of tests, all of which are designed to demonstrate that the flesh is not a deity, and is not sufficient.

The title Supreme comes from the stem ol, on, and branches out into over, ascend (the ascent or "burnt" offering), elevate, surpass, uppermost, or supreme (oliun). It is usually translated most high, or Most High, either as a mere descriptive adjective, or as a title. It is perfectly rendered by our English title, the Supreme. Its meaning is clear. He is above all others. He should be given that place in every realm. Nothing else can be really right.

The title, "Owner of the heavens and the earth," fits perfectly into this picture. The customs connected with leases and property rights vary so much today from those which are recorded in the Scriptures that it is difficult to sort out suitable words in translation. Present practice is basically wrong. It rests on the false assumption that ownership is vested in man, that he can obtain absolute control of lands and houses

and goods and even living creatures, and can dispose of these to others, as he wills. When God calls Himself the Owner, He challenges man's title to everything that he possesses. In Israel, under the law, there were few freeholds. Almost all the land remained in the hands of Jehovah, and was distributed by Him by means of the lot. It recognized that all ownership is vested only in God. To believe this because God has said it, is right, so that the very faith may be reckoned as righteousness.

As the thought of human ownership is so foreign to the Hebrew scriptures, there seems to be no special word to express it. In this passage it is really the Acquirer, the buyer, for it was by buying that permanent possession was obtained. The Hebrew word is easily remembered. for kne is the same as Cain. Eve called him this because she thought she had paid for him in some way. Literally she bought or acquired him. This is the first intimation of his rebellion against God (Gen. 4:10). But in English we cannot very well apply the name Buyer to God because He did not buy or acquire anything in a literal sense, seeing that all is out of Him. What the Hebrew means is that He occupies the control over all things that a buyer has over that which he has bought. Our term Owner is probably the nearest that we have. Among men, ownership comes by acquiring or buying. God has it by creation.

The word holding is another way of expressing permanent possession in Hebrew. When his wife Sarah died, Abraham wanted a place for her and himself in the land as a token of his faith in God's promise. Joseph had the same wish. His bones were also buried there (Gen. 50:25). So Abraham requested a holding (A.V. possession) in which to bury his dead. After characteristic palaver, he bought the cave of Machpelah for this purpose. The field, the trees and the cave were all "made sure" by the payment of a large sum of silver (Gen. 23:3-20) so that Abraham became the

"buyer" or owner in perpetuity. And, remarkable as it may seem, it is still his! No one has ever dared to dispute his title to it. I do not know just what its legal status is today, but I consider no other piece of real estate has its title so well insured as the tomb of Abraham. If he arose today, no one would care to take it from him. And his it will remain as long as the earth abides, as a token that God's promise will be redeemed. The law itself is such a "holding." It will be Abraham's for the eons (Gen. 17:8).

A great deal of mystery has been wrapped about the man Melchizedek. Some have even insisted that he was the Son of God Himself. But Scripture makes Christ of the order of Melchizedek, hence He can hardly be the King-priest Himself (Heb. 6:20). As he is to picture the Son of God, the record gives us only such information as is needed in order to show the likeness. writer of Hebrews emphasizes these points in order to stress the fact that our Lord was not a priest at all according to His birth and genealogy. Mary was no priest's daughter. And He could not even assume the priesthood on the strength of His legal relations to Joseph, who was of the tribe of Judah, Melchizedek, being entirely outside the line of Aaron, certainly had no place in the Aaronic priesthood. Hence his genealogy is not given. So also, no hint is given of his death. This was omitted in order to create the impression of a final priesthood, which needs no successor. These things are true of the Son of God, and they are stated accordingly in the record of Melchizedek

#### KING OF PEACE

The setting of this title is superb. Against the dark background of the kings of strife, who robbed one another of their sustenance and happiness, stands the figure of Melchizedek, in solitary majesty, feeding the faithful Abram with bread and wine. These are symbolic of the life and joy which comes to all who recognize the rule of the Son of God, of Whom Melchizedek was a picture. Devastation and misery, destruction and death followed the footsteps of the conquering kings, and they themselves were smitten by Abram. Many of earth's kings are kings of unrighteousness, kings of strife. Like these of old they serve their purpose when we contrast them with the coming King, who alone can bring this tortured earth the peace for which it longs.

#### BREAD AND WINE

Not on bread alone shall man be living, but on every declaration going out of the mouth of God (Mt. 4:4). Wine is rejoicing the heart of a mortal (Ps. 104:15). The bread and wine given to Abram symbolized the sustenance and blessing which he received from Jehovah. It gave not life alone, but joy and satisfaction. He already was wealthy. The goods of Sodom might have increased his riches, but they would not have added to his happiness. A man's life does not consist in the superfluity of the goods that he possesses. Sodom's goods were his by right, from the human viewpoint, yet to accept them would be wrong from the divine, for they would have brought no blessing to Abram, and the loss would probably have made the Sodomites suffer. Abram taken them, he would have accomplished the same result as the pillage of the kings, and put himself in a class with them. Rights that bring no blessing are wrong in God's sight.

#### THE BLESSER BLESSED

Not only is Abram blessed, but his Blesser is also blessed. This is the end and object of all righteousness. Looking at the matter from the standpoint of the universe, what can be basically right which does not contribute to the blessing of its Creator and Sustainer? All of His handiwork proclaims His praise. We need but to look at the stars above to be overcome with

amazed awe. We need but to glance at the flowers beneath our feet to be filled with worshiping wonder. But how little does humanity heed these promptings to give Him the adoration which is His due! Even the creature blessings on which his very life depends bring forth no thankfulness. But Abram appreciates and acknowledges the blessings which he has received, and his heart responds. He gives God His due meed of blessing, because he realizes His protecting care and believes that He is the Supreme Deity Who will carry out all that He has promised.

How much blessing accrued to the Deity through the plunder of Sodom by the confederate kings? They, of course, thought that they would enjoy their ill-gotten goods, but they had no thought of others or of God. The restoration of the spoil, through Abram, had just the opposite effect. Though he took none of it, he was blessed, as well as those whom he rescued. But, above all, the real Rescuer, the Supreme Deity, received His due in thanksgiving and blessing. This is the very summit of righteousness. Nothing else is so utterly and inexcusably wrong as the failure to recognize, to appreciate, and to recompense the Deity for His numberless and limitless benefactions. To bless Him is the greatest act of righteousness of which His creatures are capable.

Legal, formal righteousness is very minute in its requirements. Pharisees could swallow a camel, but a gnat must be carefully strained out. It tithes spices, but overlooks the weightier matters of judgment, mercy and faith (Mt. 23:23-24). Abram's righteousness was not of this kind. On his return with the goods of Sodom, if he needed a thread to sew up a tear, he took it. If his sandal needed a lacing, he helped himself. He was not small and cantankerous. Alas! how many of the saints today seem to take pleasure in their tiny grains of righteousness, and insist on putting them into the oil that would otherwise lubricate the machinery of

intercourse, and so cause tremendous damage! This is not the righteousness of faith but of hypocrisy. It does not bring blessing but contention. Legal, human justice demands strict accounting in both small and great. No one would claim that the king of Sodom had enriched Abram had he taken a lacing, when he could claim all.

It seems to us that the usual translations have missed the point in this passage. The A.V. reads: I will not take from a thread to a shoelatchet. One expects such an expression to cover the whole range of the king's possessions. But, instead of being the most valuable, the lacing of a sandal is not much more precious than a piece of thread. The next sentence takes in the bulk of the goods. Here it seems that the Hebrew from may be rendered more than. In other words, he would not accept anything of real value, but he would not carry this to offensive lengths by refusing small courtesies. The importance of this point lies in the contrast to the law and to human justice, where minute and immaterial acts and facts often hinder and thwart the course of justice and alter it to injustice. Let us not seek to maintain our own righteousness by irritating and offensive insistence on inconsequential trifles. If we are gracious to others the balance in our favor will always cover more than a shoe lacing.

Abram did not try to force his faith or its conduct upon others, who were not ready for it. His neighbors and confederates had a human right to a reward, and he had no right to interfere. So he makes it plain to the king of Sodom that his offer would not hold in their case. Faith cannot be forced. God had not dealt with these men as He had with Abram. They did not realize that the Supreme Deity was the Owner of all. Today, very few take it seriously. Indeed, hardly any of the saints even acknowledge that the Supreme is the Deity. Orthodoxy insists that the clay has the right over the Potter, to mould Him as it will. So we must not ex-

pect conduct in accord with faith even from otherwise intelligent believers. We cannot force them into a path for which they have not been prepared before by God.

Abram received no reward for his great services in rescuing Lot and restoring what he and the king of Sodom had lost. Humanly speaking, that was wrong. Did he not have a right to boast of his exploit? Had not he, with a few helpers, overcome the confederate kings? No one would begrudge him a generous share of the booty to recompense him for his efforts on their behalf. But Abram looked at the matter quite otherwise, because he believed what Melchizedek, the priest of the Supreme Deity had said, that God had given his foes into his hand. If the Supreme had done this, then He should get the reward, not Abram. So a tenth of the spoil was given to Melchizedek, as the representative of the Deity, to be used in His worship. This is faith righteousness. It is based on believing that God not only owns all, but shielded him in his effort to do the right, and that, if he was to get anything for it, the Supreme is the only One who could pay the price.

The king of Sodom would not have given a tenth for the worship of Jehovah. So he is taught the highest righteousness by the act of Abram. But men are not satisfied with a mere tithe, when they can take all. The king of Sodom expected Abraham to claim all the goods. Indeed, his speech implies that Abraham has a right to everything and everyone that he had brought back. So he begs for the "souls," the people and the animals, as a gift, and asks Abram to take the goods. Abram gladly gives him the souls, yet his faith righteousness balked at the idea of taking aught from the king of Sodom. had tasted the bread and wine from the hands of God. He could not receive nourishment or blessing from anyone else, lest they displace the Deity, in Whom his faith found its All. How basically unrighteous it would be for the king of Sodom, who owed Jehovah far more than he could ever repay, to give Abram what he did not really possess!

Because Abram believed, he was concerned about the promised posterity (Gen. 15:2). How could God's word be fulfilled unless he had a son? Was he to adopt one? But he is not allowed to leave the ground of faith. He is still forced to assume what he had been told to expect (Heb. 11:1). He is once more assured that he will have Then he is brought forth outside, and Jehovah says to him, "Look pray, toward the heavens and number the stars, should you be able to number them. Thus is to be your seed." (Gen. 15:5.) The point of this passage lies in the fact that there is no concession to unbelief. No son is given. No time is set. Physically there is no indication of any fulfillment. Rather the opposite, for Abram was getting older every day. Here we have the highest pinnacle of faith which Abram reached, for it is sheer unadulterated acceptance of God's Word, unaided by any outward sign, or the activity of the flesh. That is why this part of Abram's life is the example for the Uncircumcision, who also are justified by faith alone, apart from works (Ro. 4:1-20, 10:1-10, Ga. 3:6, Phil. 3:9).

In the midst of Abram's concern about his successor, God steps in and makes a promise. He does not do anything, but merely tells what He will do. Abram also does nothing. He simply believes that God will do it. The entire absence of works is the key to Abraham's individual relationship to God in uncircumcision. If God had fulfilled the wish of Abram at that time there would have been no room for faith. In that case Abram would doubtless have been grateful, but such help never could have displayed the deep and delightful confidence that Abram had in God. It would certainly not have brought to Abram the most marvelous gratuity that an unrighteous man can ever obtain.

The popular versions, following the present Hebrew

text, say that Abram believed "in the Lord." that is, in Jehovah. But Paul, when quoting this passage, says that he "believed God." There is no noteworthy reading to the contrary. The Septuagint also reads to-God, not in Jehovah. This seems to be more than sufficient evidence to show that the Hebrew text originally read God, not Jehovah, and that it has been tampered with by the scribes since the days of the apostles. If this is so in Genesis, probably the best preserved book in the Hebrew Scriptures, it suggests the possibility of further corruption elsewhere. It also points to the Septuagint version as a help in restoring the ancient text. The superstitious reverence which will not allow a Jew to pronounce the sacred name may account for some of But here it has been inserted, rather these changes. than avoided.

At this point in our study the title used of the Deity is highly significant. "God" fits in here ever so much better than "Jehovah," for this is the germ of the Uncircumcision evangel. It reaches out to those who cannot claim Jehovah as their God. "God" is a timeless title, the great Disposer. Jehovah is confined to the eons and Israel. He is the special God of the covenant people, in contrast to the gods of the nations. As the name finds fulfillment it will vanish. A part of it, the Coming One, will no longer apply when He has come (Rev. 11:17, 16:5). Here it is out of place. The intelligent saint is relieved to find that the Author has Himself given us the true title through that apostle who was especially used to bring this great truth to the nations. If we are of the Uncircumcision, without a God such as Israel had (Eph. 2:12), let us believe the God of Abram, Who is able to fulfill all His promises through the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Then we also will be reckoned righteous.

Eventually all mankind will be justified by God, even the Circumcision (Ro. 5:18-19). But this is not a part

of the evangel of the Circumcision, for Abram was not circumcised until later. Now let us note the great contrast between this and the Circumcision evangel, which is brought before us in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis, when Abram is ninety-nine years old. First God reminds him of his foolish attempt to make up for God's insufficiency. It is a hard lesson to learn. So long as Abram is able to assist God in fulfilling His promise, he may try to do so. So God waits until he is unable. His body is now dead, so far as procreation is concerned. He could no longer bring Ishmael's into the world, and thus aid the Deity in making good His word. So God begins by reciting His appropriate titles: "I am the Deity, All-Sufficient." As such He is able to do all that He promises, and competent to fulfill every engagement that He makes.

#### THE EXCEEDINGLY VAST HIRE

Superficially, it seems as if Abram received no reward for the rescue of Lot and the captives of Sodom and the recovery of their goods. It looked as if he had not been treated righteously, though, of course, it was his own doing. The king of Sodom had offered to do the right thing. But his faith in God led Abram to act according to a higher rule of righteousness which measured everything by its relation to God, rather than man. He knew that, in God's sight, the king of Sodom had nothing to give, for he had not paid the price for what he possessed to the Owner. How could the king of Sodom enrich him, when the poor ruler had nothing to which he was entitled? But Abram did not offend him by pointing out the truth. He probably felt it rather than knew it. He preferred to get his gifts from the one and only Source of all blessing.

Jehovah engages Himself to be the reward of Abraham! This is doubly marvelous. First of all, Abram had nothing except what God had given him. His serv-

ants, his strength, his very life, all were gifts from Jehovah. Besides, the success of the rescue was clearly due to God, who had awarded his foes into his hand. Abram was an unprofitable slave, as all of God's creatures must ever be, apart from the praise and worship which they offer to the Deity. Nevertheless, Jehovah insists on paying Abram the highest wages, the most enormous salary, the most stupendous reward that it is possible to imagine. Jehovah Himself is his hire! That is why Abram is easily the richest of all earth's denizens, the wealthiest of all mundane plutocrats. Almost all other men are burdened or even cursed if they have immense holdings, but Abram's riches always are a blessing because they are really and rightly his, and come from the actual Owner of all.

Dead things may contribute to our comfort, but they are not necessarily a source of blessing. The very land given to Abram and his seed has not satisfied his descendants when they held it apart from faith. When they forsook Jehovah the land spued them out. It is right for things to be a blessing only when they lead to the great goal which God has set—to be All for everyone. It is wrong for things to be a blessing apart from the Blesser.

What greater reward could Abram have received than Jehovah Himself? He is the only One Who can assure blessing at any time and for all the eons. If He is for us, who can be against us? In Abram's case we can see the blessing in operation. In the past Abram was blessed temporally with great possessions, such as were reckoned of value in those days. As the friend of God, his name is like a fragrant odor among the sons of men.

In my youth much was made of the abolition of slavery, which had taken place not long before. We were taught to abhor it and to look down upon all nations of the past who had harbored it. (Of course we were not told that our own country, "the land of the free,"

had been about the last of all civilized peoples to do away with it! Alas, for the self-righteousness of nations!) But, in later years I came into contact with those who had been slaves and those who had known them at that time, and was forced to greatly modify my prejudices. Of course there was injustice and cruelty. Where one man has power over another, that is to be expected. even outside of actual slavery. But there seem to have been many great slave holders who were kind. considerate, and generous to their slaves, and much real love and devotion was shown. The colored people were much happier, as a rule, than the poor white families who did the same work. Though bound, they practically enjoyed freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want and freedom from fear, because their master looked after them, and they were humbly thankful for their lot.

If, in some cases, a human patron can make existence so care-free and happy, how blessed it is for Abraham to have the great Owner of all pledge Himself to look after his lot! Riches have wings. They seldom stay in a family more than a few generations. Abram could not count on conquering the land in his day. Far less could he do aught to secure it for his seed in the future. But, if Jehovah promises, He will also perform. Abram's faith was not in himself or his holdings, but in the Owner of all, Who is the only One Who can really insure both possession and blessing. The tomb of Abram is the only place on earth with a perfect title. The seed of Abraham are the only nation with a valid right to the land of promise. In the coming kingdom, when they be subject to the Lord, then they will be blessed and free from want and fear.

Much has been said and written concerning the righteousness which became Abram's. It has been called "forensic," as though the result of judicial procedure, which might be called a *legal fiction*. Bluntly stated, it hints that Abram did not do right, but God overlooked this and falsified the record. If you look too narrowly at it you are inclined to see things you do not like. It seems almost like a sort of deception. Indeed, some of the more enlightened translators reject this term in favor of imputed. Theologians "explain" this, "to attribute or ascribe vicariously." The latter term is further defined as "substitutional." This, again, is generally accepted to mean "the righteousness of Christ" "accepted by the Divine Father as a substitute for the righteousness of mankind." It will be seen that each new term, each new explanation, calls for another, because it not only fails to satisfy, but actually seems to imply unrighteousness on the part of God.

Everyone of these non-scriptural, man-made, theological expressions is contrary to the Scriptures and the righteousness of God, the very foundation on which Abram's righteousness rests. Impute implies that Abram was not righteous. Attribute and ascribe are milder, but they still need the word vicarious in order to relieve their tinge of injustice. Vicarious has the advantage of sacerdotal trappings, but it merely means representative. The theory is that Christ's righteousness is accepted for man's unrighteousness. A few simple questions would soon show how untenable this is. If Christ's righteousness is taken for man's, is He bereft of righteousness? Of what does Christ's righteousness consist? If His holy life and sacrificial death are a part of it, how could these be imputed to Abram, long before Christ lived on earth and died? One who has seriously studied all these theological makeshifts, cannot help coming to the conclusion that they fail utterly in clarifying this great theme.

Let us rather proceed along the line of faith. Abram's passive acceptance, his belief that God is true, whatever He says, is the basis of God's reckoning. This attitude toward God is right. The acceptance of God's revela-

tion is not only more right than anything else in the world, but it also sets all else right. It puts the Creator in His right place, and man in his. But the point that is generally obscured by unbelief is this: The acts of the believer are made actually right by being combined with Christ's sacrifice. The two together are infinitely just, and are essential to God's intention, which is to make Himself known to His creatures. As a dark background is necessary to reveal His glories, the believer provides this by that part of his life which is lived in unbelief. The sins that condemn him are essential to the revelation of God's grace. When cleansed through the sacrifice of Christ, they are not merely nullified, nor are they destroyed, but they are transformed into acts essential to God's glory and the welfare of His creatures, hence are not merely reckoned right by a legal fiction, but are genuinely, gloriously right, reckoned by the highest standards in the universe.

# THE WALK OF ABRAHAM

(Genesis 17)

WALK is the keynote of the salvation of the Circumcision (Gen. 17:2). This is in crass contrast to the salvation of the Uncircumcision, which had been revealed to Abram at first (Gen. 15:6). There it was faith. Abram had failed to believe as fully as he should have He still had confidence in the flesh. This must be destroyed. Therefore it is that Jeliovah said to him. "Walk before Me, and become flawless." To me this now seems an impossible, a dreadful load. But to Abraham and to most of the saints, it is just such a task as they like, and for which they feel quite competent. The whole evangel of the Circumcision is based upon their fearful ignorance of themselves and their overweening confidence in their ability to please God to perfection. Even in my spiritual infancy I could not see why God should demand perfection of Abram. No one could fulfill that! Certainly Abraham did not! Why, then, demand the impossible? I did not see then that God did not intend that Abraham should succeed. He intended that he should fail, and thus lose the confidence he still had in his flesh, and place it in the Deity.

This is the essential distinction between the two evangels. God wants us to trust Him unreservedly and implicitly. He does not want us to trust in ourselves. He does not expect perfection in the keeping of a covenant, or a law, for that would lead to the very reverse of His intention. Only their failure will teach them their utter lack and His all-sufficiency. Of course He could not reveal this intention of His to them, or the demonstration would have been fruitless. This not only explains the failures of Abraham and the patriarchs, but the threefold apostasy of the nation, as seen in the Hebrew Scriptures (Is. 6), in the "gospels," and in the book of Acts. They walked before Him very imperfectly indeed! Yet, in so doing, they have manifested to the world that the creature is impotent and sinful and offensive apart from the Creator. Man needs God, not only to create him, but to save him and to keep him. When this has been learned by bitter experience, men will be ready to recognize God as their All, and thus attain the goal of the eons.

The friend of God had a taste of both of these salvations, for he was justified by faith (Gen. 15:5, Ro. 4, Ga. 3) and also by works (Gen. 17:1, Ja. 2:21-24). One was before he was circumcised, and apart from it. The other was sealed by circumcision. In the first, Abram did nothing but believe God, and righteousness was reckoned to him unconditionally, apart from works. In the second he is exhorted to walk before God, and be flawless, so that there should be a covenant between him and God, to make him a "father of many nations." Let us not confuse the latter phrase with his faith father-hood of many believers among the nations. Here he is

not the father of the nations as such, but only of a few individuals who have faith, chosen out of the nations.

# ABRAM AND ABRAHAM

The name Abram (Abrm) comes from the Hebrew stems ab (FATHER) and rm (HIGH). Abraham (with the h) is just the same except that an e is inserted (Abrem). This implies the addition of another stem, making Ab (FATHER), r(m) (HIGH), and em (CLAMOR or throng). One of the m's is dropped in combining. Others derive it from Ab (father), rb (great), and em (throng). The difference is not much or vital, for GREAT and HIGH are both used as a faded figure merely to magnify the idea. Abram is the personal name, while Abraham unites him with descendants by including the stem throng. This corresponds to the two salvations. One is individual, the other national. Contrary to the usual idea, we are associated with Abram, not Abraham. The earlier part of his life, before his circumcision, is associated with the nations. The later enlargement was given in order to connect him with his physical seed.

I well remember listening with rapt attention to a brother who sought to show the difference between Abram and Abraham. His thought was that the letter h was inserted in Abram in order to indicate the addition of the holy spirit. Of course this would not be known to Abraham himself, or Paul, because neither the Hebrew nor the Greek has a letter h. The Greek simply doubles the a, Abraam. The Hebrew inserts an e, which is commonly mistaken for an h. As we have seen, it adds the element throng to the name. Besides. the name Abram is connected with faith and righteousness. It is the spiritual name, rather than Abraham, which is not used until walk, with physical and national blessing, is in view. In *Uncircumcision* it is Abram. Since this distinction is not observed in the Greek Scriptures, it is very difficult to carry it out, so we use

Abraham, as a rule, to denote the man, apart from these distinctions. But in these studies we will try to keep them distinct.

## THE ORIGIN OF CIRCUMCISION

It is in *this* light that we must view the rite of circumcision. It is the *sign* of the covenant which characterizes the salvation of the Circumcision. After promising the land to Abraham and his seed. God goes on to confirm it by the covenant of *circumcision* (Gn. 17:9-14).

The significance of this sign is almost totally overlooked. In it God gives a foreview of the result of the demonstration He is giving. It signifies the futility of the flesh. As this small sample of the flesh is snipped off, so would God have us deal with the flesh in its entirety. This sign ought to have opened their eyes to the failure of the flesh, which has been fully demonstrated since Abraham's day by no other group of the race as thoroughly as by the Circumcision. Let us note in passing that it is not intended for all mankind, but only the throng of nations who have descended from Abraham.

#### THE FAILURE OF FAITH

Just as Abram's experience from his call to his justification by faith is the key to the evangel of the Uncircumcision and righteousness by faith, so his further experience up to the time he received the rite of circumcision prepares us to understand the evangel of the Circumcision and righteousness by works. It is based on the failure of faith and the activity of the flesh. Instead of waiting for Isaac, the promised son by the freewoman Sarai, he generates Ishmael by Hagar, the slave. This brings bondage, in which we find walk, and a covenant, and the sign of circumcision without in place of faith within (Gen. 16, 17).

The actual acts of Abram which preceded his justification by faith were all righteous when reviewed in

the light of God's rights and purpose. His faith in God's declarations had kept him from all wrong. But his walk which led up to his circumcision was wrong, because it was not founded on faith, but on the flesh. And, indeed, circumcision is a sign of this, for why should the flesh be cut off if it is righteous? Sarai acknowledges that she has done wrong (Gen. 16:5), and that this wrong comes upon Abram. He was wrong in that he hearkened to her advice. The wrong of it is much clearer when we consider how much evil it brought upon Abraham and his descendants. It brought immediate suffering on Sarai and Hagar.

# THE REAL CIRCUMCISION

We are the real, the genuine Circumcision, because we offer divine service to God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in flesh. The so-called Circumcision are only a Maimcision, for they merely mutilate the flesh, and lack the faith of which circumcision is simply the sign (Phil. 3:2-5). They worship God in flesh, and glory in their flesh, in direct contradiction to the import of this sign, which consists in the removal, the cutting away of a part of the flesh as a token of the stripping off of the whole. Let us be clear concerning this. We are not the literal Circumcision. We are the figurative Circumcision, the literal Uncircumcision. The fact is that literal circumcision is itself only a sign, an indication, a token, an earnest, a label, in which a small part of the flesh is literally removed to signalize its utter failure and bankruptcy in its entirety. We realize and enjoy that which it merely indicates. We are the real, the genuine Circumcision, even though our flesh is not mutilated as theirs is.

This is the actual, ultimate truth as to circumcision, and should form the basis of our study. We must remember, however, that all revelation previous to this is not written from this standpoint, but in an enigma, and is seen distorted, as in a mirror. Yet even in that earlier

unfolding we will find hints and intimations which would have led a spiritually minded saint into the truth. This is clearly suggested before it was given to Abraham, for he was ninety-nine years old and his flesh was dead, so far as fulfilling the promise of God as to the seed was concerned. Abraham knew this, and said as much to God. He wanted to substitute other flesh, as his heir, but God wished to show that all was dependent on Him, and not on flesh at all. So He vivified, invigorated Abraham, gave him life after death, and then insisted on a sign of this, to keep it in continual remembrance, by cutting off a part of the flesh.

If a descendant of Abraham were spiritually minded, he would have deduced thus: I am supposed to be the literal seed of Abraham, but, in reality, I am not, for Abram had no issue, except Ishmael, until he was physically incapable of propagation. At ninety-nine years he could not have further descendants, and he knew it and acknowledged it. His flesh was beyond hope. I am really a descendant of his faith and of God's vivifying power. This is what my circumcision signifies. Otherwise I would be an Ishmaelite, a product of Abram's unbelieving flesh and a slave girl, doomed to servitude and humiliation . . . But, alas, few in Israel were humble enough to feel the futility of the flesh.

All that we have that is of any value is in Christ, not in ourselves. Our circumcision also is in Him. Was His circumcision on the eighth day reckoned to us? By no means. That was made by hands, and consisted in cutting off a very small portion of the flesh. His real circumcision came at the cross, when He was cut off from the land of the living, and His flesh as a whole was stripped off and laid in the tomb. In Him, at that time, we stripped off the body of flesh (Col. 2:11). This brings us into the place denoted by circumcision. We possess the spiritual reality of which the physical rite was merely the symbol. Having the thing itself we do

not need the label. The label on an empty bottle is of no value. The contents are just as valuable without the label as with it, especially when its qualities are evident by their virtue and potency.

# THE SIGN AND SEAL

It is of great help to impress upon our hearts that circumcision is a sign and a seal (Ro. 4:9-12). Then we will look beyond for that which it signifies and that which it secures. When we come to consider the case of Abraham, let us note that he had God's righteousness, by faith, long before he was circumcised, the rite did not add to either his faith or his own righteousness. It merely labeled him as one who possessed these things. Abram was secretly reckoned righteous in uncircumcision; but he was openly recognized as righteous by the sign and seal of circumcision. The reckoning was by God and was immanent. The recognition was for men and was superficial.

Our Lord acknowledged that the Jews were Abraham's seed in a physical sense, so also were the Ishmaelites and Esau's descendants. But they claimed Abraham as their father in a much deeper sense than that. He would not acknowledge that they were Abraham's children. That was presumption on their part. God, said He, could rouse such children out of the very stones, which they resembled, for they were hard hearted and lifeless clods of earth (Mt. 3:9, Lu. 3:8). They were so unlike Abraham in their conduct that they had no right to claim him as their ancestor. They were seeking to kill their own Messiah. Imagine Abram doing this! By their works they proved themselves to be descendants of the Adversary, not of Abram. So our Lord said to them, "If you are children of Abraham, did you ever do the works of Abraham?" (Jn. 8:31-47). They had the circumcision on the eighth day, but they not only lacked the faith of which it was the sign and seal, but also the works which perfected it (Ja. 2:22). Abraham

# 30 Abram is Father of those Who Have Faith

offered Isaac by faith; they crucified Christ by unbelief. I often think of this in connection with a story told by Dr. Weizmann, the Zionist leader, at a Jewish rally that I attended in Los Angeles. It concerned a Russian Jew who sought to escape from that country, who had a false passport. His name was Abraham, but his passport was in some other name, which was thoroughly drilled into him, as he could not read. But when he came to the border he was too excited to remember anything. They asked him his name, and he answered in great agitation: "I don't know! I forget! But I do know that it is not Abraham!" How true that was of all the Jews even Dr. Weizmann did not know. Whatever their name may be, they are not the children of the friend of God, who trusted Him, and not their own arm. The Jews present (I was the only Gentile, so far as I know) were like that poor fellow. They collected money to buy Palestine, the land that was given to Abram and his seed! They were not even Jacob. He would not pay out good money to buy his own land!

As a result, Abraham became the father of two distinct classes, one of which the apostle associates with the reckoning of faith righteousness in uncircumcision (to which the saints of the nations today belong) and the father of the Circumcision, but not those who merely have the outward sign and seal, but to those who observe the fundamentals of the faith in the footprints of Abram before he was circumcised. This distinction is vital, if we wish to understand the difference between the evangel of the Circumcision and that of the Uncircumcision. As the apostle explains fully elsewhere, Abram was not the father of those of the Circumcision who did not follow in his steps (Ro. 2:25-3:1). This we will consider elsewhere later. The Uncircumcision know him as their father on the ground of faith alone. The Circumcision may claim him only when they have the faith, the sign. and the walk.

As circumcision is only an outward sign, its benefits are limited to those who have the corresponding inward reality. Those who walk flawlessly before God will be benefited, but those who do not keep His law are practically uncircumcised. They are like an empty jar with a label. The label only misleads if the contents are gone. Another jar containing that which the label indicates, even if it has no label, is the real thing. Not only are the Uncircumcision who believe the real Circumcision (Phil. 3:2-3), but the Jew who is circumcised in heart, in spirit, not literally in the flesh is the genuine Circumcision. Nevertheless the outward sign entitled them to benefits not to be despised, the chief of which was that they became the repositories of God's revelation (Ro. 2).

## THE OBLIGATION OF CIRCUMCISION

Circumcision lays an obligation on all who have it far beyond their capacity to pay. It is like a label guaranteeing that the whole law has been observed. Anyone who uses it thereby advertises his ability to get along without Christ and His sacrifice. Circumcision is the real falling "from" grace. It is a fearful load to take upon ourselves, when God has not laid it upon us. No one can live up to this label. It must inevitably lead to the curse that rests upon all who fail to fulfill the least item of God's law. So blind were the Jewish "believers" in Paul's day that they insisted that circumcision was necessary for the nations for their salvation! Rather it clinched their condemnation.

The needlessness of circumcision for the nations is repeatedly emphasized by Paul in his epistles. It is so unimportant that it is not even worth the trouble to get rid of it. Each one is to remain as he was when God called him, either circumcised or uncircumcised. We ignore external nonessential labels and recognize only internal essential realities! For the Circumcision it is a precept of God to be kept. For us circumcision is nothing (1 Cor. 7:17-20). In Christ Jesus neither cir-

cumcision is availing anything nor uncircumcision, but faith, operating through love (Gal. 5:6). In Him there is a new creation (Gal. 6:15). It was the self righteous Pharisees who opposed Paul and insisted on circumcision and law keeping (Ac. 15:5, 21:21). Not having God's righteousness, they sought to make one of their own, and managed to make the opposite.

The question of circumcision for the Uncircumcision was the cause of much grief and conflict during the early ministry of the apostle Paul due to the fact that circumcision was the hall-mark of Jehovah's people. When Paul returned to Antioch after his first missionary journey, the Jews, especially some from Judea, opposed him violently because he had not made proselytes nor had them circumcised nor put them under the law. The commotion became so severe that the matter was referred to the apostles in Jerusalem. Peter seems to have been the only one among the Circumcision who had any sympathy with Paul's position. Even he would not have understood if he had not been prepared by means of the vision which he saw at Joppa, and had not seen God's hand in dealing with Cornelius (Ac. 10:).

Paul in his epistles, tells us far more about circumcision than any other inspired writer, even though he is the apostle of the *Uncircumcision*. This is due to the fact that the true intent of the rite was not understood, and that religious unbelievers still clung to their own flesh and its works. Once we see the great contrast between Abram and Abraham, between faith and works, between God's righteousness and man's, between Paul's evangel and Peter's, our hearts will be filled with exultation that we did not receive a probationary pardon which depends upon our deeds, but were justified by grace apart from works dependent entirely upon faith in God. We are weak and wanting. He is the All-Sufficient!

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