

## “Claim God’s Promise” (Romans 4:13–25)

Have you ever been given an empty promise? This happened to me many years ago. When I was in my first year of seminary, Lori and I were barely making ends meet. One afternoon we received a postcard in the mail from a company called Uni-Mart. Uni-Mart promised that if we took a quick tour of their warehouse we would receive a 35 mm camera, a large screen TV, or an all-expense paid vacation to Maui. Our first thought was, “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” So we threw the postcard away. We received a second postcard and threw it away as well. We then began receiving calls at home from Uni-Mart. The sheer desperation of their numerous attempts should have alarmed us. But we were foolish enough to give it a shot. BIG MISTAKE! After we toured the warehouse, we determined that there was no way that we would purchase a membership. It was a small time, little league Costco. Unfortunately, we had to sit down with our obnoxious tour guide Dan—an oily, unctuous, pushy, slithery, cutthroat salesman paid on commission. (Gulp!) When we declined the \$1,000 membership he came unglued! The second time we turned him down, he almost slit his throat. The third time we turned him down, he almost slit our throats. We explained to Dan that we couldn’t afford the membership fees. We explained how we were paying thousands of dollars to go to seminary, and we also told him we were sacrificially giving to our church. He angrily replied, “Let’s open up your checkbook and see if every check is made out to God!” Finally, we had to get up and walk out, but before we did, we, of course, had to request our free gift. After all, we had endured the painful experience. We were delighted and thrilled, then, when Dan joyfully rushed at us to give us a voucher for a large screen TV. No, I take that back! He handed us tickets for our paid vacation to Maui. No! Wrong again! Instead, he handed us a piece-of-junk camera that looked like it came out of a Cracker Jack box. I was honestly expecting the camera to shoot a stream of water in my face. As we drove out of the Uni-Mart parking lot, I was enraged. To this day, Lori and I call this one of the most emotionally scaring incidents of our lives.

The Uni-Mart experiences in life can lead us to wonder if anyone can be trusted anymore. It’s natural to become skeptical, if not downright cynical. We think to ourselves, “Promises, promises, promises. Yea, I’ve heard this line before. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” We live in an era of broken promises and promise breakers. Nations sign important treaties and then break them at will. Many couples show little regard for their wedding vows. Children and parents break promises to one another. Employers and employees break promises. Even pastors and church members break promises. In a world of so many empty promises, we can, fortunately, still trust in God. *Faith in God’s promises guarantees blessing.* In Rom 4:13–25, Paul provides two facts about faith.

**1. Faith obtains God’s promises (4:13–17).** In this section Paul continues to discuss justification, but he also introduces the idea of inheritance, which is the goal of salvation. He explains that justification and inheritance are both by means of faith. We’re given a free salvation in order to “inherit.”<sup>1</sup> Paul begins with his basic thesis: **“For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law,<sup>2</sup> but through the righteousness of faith”** (4:13).<sup>3</sup> The key term in this section is “promise.” The noun appears four times (4:13, 14, 16, 20) and the verb appears once (4:21).<sup>4</sup> Paul explains (“for”) that the promise that Abraham would be heir of the world was not through the Law. Rather, the promise was “through the righteousness of faith.” Interestingly, God never promised Abraham that he (or his descendants) would be “heir of the world.”<sup>5</sup> The reference to “descendants” (*spermati*, pl.) should be understood in the singular (lit. “seed”). Gal 3:16, 19 clarifies that the seed of Abraham is Jesus. Hence, those who are Abraham’s children by faith will inherit the world and rule with Christ. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul is likely fleshing out the original prophecy.<sup>6</sup> In either case, his primary goal is to make it clear that God’s promise comes through faith not through the Law.<sup>7</sup> He wants us to recognize that faith and the promise are distinct. Law language says “you shall,” while promise language says, “I will.” Law language demands our obedience, but promise language demands our faith.<sup>8</sup> This explains why it’s critical to distinguish between the Law and the promise.<sup>9</sup> Whenever we add works or

obedience to salvation we cancel out the importance of faith. Salvation is  $F + N = E$ : Faith plus *nothing* equals everything. Or as I stated earlier: *Faith in God's promises guarantees blessing*.

In 4:14–15, Paul develops the negative side of his thesis.<sup>10</sup> He writes, “**For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void<sup>11</sup> and the promise is nullified.<sup>12</sup> For the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.**” If only the Jews are heirs through the Law, “faith is made void” [or “empty”]. This means that faith is canceled out when the Law is mixed with it. Paul’s point is simple: If the Law could save, there would be no need for faith.<sup>13</sup> Yet, Paul has said many times throughout the first four chapters that we’re justified through faith. Verse 14 elevates faith and tears down the Law. So what benefit comes from the Law? Verse 15a succinctly explains: “for the Law brings about wrath.” As it pertains to our justification, one of the main purposes of the Law is to “bring about wrath.” This is a benefit because it forces us to acknowledge that we’re sinful and drives us to Christ. How does the Law bring about wrath? It brings about wrath by allowing us to experience consequences every time we sin.

Have you ever been pulled over by a police officer? (Come on, confession is good for the soul.) Now tell me if this has ever happened to you. A police officer pulls you over, gets out of his car, slowly makes his way up to the driver’s window, and says, “I couldn’t help but notice on my radar that you were going the speed limit. So I just wanted to pull you over and let you know how blessed the police department of this city is to have a law abiding citizen like you. Here, let me write you a thank you ticket.” Has this ever happened to you? Why not? For one simple reason: The police radar is not there to congratulate you for obeying the law. It’s there to catch you when you exceed the speed limit. It’s there to condemn you because that’s what the law does. The problem with the Law is that it doesn’t give you the power to obey it. All it can do is give you the guidelines and punish you when you have broken them. That’s what Paul means when he writes that the Law “brings about wrath.”

In 4:15b, Paul writes, “but where there is no law, there also is no violation.”<sup>14</sup> He doesn’t mean that there’s no “sin” apart from the Law; rather, he is teaching that the definite form of sin translated “violation” or “transgression” (*parabasis*) can only exist in the face of definite, clear commandments of God for which one is responsible. What Paul means, then, is that the explicit commands of the Mosaic Law reveal sin to a much greater degree than is otherwise known and understood by men. When sin is exposed as such, the wrath of God is aroused. But where the Mosaic Law is not in force or is not known, there is no knowledge of specific sin among people, at least not to the same degree. Why does Paul make this point here? It’s because he’s trying to show why it’s futile to attempt, through the Law, to obtain God’s blessing. It only winds up in wrath. The Law only reveals what great sinners we really are and obliges the wrath of God to flare up against us.

Perhaps you’re saying, “We’ve spent an awful lot of time on the point that a person can’t be saved by keeping the Mosaic Law, but I don’t know anyone who’s trying to be justified that way.” Well, that may be true, but I’ll bet you know many who are trying to get to heaven by some list of rules, and the principle is the same. The trouble with any system of salvation-by-law is that one never knows for sure if he or she has kept a sufficient number of laws with sufficient regularity to merit God’s favor. All systems of salvation-by-law are doomed to fail. It’s the same way with God’s law. There’s no such thing as being a “moderate” sinner. That’s like being a “little bit” pregnant. You’re either a sinner or you’re not. If you break any part of God’s law, it’s as if you’ve broken the whole thing (see Jas 2:10). That’s why the Law was doomed from the start.

Paul now develops the positive side of his thesis. He writes in 4:16–17: “**For this reason** [the inability and futility of the Law] **it** [salvation and inheritance] **is by faith,<sup>15</sup> in order that it** [justification and inheritance] **may be in accordance with grace,<sup>16</sup> so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law [Jews], but also to those who are of the faith of**

**Abraham [Gentiles], who is the father of us all, (as it is written, ‘A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU’ [Gen 15:5]) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.”**

The promise of God’s great salvation and all its accompanying blessings comes as a result of grace. Grace is God’s unmerited favor given to man. God gives us what we don’t deserve. Why must God’s promise be according to grace? The promise must be offered freely to all freely. The term “guaranteed” or “certain” (*bebaios*) means “firm,” “dependable,” “unmovable,” and is used in connection with the function of an anchor in Heb 6:19. If the promise was according to the Law, a person could only be certain of one thing, its non-fulfillment. If it’s by faith, one can be confident that the fulfillment is as guaranteed as the One who is being trusted. Since the blessings of God are based upon faith and not Law, they are assured to those who are of the Law (Jews) and those who are not (Gentiles). They are assured through faith in Jesus Christ. The whole point seems to be that if the Law were the basis for salvation, only those who possessed that Law (i.e., the Jews) could be saved. And, even in the case of the Jews, there’s no salvation apart from faith because all have sinned (Rom 3:23). But if *faith* is the basis for salvation, then everyone is eligible. *Faith in God’s promises guarantees blessing.*

I am holding a key ring. [Display keys.] I have keys to my house, vehicles, and even the church buildings. However, this past week we changed all the locks at our church. We asked each person who uses our church building for ministry purposes to come into our church office and pick up a new key that opens the doors that he or she needs to access. Unfortunately, I was out of town this past week and wasn’t able to pick up my key. So I’m holding a beautiful key chain that belongs to me, but I don’t have access to the church building or to the office until I take my new key and put it on this key chain. Faith is the key that opens the door to heaven. There’s nothing else in the world that will open that door. Furthermore, faith is also the only way of blessing. If we can trust God for salvation, we can trust Him for everything. Every blessing of God comes to the believer by way of faith. Today, if you have never exercised faith in Jesus Christ, will you believe in Him as your Savior? If you have already believed in Christ, will you continue to trust Him with your daily life? Will you consciously and continually invite Him to grow you up in Him?

[The first fact of faith is faith obtains God’s promises. Fact number two is . . .]

**2. Faith believes God’s promises (4:18-22).** Paul continues to demonstrate the truths of justification and a maturing faith through the story of Abraham. If you have entered into a relationship with God, like Abraham, God has granted you His unconditional love. This comes by grace, through faith. These eight verses describe the nature of faith. In 4:18, Paul writes, **“In hope against hope<sup>17</sup> he [Abraham] believed,<sup>18</sup> so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, ‘so shall your descendants be.’”<sup>19</sup>** The phrase, “In hope against hope he believed,” means that every natural odd was against God fulfilling the promise that He made to Abraham. “Hope” (*elpis*) is one of Paul’s favorite words. He uses the term thirteen times in the book of Romans, which is more than in any other New Testament book.<sup>20</sup> The biblical concept of “hope” is not wishful thinking; it’s a confident certainty. In spite of the odds, Abraham believed God’s promise that he would become “a father of many nations.”<sup>21</sup> He had a definite promise from God and that was enough for him.

Paul explains the nature of Abraham’s faith further in 4:19–21. **“Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness<sup>22</sup> of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief<sup>23</sup> but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,<sup>24</sup> and being fully assured<sup>25</sup> that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.”<sup>26</sup>** These verses demonstrate that Abraham’s faith didn’t weaken even though his physical body was progressively weakening.<sup>27</sup> Paul bluntly states that Abraham and Sarah were both basically dead (4:19)!<sup>28</sup> In the natural realm, sexual intimacy was not even an option,

much less having a baby! To put it bluntly, Abraham was impotent and Sarah was forty-five years past menopause. John Calvin summarized the matter well when he said that Abraham and Sarah were closer to the grave than to the marriage bed. Unless God did a miracle, no baby would be born.<sup>29</sup>

What are you facing right now that is “as good as dead?”<sup>30</sup> Has God given you a promise that has yet to be fulfilled? Has God placed a calling on your life that has yet to be realized? Have you sensed God leading you to wait on Him for certain things that have not come to pass? Perhaps it’s marital harmony? Maybe it’s reconciliation with a wayward child? Whatever promise, calling, or biblical desire you may have, ask God for grace to persevere in your faith with patience. Until He says “no,” He likely wants you to wait on Him and continue to trust in Him.

Although Abraham knew all of the overwhelming obstacles, he trusted God to do as He promised (4:20a). His faith overlooked the obstacles and focused upon the object of faith, God. This is a reminder to us that justification and spiritual growth comes when we come to the end of ourselves. In the same way, God wants those without Christ to acknowledge that they are spiritually “dead.” He wants men and women to recognize that, unless He steps in, they are without hope. This is a perfect picture of salvation. God also wants those of us who are in Christ to recognize this same truth. This means acknowledging that we are dead in and of ourselves. We need Christ in order to live the Christian life. This means that we begin to realize we can’t do it on our own. If you’re like me, it’s all too easy to focus on performance more than on Jesus Christ. Yet, the Bible teaches that fruitful Christian living doesn’t come by trying; it comes by trusting Christ to express His life through us. *Faith in God’s promises guarantees blessing.*

Surprisingly, Paul states that Abraham “did not waver in unbelief” (4:20a). Yet, the Genesis account indicates that Abraham did waver in unbelief. He tried to give Sarah away twice (Gen 12:10–19; 20:1–7). He took Hagar as a surrogate solution (16:1–16). He also laughed when God reaffirmed His promise of a future seed (17:17). So how do we reconcile Paul’s statement with Genesis? It’s likely that Paul is referring to the overall character of Abraham’s faith.<sup>31</sup> While Abraham had struggles like all of us, in the end he could be said to be a man who “did not waver in unbelief.” Thank God, salvation and reward do not require perfect faith, but only the proper object.<sup>32</sup> This should encourage us. God is more gracious than most of us think He is. Aren’t you glad? I sure am.

Paul writes that Abraham “**grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,<sup>33</sup> and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform**” (4:20b).<sup>34</sup> The verb translated “grew strong” (*endunamoo*) literally means, “to make powerful.”<sup>35</sup> This verb is from the same root as the word translated “he was able” (*dunatos*). In other words, Abraham’s faith was empowered by contemplating God’s power! The more Abraham looked at who he was and who God was, the more empowered or “fully assured” (*plerophoreo*) he became that God was able to do that which He had promised.<sup>36</sup> This is how we can rise above the tests and trials of our lives—by believing in an all-powerful God. *Faith in God’s promises guarantees blessing.*

Before moving on, we must ask the question: How can our faith “give glory to God”? When we believe God and take Him at His Word, we make Him look as good as He really is. In one sense, we can’t give God more glory, but we can glorify Him by showing off His greatness in our lives. We give glory to God when we trust Him to do what He has promised to do.

My three children have always enjoyed swimming. When we are able to use a pool, I generally jump in first and then beckon any of my kids to jump from the edge of the pool into my arms. I simply hold out my arms and exclaim, “Jump! I’ll catch you; I promise. You can trust these bulging biceps.” Now, let me ask you an obvious question: How can my children make me look and feel good? Answer: By trusting me and jumping into my arms. When my kids take that leap of faith they make me look strong, wise, and loving. But when they refuse to jump, shake their heads, and run away from the edge of the pool, they

make me look bad. It appears like they are saying, “my daddy can’t catch me,” or “he won’t catch me,” or “it’s not a good idea to do what he tells me to do.” All three of those responses make me look bad. However, when any of my children trust me and jump, in spite of their fear, they give me glory.

Paul concludes the story of Abraham in 4:22: **“Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness.”** This is another citation from Gen 15:6. Paul referred to this same verse in 4:3. These two quotes serve as bookends. In quoting this verse, Paul brings to a conclusion all that he has said up to this point, beginning in 1:18: We are sinners and we will not be justified by works of the Law but by faith. Abraham is the classic example of this truth, and he stands as the father of all those who believe.

In 4:23–25 Paul concludes and summarizes everything he’s been saying since 3:21 before proceeding to a new section in 5:1.<sup>37</sup> **“Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him<sup>38</sup> who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because<sup>39</sup> of our justification.”**<sup>40</sup> When Moses was penning Genesis, I’m sure he never understood the full significance of the statement made in 15:6. This verse simply reads: “Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Abraham believed that God could resurrect both his and Sarah’s bodies. We believe that God resurrected Jesus and will one day resurrect us as well. God planned from the very beginning that Abraham might be a model for the entire world and for the rest of human history. He’s the model of what biblical faith should look like.

Please notice in 4:25 that Jesus was “delivered over because of our transgressions.”<sup>41</sup> It was because of our sin that Jesus had to die. Yet this verse tells us that “justification” has been provided for the entire human race through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ resurrection confirms our salvation. It’s the divine guarantee that His death satisfied the payment demanded for sin. If you’ve received Jesus Christ as your Savior by faith, His resurrection is a guarantee that your salvation is secure. The resurrection assures what the cross secures.

I have a trivia question for all of you shoppers out there. Are you ready? What policy do Costco and Nordstrom have in common? Both companies have an unconditional return policy. This policy permits the customer to return a purchase at any time (in most cases). I have known employees from both companies, and I have been shocked at some of the stories they recount. At Costco, for instance, customers routinely purchase a lawn mower in the spring and then return it in the winter for a full refund. Some of the customers don’t even bother cleaning up the lawnmower before bringing it back! At Nordstrom there are customers who will buy suits or formal dresses and then return them years later. This is astounding to me! It amazes me that there are customers who are brave enough to make such returns. It also amazes me that these companies continue to honor such a policy. Obviously, Costco and Nordstrom are unusual companies. In fact, they are the exception to the rule. While they do many other things well, what sets them apart from their competition is that they honor their word. The message of the Bible is that God honors His Word. He keeps His promises. He is a covenant-keeping God. In doing so, God demonstrates that He has no rivals and is set apart from His creation.

This past week Lori and I purchased several Christmas gifts at Costco. We made our purchases at Costco because they were affordable and because of their unconditional return policy. After purchasing our gifts, we made sure that we put the receipt in a safe place in case anything went wrong with one of our purchases. [Display the Costco receipt.] Receipts are valuable, if not essential. You know how important it is to get a receipt when you make a major purchase. If there is a problem with the product or if a dispute arises about whether you actually bought the item, your receipt proves your purchase and authorizes your claim to have the problem fixed. The receipt shows that the payment for the product was made and accepted. Jesus’ resurrection serves the same purpose for us. It is God’s “receipt.” When Jesus cried, “It is finished!” on the cross (John 19:30), He was announcing that the price for sin had been paid in full. We

can spend eternity in the presence of God through the death and resurrection of Christ. Right now, will you place your faith in Jesus Christ alone? Jesus Christ loves you and wants you to place your faith in His promise and work. Will you do so? *Faith in God's promises guarantees blessing.*

### **Scripture References**

Romans 4:13–25

1 Corinthians 3:21–23

Galatians 3:10–11

Genesis 15:6; 17:5

Hebrews 11:17–19

Mark 2:10–11

Luke 7:7–10

### **Study Questions**

1. Why is justification by faith instead of by the Law (Romans 4:13–17)? How have I witnessed the primary purpose of the Law in my personal experience (4:13–15)? In what way has this caused me to rely on faith alone in Christ alone? How can I help others not to depend upon law of any kind for salvation?
2. What is the first characteristic of faith that Paul alludes to in Romans 4:17b? How does a proper understanding of the Creator and creation affect one's daily life? How do I see God's power and faithfulness revealed in creation? Read Habakkuk 3:17–19.
3. What situation in my life seems outside the realm of possibility (Romans 4:17–19)? Read Hebrews 11:11–12. What kept Abraham from not “wavering in unbelief” (Romans 4:20)? Were there times when Abraham struggled with doubt (Genesis 15:3; 16:1–4)? What can I learn from Abraham's experience?
4. Am I “growing strong in faith” (Romans 4:20–21)? Is there such a thing as a weak faith (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8) or a strong faith (Matthew 21:21; Mark 11:22–25; James 1:5–7)? How would I describe my faith? Where is God stretching my faith right now? Where would be it easier for me to doubt God than to believe Him? How can I choose to believe God?
5. Why do Paul and the other New Testament writers emphasize the resurrection (Romans 4:24–25)? How important is the resurrection to my personal faith? How does the resurrection serve as the bedrock for the Christian faith? Read 1 Corinthians 15. How can I explain the importance of the resurrection to others?

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Eaton, *Romans*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2010), 83–84.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase (“not through the Law”) was put first in the Greek sentence to express its importance.

<sup>3</sup> Eaton, *Romans*, 87 notes, “For Israel it [the inheritance] was through the law. ‘Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws . . . so that you may . . . inherit the land’ (Deuteronomy 4:1; see also 6:18).” But this is not the case with Abraham or his descendants (i.e., Christians).

<sup>4</sup> The noun *epaggelia* (“promise”) is used eight times in Romans (4:13, 14, 16, 20; 9:4, 8, 9, 15:8).

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*. Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 133. See Gen 15:5–21; 17:4–8; 18:18–19; 22:17–18. Geographically, Abraham was promised the land of Canaan as an inheritance (12:1; 13:14–15, 17; 15:7; 17:8; 28:4; 35:12).

<sup>6</sup> See also Boa and Kruidenier, *Romans*, 134. Cf. Matt 5:5; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5.

<sup>7</sup> Gal 3:17 indicates that the Law came 430 years after Abraham was made heir to the promise by faith—and thus, there is no way the Law could invalidate or restrict its scope.

<sup>8</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 131.

<sup>9</sup> In Rom 1–4, there are five other similar examples of this phrase “the righteousness of faith” (1:17; 3:5, 21, 22, 4:11; cf. 9:30; 10:3, 6). This phrase refers to God declaring a sinner righteous upon belief in Christ’s person and work. This means that if we have believed in Jesus Christ, we have become heirs of the promise. However, the promise is more than justification; it’s being placed in a position to experience many of God’s gracious blessings.

<sup>10</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*. The IVP NT Commentary series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 115.

<sup>11</sup> This term was also used by Paul in 1 Cor 1:17; 9:15; 2 Cor 9:3; Phil 2:7.

<sup>12</sup> This term was also used by Paul in Rom 3:3, 31; 6:6; 7:2, 6; 1 Cor 2:6; 13:8; 15:24, 26; 2 Cor 3:7; Gal 5:4; 2 Thess 2:8.

<sup>13</sup> See esp. Gal 3:18:

<sup>14</sup> The best way to understand this comment is in light of Rom 5:13. There he says: “for before the law was given, sin was in the world, but there is no accounting for sin when there is no law.” Moo writes:

“Violation of law turns ‘sin’ into the more serious offense of ‘transgression,’ meriting God’s wrath

God gave the law to the Jews

The Jews have transgressed the law (cf. 2:1–29; 3:9–19)

The law brought wrath to the Jews . . .

Paul, then, is not claiming that there is no ‘sin’ where there is no law, but, in almost a ‘truism,’ that there is no deliberate disobedience of positive commands where there is no positive command to disobey.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 276–77.

<sup>15</sup> Mounce aptly states, “Faith is helplessness reaching out in total dependence upon God.” Robert Mounce, *Romans*. The New American Commentary series (Nashville: Broadman, 1995), 127.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce rightly states, “What God provides by his free grace can be appropriated by men only through faith. What, on the contrary, is earned by works (not faith) is bestowed as a matter of merit (not grace).” F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 117.

<sup>17</sup> Eaton finds the phrase, “In hope against hope” a description of a struggle that is not consistent with the immediate assurance that comes with justification, nor is it in his opinion an adequate depiction of the conviction of sin. Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 182–83.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 118 says, the patriarch Abraham believed “the bare word of God.”

<sup>19</sup> The words “so shall your descendants be” are a quote from Gen 15:5 that emphasized the surety of God’s promise to Abraham about a son (cf. Rom 4:19–22).

<sup>20</sup> The word *elpis* (“hope”) is used fifty-three times in the NT (thirty-six of those usages come from Paul).

<sup>21</sup> Faith didn’t come easy for Abraham: From age seventy–five to one hundred, this one called “exalted father” (Abram) was childless, in a culture in which barrenness was a disgrace to the whole family. Yet, God changed his name to “father of a multitude” (Abraham) and Isaac was eventually born. The basic timeline is as follows:

Abraham was first promised a “seed” in Gen 12:2 at the age of seventy–five (12:4). A more specific promise was given in 15:4. Abram was between seventy–five and eighty–six (16:16) when he was reckoned to be righteous by God, as recorded in 15:6. Isaac, the son of promise, was born to Abraham and Sarah when Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety (17:17; 21:5).

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<sup>22</sup> In the only other NT use *nekrosis* is used figuratively to describe the act of killing or putting to death (2 Cor 4:10). The English term necrosis (medical term describing a localized death of cells most often secondary to interruption of the blood supply, necrotic) describes a putting to death or state of death.

<sup>23</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 284–85 remarks: “When Paul says that Abraham did not ‘doubt . . . because of unbelief,’ he means not that Abraham never had momentary hesitations, but that he avoided a deep-seated and permanent attitude of distrust and inconsistency in relationship to God and his promises.”

<sup>24</sup> The two verbs in Rom 4:20 are both aorist passive indicatives. The passive voice implies the agency of God, but Abraham had to allow (covenant) God’s power to energize him.

<sup>25</sup> This is an aorist passive participle, which denotes a full assurance of something (cf. Luke 1:1; Col 4:12) or someone (cf. Rom 4:21; 14:5). The noun is used of full assurance in Col 2:2 and 1 Thess 1:5. This confidence in God’s will, word, and power enables humans to act in faith!

<sup>26</sup> In Heb 6:12–14, the promise to Abraham that he would have a son came through patient and persistent faith: “so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.’”

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 237–38.

<sup>28</sup> In the Genesis account Moses records that Sarah was “worn out” and Abraham was “old” (Gen 18:12). To make matters even worse, Sarah had never had a child.

<sup>29</sup> Ray Pritchard, “The Oldest Dad in the Nursery” (Rom 4:18–25): [www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1992-05-24-The-Oldest-Dad-in-the-Nursery/](http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1992-05-24-The-Oldest-Dad-in-the-Nursery/).

<sup>30</sup> John Hart, “The Letter to the Romans,” unpublished class notes (2010 ed.), Moody Bible Institute.

<sup>31</sup> It is also possible that Paul may be simply focusing on the time from the initial giving of the promise in Gen 12, to the point that Abraham was justified by faith in 15:6. At that time, when God appeared to him and reiterated the promise, Abraham did not waver in unbelief.

<sup>32</sup> Bob Utley, “Bob Utley, “The Gospel According to Paul: Romans” (2010 ed.): [www.freebiblecommentary.org/pdf/EN/VOL05.pdf](http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/pdf/EN/VOL05.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Deffinbaugh makes an interesting observation: In Rom 4:20, there seems to be a deliberate contrast between Abraham’s “giving glory to God” and the unbelief of men, as described in 1:21: “For even though they knew God, they did not honor (Lit. “Glorify,” [see marginal note in NASB]) Him as God, or give thanks.” While these unbelievers became increasingly darkened in their understanding of God and of reality (1:21–22), Abraham saw God and life ever more clearly (4:19–21). See Bob Deffinbaugh, “Abraham: The Faith of our Father” (Rom 3:27–4:25): [www.bible.org/seriespage/abraham-faith-our-father-romans-3278211425](http://www.bible.org/seriespage/abraham-faith-our-father-romans-3278211425).

<sup>34</sup> Heb 11:19 states that Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead!

<sup>35</sup> Morris writes, “The verb *was strengthened* is in the passive in the New Testament more often than in the active, which accords with the fact that the believer’s strength is derivative. I have reservations about translations like ‘his faith filled him with power’ (GNB) or ‘he grew strong’ (RSV). Paul is not saying that faith, so to speak, took a weak Abraham and put strength into him. He is saying that God took a weak Abraham and put strength into him. Abraham was made strong because of his faith indeed, but it was God, not faith, that provided the strength. Faith was no more than the means by which he received it. The Greek may be understood as ‘he was strengthened in his faith’ (his faith grew stronger), or ‘he was strengthened through his faith’. Either way it was God who gave the strength.” Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 212.

<sup>36</sup> Faith is primarily a persuasion (Acts 18:4; 28:24).

<sup>37</sup> Rom 4:23–25 are one sentence in Greek.

<sup>38</sup> Usually Christ is presented as the object of saving faith, but here Paul mentions God the Father to tie the faith of Abraham together with NT Christians. See also John 5:23–24 and John 12:44.

<sup>39</sup> Eaton, *Romans*, 93 writes, “People have sometimes been puzzled by the phrase ‘raised because of our justification’ but actually it is similar to teaching of Paul elsewhere. Later Paul will say: ‘as through one man’s trespass something happened **for all people** for their condemnation, so also through one man’s righteous act something happened **for all people** for justification of life. For as through the disobedience of one man **the many** (that is ‘everyone’) were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man **the many** (that is ‘everyone’) will be constituted righteous (Romans 5:19–20).” Author’s emphasis.

<sup>40</sup> Osborne, *Romans*, 122 states, “The greatest truth ever given to mortal man is stated in verse 25, and it contains the essence of the Bible.”

<sup>41</sup> Rom 4:25 is a wonderful Christological statement reflecting the Septuagint (Greek OT) of Isa 53:11–12.