

# Faith In The Promise

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[ 0 : 00 ] Has there ever been something you have completely failed to understand?

Has there ever been something that has been so totally over your head that even if you try and grab onto it and grapple with it, it's just completely futile? Now, my father, who's a very revered academic scholar, was not always a revered academic scholar.

And when he was in primary school, he had to take art class. And my dad brought home his report card one year, and right next to art, the teacher had written in 29%.

I mean, that's almost closer to zero than it is to 50%. And right next to his mark, it said, David is a disturbing influence on this classroom.

Love that. Not to be outdone by my father, I took second year calculus in my undergraduate degree. And I had an incredibly high mark going into the final exam.

[ 1 : 19 ] I don't really know how I'd done it, but I was feeling pretty good about it. And the way calculus exams work is you're given an exam that is 30 pages long, and it has six questions on it. And what you're expected to do, apparently, is you're supposed to see the question, and you're supposed to work through it.

And by the end of five pages, you're supposed to have the solution. So I walk into this exam, and I open up my exam. And I stare at the first question, and realize it might as well be in Russian.

And I just haven't a clue what is going on. So I skip it and go past five pages and go to the next question. Not a clue. Next question. Not a clue. I get to the end of my exam, and I have not written a single mark in this entire paper.

And so I pray. And over the next two and a half hours, I struggle through this exam, and I remember feeling pretty good about it, handing it in, because I'd fought through, and I felt like I'd overcome adversity, and I'd conquered this thing.

Until I received my grade. I dropped eight letter grades. Eight. I still passed the course, because I had a very high mark.

[ 2 : 31 ] But I emailed my prof, and I said, Dear Dr. Lamb, Apparently my math isn't very good, but according to my calculations, I must have got something like 29% on your final exam.

Can you please check it over, and see if this is indeed accurate? Dr. Lamb was very nice to quickly respond, and say, Dear Chris, Yes, I'm afraid it is accurate. You bombed it.

So I ask you again, is there something in your life you have completely failed to understand? I will never understand American football. I just don't get it.

I'll never understand 17th century romantic British miniseries movies. Girls just watch again and again. But I ask you this question, because I'm wondering, when you read that letter Paul wrote to the Romans, Do you have any idea what's going on?

Do you wrestle to find any significance here? Or is it like it's in a different language to you? David Short called the book of Romans both majestic and maddening.

[ 3 : 47 ] He called it majestic, because in this book we see the riches of God's mercy, and his love and his grace, and how desperately he wants to save us in the person of Jesus.

It's majestic. But at the same time, David was quick to point out, it is maddening, because in this book, it tells us how sinful we are.

And quite frankly, this book is very difficult to understand. And so I want to encourage you, if you're frustrated with Romans, I want to encourage you, if you're ready to be looking at an easier book, that this is incredibly rich, and we need to wrestle with it.

It's not a passage that you can just glance over and instantly consume and fully digest. I sent Jim an email this week, complaining that I was getting theological indigestion as I was studying this passage.

And if that is you, I want you to be comforted that you are certainly not alone, and that we will wrestle through this together. Now, we skipped a call act, you may have noticed, right before a sermon on your service sheet, is a collect.

[ 4 : 55 ] That's a prayer we pray together, and it's from last week. And it is a prayer that God would make us understand what the Bible is telling us about himself. And I love, right in the middle of it, in the second line, it says, may we read, mark, learn, learn, and inwardly digest your word.

It's just a beautiful phrase. And I think we need this prayer as we look at Romans. So I'm wondering, if you're comfortable, would you pray with me? If you can't concentrate reading it out loud, then rather, just listen to us pray it to you.

But may this prayer be a comfort to you as we approach this chapter. So together, Blessed Lord, you have caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning.

Grant that we may, in such wise, hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them. And that by patience and comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior.

Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Alright. Let's get to the passage. It would be really helpful if your Bible were open.

[ 6 : 14 ] So, if you have a Bible in front of you, I encourage you to open it. We're still in Romans 4. The page is 9, 4, 1. We're starting in the bottom right corner in verse 13.

Alright, let's just go for it. What is this passage about? Why did God ordain this text should be his word forever?

Why did God decide this word is so important that I'm going to put it in my Bible, which is the book about me? I think Paul tries to answer that question in verse 13, which acts as sort of a thesis statement for the entire chapter.

So, I'm going to read verse 13, and that's going to be sort of our jumping point into the rest of the passage because it tells us where Paul is going. It gives us a road map. Verse 13 says, For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

I asked you what this passage is about. I wonder if you could tell me what that verse is about. And helpful to figuring out what a sentence about is to look at what its subject is.

[ 7 : 37 ] The subject of verse 13 is the promise. That's the subject of that verse, and indeed, this entire passage hinges on the promise of God.

So that's where we're going. We're studying this beautiful promise that God gave to Abraham and to his offspring. And what Paul is trying to say is that the promise he gave to Abraham he now offers to us.

And more than that, Paul is saying that the way God dealt with Abraham is the exact same way he deals with us. And so what we're going to do to understand this chapter is we're going to zoom in on the example of Abraham because that's what Paul does.

and then we're going to zoom in on Abraham's offspring. We're going to try and figure out what this promise means in the context of Abraham and then in the context of his offspring.

All right? So first, let's go to Abraham. I have three questions about Abraham that I want to ask and we'll zip through them, I hope, fairly quickly. And the questions are, what is the promise God gives to Abraham?

[ 8 : 50 ] Abraham? Second question is, who is Abraham? Third question is, why did God choose Abraham? Why Abraham? What's so special about Abraham? Now to answer these questions we need to go back to Genesis.

So if you do have your Bible open, I encourage you to flip back to Genesis 12. That's on page 8 of the Pew Bible. And it's important to go there because it actually gives us what the promise is. it explicitly lays it out for us. And I'm just going to read a few verses. This is Genesis 12 starting halfway through verse 1.

Rather, I'll start at verse 2. And God said, I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and I will make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you. I will curse and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. If you flip the page, again God comes to Abraham in chapter 15 verse 5.

[ 9 : 56 ] And God brings Abraham outside and he says, look up towards heaven and look at all the stars and count them if you can. And as many stars as you count Abraham, that is how many

offspring you shall have.

If you go again to chapter 17 in Genesis, starting at verse 4, we read that God says to Abraham, behold, my covenant is with you and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.

No longer shall your name be called Abram, but you shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful and I will make you into nations and kings shall come from you and I will establish my covenant, my promise between me and you and your offspring, after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.

What does God promise Abraham? Abraham? He promises him lots of things. God comes to Abraham and he promises to bless him.

[11:14] The word blessing comes up. God says, I want to bless you. I want to give you offspring. I want to give you land. God promises that he will be with Abraham and with his offspring forever.

It's like a marriage between God and humanity where God says, I will be with you forever. And God promises to keep his covenant with him.

That is the promise. The promise is blessing. The promise is that God will be with Abraham forever. I think this leads into the next question.

Who is Abraham? Who is this guy that God appears to and gives this unbelievable promise? How did this man deserve such an amazing gift?

What's really incredible is if you go back and read before God appears to Abraham? Abraham really is a nobody. He was born Abram.

[12:14] He was born in a city called Ur, which is about 300 kilometers south of modern day Baghdad. And Ur, all it's known for today is that it had a massive temple to a pagan moon god called Nana.

So Abraham lived in a city that had a moon god named Nana. And he likely worshipped him because he was a member of that community. Abram had a father Terah who took Abram and his wife on a journey about 500 kilometers from Ur to a new city, Haran, to live in.

And there Haran died. And Abram was about 100 years old. He was a nomad. He was homeless. His wife was barren. He was childless.

He had no reputation, no land, no home, really nothing. He's not an impressive man at this stage of the Bible. And I'm not saying he's a bad man.

There's just really nothing to say about him. He's a nobody. He's a nomadic shepherd. 75 year old homeless nomadic shepherd. That's who Abraham is.

[13:25] And I think giving you the promise and giving you who Abraham was, we now have to go to why. Why? Why did God give Abraham this unbelievable promise?

What could he possibly have done to merit such an amazing gift? Why did God say to Abraham, you are worthy to receive this unbelievable covenant?

You are worthy to be blessed forever. You are worthy to have many offspring and an eternal land and me with you forever. And it's as we ask that question, how is Abraham righteous before God? How is Abraham justified before God to receive that gift that we get to the very heart of Romans 4? God if we go back to our thesis statement, verse 13, for the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

when Paul answers the question, why Abraham? He starts off by giving us the wrong answer and saying, well it certainly wasn't for this reason.

[14:41] And the reason Paul gives us is it certainly wasn't because Abraham obeyed some law. And indeed, if you go back and read it, we're told nothing about Abraham's works.

We really know nothing about him. The Old Testament Jewish law didn't exist for 430 years after Abraham died. So to say Abraham was a great man who was justified by these incredible works and rituals and law that he obeyed is just not true because it didn't exist.

It's impossible for this guy to have been following all the rules because there weren't any rules. But I still haven't answered the question, why Abraham? And what we see in this passage, is that Abraham was righteous before God not because he worked for it or not because he deserved it, but because when God came to him and he confronted him with this amazing promise, Abraham

believed it.

All we're told in Genesis chapter 15 when God says, look up at the stars and as you count them, that's how many offspring you'll have. All we're told is that Abraham believed him.

That's all we're told. Abraham's simple response to God's unbelievable grace and mercy is complete belief. I believe you will do it.

[16:11] In Romans 4, I want to read you verses 18 to 22. These verses really hammer home why Abraham was justified, why Abraham God deemed deserving of this amazing gift.

In hope, Abraham believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations, just as he had been told, so shall your offspring be.

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

Indeed, no distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

That is why it was counted to him as righteousness. Did you know when God first appeared to Abraham, to the time when Abraham had Isaac, his son that would become his heir and his offspring?

[17:24] Twenty-five years elapsed. Twenty-five years. God came to Abraham and he made all these promises, and for twenty-five years, Abraham saw nothing.

I haven't even had to wait twenty-five years for anything. Goodness, I complain about waiting four weeks for Christmas. And Abraham had to wait twenty-five years.

Homeless, old, without possessions, without land, without children. Just getting older and older and older. And yet, he hoped against hope.

Abraham believed God's promise even though everything around him was completely hopeless. Abraham was as good as dead, his wife was barren, but beside these two points, he decided to trust God and God's promises.

And when Abraham did that, it was counted to him as righteousness, and God honored the promise that he made to him. And when Abraham stands before God, it is not going to be Abraham's works that God remembers.

[18:34] It is going to be Abraham's faith. And I think the same is true for us. So what is the promise? The promise is blessing.

The promise is land. The promise is offspring. And that God will be with him forever. Who is the promise to? The promise is to a nobody.

To a nomadic shepherd. 75 year old without a home. And why Abraham? Because when Abraham heard God's goodness, he believed him.

And he grew strong in faith as he glorified God. That's the example of Abraham.

But it's important to remember the promise is not for this single man alone, but also for his offspring. And I'd like to move now from looking at Abraham to looking at his offspring.

[19:38] And to see that God offers them the exact same promise. I think it's first of all helpful to ask, who are Abraham's offspring?

Are we talking about Jewish people? Who exactly are we talking about? Abraham's offspring? And what Paul states amazingly, is because the promise rests on faith, Abraham's offspring includes anyone who believes God's promise.

I want you to look at verse 16. 16 of our passage. In verse 16, we are told that the promise rests on grace and is guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring.

Not only to those who adhere to the law, but also to the one who shares in the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. I just want you to take a step back and realize what an audacious radical claim that is.

What Paul is saying is that if you share in the same faith as Abraham, and if you believe God's promise like Abraham did, then you are therefore adopted as one of Abraham's offspring.

[21:03] Paul was Jewish, but he knew he was writing to people who were both Jewish and Gentile, and he has the audacity to say that Abraham is the father of all believers.

All believers. And you might be thinking, where does he get that from? Where does he get that from? We'll keep reading.

In verse 17, it quotes Genesis when God says, I have made you the father of many nations. It was never God's intention to make Abraham the father of one solid line of people, of a single nation.

It was God's promise that through Abraham, many nations would enter into this same promise with God. It's incredible.

And what is more than that, the promise God makes to Abraham of blessing and land and offspring and God's eternal presence is completely fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

[ 22 : 09 ] And we see through this Bible, starting in Genesis and going all the way to Revelation, God fulfilling his promise to Abraham and to his offspring. And we see in the person of Jesus, every promise God makes perfectly fulfilled.

In Jesus, we see God's blessing, we see God's eternal presence with us, we see God's forgiveness and his mercy, and we receive God's eternal life. Listen to this familiar verse.

God so loved the world, or God so desperately wanted to fulfill his promises, that he sent his only son, that whoever believes in him shall not die, but instead have eternal life.

Did you catch that? Did you catch how we receive eternal life according to Jesus' own words in John 3, 16? Jesus says, if we believe in him, we shall not die, but instead have eternal life.

The emphasis is on our belief, and so exactly how God justified Abraham, he now justifies us. And he says, this promise I made to that man 4,000 years ago, I now make to you.

[ 23 : 26 ] I want to bless you. I want to be with you. I want to know you. I want you to have offspring. I want you to have an eternal possession. And all you need to do is you need to believe my promise.

It doesn't matter if, I don't think we have any, but it doesn't matter if you're a 75-year-old homeless nomadic shepherd sitting here tonight. God's promise is for you.

God's promise is not dependent on what you have done. God simply looks at you and he says, I want to bless you. And all we need to do is say, thank you.

I believe you. And receive his blessing. I want you to understand that God isn't just offering this promise to Abraham, but he is offering it to you. And we all have the opportunity to embrace this promise and to say, thank you, Lord.

Forgive me, Lord. I want to follow you, Lord. I want to believe in you, Lord. And so very simply, I think it's fitting to just end tonight by asking, do you believe God's promise?

[ 24 : 49 ] Do you believe there is a God who loves you? Do you believe there is a God who wants to know all of us? A God who so loves this world that he sent himself, he sent his son, he sent him to the cross, God?

As Romans 23 tells us, rather 24, Jesus was delivered for our trespasses, Jesus was killed for our sins, that God might fulfill this promise.

More than just killed, Jesus was then raised from the dead in order that we might stand before God fully justified when we accept his promise. So I encourage you tonight.

Did you know God wants to make a promise to you? And do you know that all you need to do is in faith accept it? Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 25 : 52 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.