

1. Judaism, Islam and Christianity claim Abraham. But only Christianity speaks of Abraham as the father of believers. That is the theme of Rom. 4. He is used as the prime example of justification by faith in Christ. See also Jn. 8 and Gal. 3.
2. At Rom. 3:21 Paul said: "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets Peter at Acts 10:43: "Of Christ all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins." And Jesus at Lk. 24:27: "And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." What is the central teaching of the OT? Christ, the forgiveness of sins, justification by faith. See also Jn. 8:33-59.
3. Vs. 1 of our text can be read this way: "What should we say Abraham, our natural ancestor, found?" Or this way: "What then shall we say that Abraham, our father, has found through his own deeds and efforts?" In view of the context we consider the second translation superior.
4. The sense of vs. 2 is: "You see, if Abraham (really) was justified on the basis of his works he has something to boast of, but (as matters stand) not before God." It is axiomatic that people boast about their deeds. That shows the sinfulness of human nature. But not even Abraham, the father of believers, had anything to boast about before God. How much less can we, his children, boast!!
5. The voice of Scripture is the voice of God. Gen. 15:6 is quoted also at Gal. 3:6. "Abraham believed God" means "Abraham believed what God said." By believing Abraham was regarded, reckoned, counted, considered righteous. God's reckoning changed Abraham's status before God. Is this vs. speaking about the righteousness of Christ? Yes. See Jn. 8:56. The whole Gospel is found in Rom. 4:3. In the whole Bible faith is always and ultimately faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Do not forget that!!
6. Vs. 4 reads: "For the laborer the wage is not reckoned on the basis of favor but on the basis of what is owed." It is an axiom from everyday life. It always pertains in the kingdom of power. Even a pastor gets his salary not by favor but on the basis of what is owed to him: "The laborer is worthy of his hire." Lk. 10:7. But in the kingdom of God this principle is absolutely ruled out. Even if I could keep the law of God perfectly I would still be saved by grace, not by my works.
7. Vs. 5 contains the heart of Christianity. The subjects of vss. 4 and 5 are antonyms: the wage and the gift. "The one who does not work" means "the one who believes" which means "the one who receives." Faith is here pictured as the receiving means. In this vs. "the one who does not work" is the same person as "the godless man" as are all people by nature. By nature Abraham was a godless man. Though he was a godless man he received the gift of Christ's righteousness. That happened about 2000 years before Christ.
8. Vs. 6 introduces a second OT example, about 1000 B.C., David. The forgiven state of the believers is called "blessedness". That is the heart of Christianity.
9. In vss. 7-8 Paul goes on to quote Ps. 32:1-2. The word "blessed" occurs twice in these vss. It denotes the forgiven state of the believer. It refers back to the word "blessedness" in vs. 6. In vss. 7-8 Paul and David use three verbs to describe the salvation of Jehovah, the God of promise: "Forgive, cover, not reckon." Justification and forgiveness are identical. Christ takes my sin and gives me His righteousness.
10. The remainder of this chapter, not a part of our text, is an exposition of Gen. 17:5 where God told Abraham: "I have made you the father of many nations." This means that Abraham is the father of all truly believing Jews and Gentiles. Since Abraham's time (2000 B.C.) millions of believers have lived and died and gone to everlasting life.

Theme: THE SAVING RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD CLEARLY REVEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Introduction: Many people have the mistaken idea that people in the OT were saved in a way different from that in the NT. But that is incorrect. Immediately after man sinned, God promised the Savior, Gen. 3:15. Throughout the OT this promise opens and blooms like a flower. Our text gives two examples. Jesus (Lk. 24:27), Peter (Acts 10:43) and Paul (Rom. 3:21) make clear that there is only ONE way of salvation, clearly revealed already in the Old Testament.

I-The Example of Abraham, 2000 years before Christ Vss. 1-5

A-Abraham had nothing in which to boast. In the kingdom of this world people receive wages for their work. Vs. 4. The master of a worker does the worker no favor by paying him. The worker earned it. In his sinfulness natural man attempts to transfer this principle into the kingdom of God. But the works and worthiness of sinful man is not acceptable to God. Rom. 3:23. Natural man is sinful since conception. The wages of sin is death. Rom. 6:23. He cannot save himself. Abraham learned that lesson 2000 years ago. By implication vs. 5 of our text calls Abraham an ungodly man.

B-Abraham believed God and this was counted to him for righteousness. Vs. This is a quotation from Gen. 15:6, repeated here in our text and again at Gal. 3:6. Jesus said of Abraham: "Abraham your father rejoiced to see My day. He saw it and was glad." What does this mean? It means that he believed and trusted only in the righteousness of Christ for forgiveness and salvation. It is the same righteousness of which Paul speaks at Php. 3:9: "Not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith." Abraham had nothing of which to boast before God. He believed in God Who justifies the ungodly man and this faith was reckoned for righteousness. Faith in Christ is a gift of God which comes through God's Word. With the faith God gives the righteousness of Christ. That is what Abraham had and is now in heaven.

II-The Example of David, 1000 years before Christ Vss. 6-8

A-David admits his lawlessness and sins in our text. Vs. 7

David is speaking of himself when he says: "Blessed are those whose lawlessnesses are forgiven and whose sins are covered." Though David is now in everlasting life he did not get there by his own works and worthiness. Though he was permitted to write many Psalms he did not earn his way to heaven. He said of himself: "Behold I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me." Ps. 51:5. Though he was a fine young man he said: "Remember not the sins of my youth." Ps. 25:7. And we know the story of his fornication with Bathsheba and the murder which followed. We know the words of confession in Ps. 51. Abraham and David were no different from any of us. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Rom. 3:23.

B-But David clearly also knew and believed the Gospel. Vss. 7-8

1-He knew he was blessed because the Lord did not count his sin against him. God not only forgives. He also forgets. We often hear people say: "I'll forgive but I won't forget." That is not God's way. No man can undo sin. But when God forgives He no longer holds the sin against that person. David believed the promises of God. His sins were no longer counted against him.

2-He knew that he was blessed because his lawlessnesses were forgiven and his sins covered. Just as clothing covers nakedness, so the grace of God covers the believer's sins. In the OT it was called justification, forgiveness and covering. It all amounts to the same thing and that is blessedness. The Day of Atonement, Lev. 16, was known as YOM KIPPUR, the Day of Covering. On that day they reminded themselves that their sins were covered.

Conclusion: The saving righteousness of God is clearly taught in the OT. Abraham and David had the same forgiveness which we have.