



Romans 4:13-25 (ESV)

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. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” ²³ But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Romans 4:13-25 (HCSB)

¹³ For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ If those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made empty and the promise is canceled. ¹⁵ For the law produces wrath. And where there is no law, there is no transgression.

¹⁶ This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of Abraham’s faith. He is the father of us all ¹⁷ in God’s sight. As it is written: I have made you the father of many nations. He believed in God, who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist. ¹⁸ He believed, hoping against hope, so that he became the father of many nations according to what had been spoken: So will your descendants be. ¹⁹ He considered his own body to be already dead (since he was about 100 years old) and also considered the deadness of Sarah’s womb, without weakening in the faith. ²⁰ He did not waver in unbelief at God’s promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ because he was fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. ²² Therefore, it was credited to him for righteousness. ²³ Now it was credited to him was not written for Abraham alone, ²⁴ but also for us. It will be credited to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

English Standard Version Bible - *Study Bible*¹

Romans 4:13-25

3:21-4:25 *The Saving Righteousness of God.* Since no one can be righteous before God by keeping the law, Paul now explains that right standing with God comes through faith in the atoning work of Jesus on the cross.

4:13 The promise given to Abraham embraces not only the land of Canaan but also the whole **world**. The final reward (the inheritance, which is another term for final salvation) that will be given to Abraham and all believers is the world to come (cf. [Heb. 11:10-16](#); [Revelation 21-22](#)).

4:14 If the inheritance is gained by observing the **law**, then righteousness is no longer by **faith** but by works. Faith and works are fundamentally opposed, for faith means trusting in or relying on a promise of God's work and not depending in any way on human performance.

4:15 Paul explains why one cannot be an heir through the law: human beings cannot keep the law, and they therefore face God's **wrath**. Paul uses the word **transgression** technically, so that it is distinguished from sin. Transgression is defined as the violation of a revealed command, which means that the Jews, who had the written law, had even greater responsibility for their sin and as great a need to be saved from God's wrath and justified by faith. (Paul elsewhere argues that sin also exists where no written law specifies the malfeasance; see [2:12](#), and note on [5:13](#)).

4:16 **That is why** points to the special relationship between **faith** and **grace**: Faith means trusting in another, not in one's own efforts. Faith therefore corresponds exactly to grace, which involves trusting God's gift of unmerited favor. **The adherent of the law** refers to the Jewish believer in Christ.

4:17 **many nations.** Abraham's universal fatherhood is confirmed by [Gen. 17:5](#). **Calls into existence the things that do not exist** underscores the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* or "out of nothing." Before God created the universe ([Gen. 1:1](#)), only God existed, nothing else. Paul uses this general truth to affirm the great power of the God whom Abraham trusted: Abraham believed in a God who could raise the dead and summon into existence what did not exist (e.g., new life in Sarah's womb).

4:19 Abraham squarely faced the fact that he and Sarah were too old to have children.

4:20-21 Abraham's faith actually increased as the time of waiting went on: **he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God**. He continued trusting that God could be relied on to do what he had promised, and as Abraham trusted God, he honored and glorified him.

4:23-24 Paul applies [Gen. 15:6](#) to his readers. **but for ours also**. Paul sees that, in God's plan, Scriptures as far back as Genesis were written also for the benefit of Christians in the new covenant age.

4:25 Both the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are necessary for forgiveness of sins and justification. **raised for our justification**. When God the Father raised Christ from the dead, it was a demonstration that he accepted Christ's suffering and death as full payment for sin, and that the Father's favor, no longer his wrath against sin, was directed toward Christ, and through Christ toward those who believe. Since Paul sees Christians as united with Christ in his death and resurrection ([6:6](#), [8-11](#); [Eph.](#)

1. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 4".

[2:6](#); [Col. 2:12](#); [3:1](#)), God's approval of Christ at the resurrection results in God's approval also of all who are united to Christ, and in this way results in their "justification."

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*²

Romans 4:13-25

4:13 The **law** demanded obedience and performance. If the law was violated, wrath resulted. The law was not a system of grace. God's **promise** was one of grace. The promise to Abraham and his seed ([Gal 3:16-18](#)) was not through the law but through the **righteousness that comes by faith**.

4:14-15 If the inheritance of the **promise** came by legal obedience, then the way of **faith** is **empty**. Furthermore, no one would inherit the promise since no one could keep the law.

4:16-17 God's **promise is by faith**, so that it may be guaranteed to both Jews and Gentiles who believe. If it were by law, no such guarantee would be possible. To make it certain, therefore, the promise was **according to grace**. **Abraham** was also promised to be the **father** of many nations. Abraham believed in the God who created everything from nothing and **gives life to the dead**.

4:18 It seemed humanly impossible for Abraham to become the **father of many nations** when he was old, but he placed his **hope** in God's promise.

4:19-20 Abraham had a realistic evaluation of his prospects for fatherhood. He was about **100 years old**, and Sarah was childless and long past child-bearing years. Yet Abraham did not doubt **God's promise**, and God strengthened his **faith**.

4:23-24 Everything in Scripture is for our benefit. The experiences of **Abraham** are as relevant to us as they were to him, for we serve the same Creator God who can do the humanly impossible. We are credited as righteous before God in the same manner as Abraham: by faith.

4:25 Jesus was **delivered up for our trespasses** as promised in [Isa 52:13-53:12](#). Who delivered up Jesus? Was it Judas? Pilate? The Jewish Sanhedrin? Satan? Certainly all these were causal agents in the crucifixion of Christ, but ultimately it was the sovereign God who brought it to pass in order to fulfill His plan of redemption ([Ac 4:27-28](#)). The Father delivered Jesus up for our trespasses, and raised Him so that His righteous Servant would justify many people ([Isa 53:11](#)).

2. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., HCSB Study Bible, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 4".

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Romans 4:13-25

4:16 Paul explains that Abraham had pleased God through faith alone before he had ever heard about the rituals that would become so important to the Jewish people. We, too, are saved by faith plus nothing. It is not by loving God and doing good that we are saved; neither is it by faith plus love or by faith plus good deeds. We are saved only through faith in Christ, trusting him to forgive all our sins. For more on Abraham, see his Profile in [Genesis 18, p. 33](#).

4:17 The promise (or covenant) God gave Abraham stated that Abraham would be the father of many nations ([Genesis 17:2-4](#)) and that the entire world would be blessed through him ([Genesis 12:3](#)). This promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus was from Abraham's line, and truly the whole world was blessed through him.

4:21 Abraham never doubted that God would fulfill his promise. Abraham's life was marked by mistakes, sins, and failures as well as by wisdom and goodness, but he consistently trusted God. His faith was strengthened by the obstacles he faced, and his life was an example of faith in action. If he had looked only at his own resources for subduing Canaan and founding a nation, he would have given up in despair. But Abraham looked to God, obeyed him, and waited for God to fulfill his word.

4:25 When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, an exchange takes place. We give him our sins, and he forgives us and makes us right with God (see [2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). There is nothing we can do to earn this. Only through Christ can we be made right in God's eyes. What an incredible bargain this is for us! But sadly, many still choose to pass up this gift to continue "enjoying" their sin.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1901-1902.

Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary⁴

Romans 4:13-25

4:13 The **promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants** is found in [Genesis 12:2-3](#) and [Genesis 15:5](#). This promise was made to Abraham many years before the requirement of circumcision, and hundreds of years before the giving of the Ten Commandments ([Exodus 20](#)). Abraham believed God's promise, even though it was also made when he was almost one hundred years old and did not yet have any children. The promise was based on his **faith** not his **obedience** to a set of laws that did not yet exist.

4:14-15 If people must **obey God's law** and be **good enough** in order to be saved, then **faith is useless**. That, in turn, would make God's **promise also meaningless**. If the law does not bring righteousness, then why does it exist? **The law brings punishment**. In other words, in a world where people can make real choices, the law's presence automatically includes the possibility of failure and the consequences that would follow. The law's function is to help people realize their great sinfulness and to impose penalties on those who transgress it. **The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break**. If no one defines right and wrong, then no one knows the difference, and no one can sin.

4:16 What God gives by grace can only be accepted by **faith**. The promise given to Abraham that he and his countless offspring would inherit the world ([4:13](#)) refers to his spiritual offspring, those who follow his example of faith. Abraham had pleased God through **faith** alone, before he had ever heard about the **customs** that would become so important to the Jewish people. We too are saved by faith plus nothing. That makes Abraham **the father of all who believe**, not just of the Jewish nation.

4:17 The promise (or covenant) that God gave Abraham said that Abraham would be the **father of many nations** ([Genesis 17:2-4](#)) and that the entire world would be blessed through him ([Genesis 12:3](#)). This promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who was from Abraham's line. Not only was Abraham the physical father of God's chosen nation, the Jews, he was also the father of God's people today, the church. Paul points out that the promise to Abraham to be the father of many nations extends beyond Israel to all the nations of the world.

Paul switches quickly into a description of God. Abraham and Paul believe in the same God, so what is the character of the God in whom they believe? Paul answers this question because believers need to have a clear understanding of the God being trusted. Paul's words here may seem awkward to us, but they were very familiar to the Jews. God is Creator—the giver and sustainer of life. He **brings the dead back to life** and **brings into existence what didn't exist before** (see also [Deuteronomy 32:39](#); [1 Samuel 2:6](#)). God has demonstrated his power. We know he can do the impossible!

4:18-19 Abraham **believed** God's promise that **he would become the father of many nations**. He believed it against all hope; that is, beyond any possible natural hope, because he was **too old to be a father at the age of one hundred** and his wife was well past childbearing age and **had never been able to have children**. Yet Abraham realized that God's ability to fulfill his promises outweighed the circumstances. So, **Abraham's faith did not weaken** even when they, a childless couple, had been promised **descendants as numerous as the stars**. It was **impossible**, but Abraham believed in God.

4. Barton B. Bruce et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 595-596.

4:20 Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise because he was able to take God at his word. Abraham persisted in believing; thus, **his faith grew stronger**. He was able to trust in God to do what seemed humanly impossible, and even to glorify God before the results were apparent.

In spite of all this, Abraham was clearly human and imperfect. He had his weaknesses (fears) and bad habits (lying under pressure). The Bible describes Abraham with all his flaws, but as a man of faith. Thus, Abraham’s faith could not have been anything but simple trust in God. Yet God honored that. Abraham is a model not just for the Jews, but for all people as a person of faith who realized he was totally dependent on his Creator for all things, even life itself.

4:21 Surrounded by a society fully immersed in paganism, where gods came by the dozens and were subject to human manipulation, Abraham dared to trust a God he could not control. Abraham did not say, “Well, we’ll see what happens.” Instead, **he was absolutely convinced that God was able to do anything he promised**. Abraham’s faith was in God alone. And Abraham never doubted that God would fulfill his promise.

4:22 Abraham’s faith, detailed above, was exactly the kind of faith God wanted and accepted when he **declared** Abraham **righteous** ([4:3](#)). It was this “absolutely convinced” faith that Paul called for when he preached the gospel—faith that relies on nothing but God; faith in God, who gives life, sustains life, and has power to keep his promises.

4:23-24 That Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness ([Genesis 15:6](#)) describes not only how Abraham became righteous, but also how all his descendants (spiritual descendants, see [4:16](#)) can become righteous before God. He will **declare us to be righteous if we believe in God, who brought Jesus our Lord back from the dead**. What makes us acceptable to God is not our works, but simply exercising the kind of faith Abraham had.

Abraham had to simply trust in God. That trust was confirmed in the immediate promises Abraham witnessed God fulfill in his lifetime. But he faced death without seeing all the promises fulfilled, nor understanding how God would fulfill them. The writer of Hebrews described the quality of this faith in glowing terms: “All these faithful ones died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God” ([Hebrews 11:13](#)). Now Paul directs his readers to the same Abrahamic faith, but clearly focused on God’s fulfillment of the great promise, the blessing of the entire world through the gift of Jesus.

4:25 Jesus died **because of our sins**, taking the penalty we deserved, according to God’s plan (see [3:23-26](#)). Just as God brought life from Abraham and Sarah (even though they thought they were “dead” and unable to have children), so God **raised Jesus from the dead**. His resurrection made us **right with God**.

Study and Discussion Questions



Abraham Justified by Faith - [Romans 4:1-25](#) (Part 2: vs 13-25)

Topics: [Covenant](#), [Faith](#), [New Covenant](#), [Promises](#), [Righteousness](#), [Sin](#)

Open It

1. How much faith do you put in the promises people make to you?

Explore It

2. On what basis did Abraham receive the promise of inheriting the world? ([4:13](#))

3. Why would God's promise be worthless if a person had to keep the Law perfectly to receive it? ([4:14-15](#))

4. What was God's promise to Abraham? ([4:18](#))

5. What did Abraham believe about God that convinced him God could keep His promise? ([4:20-21](#))

6. How does Abraham's righteousness by faith apply to us? ([4:23-24](#))

7. Whom has God provided as a worthy object of our faith? ([4:24-25](#))

Get It

8. What causes many people to think that works are more important than faith for pleasing God?

9. In what ways do people act as if they must earn God's love?

10. What must a person do to have his or her sins completely forgiven?

11. What promise are you waiting for God to fulfill in your life?

12. How does God's relationship with Abraham help you understand His workings in your life?

Apply It

13. What promise of God do you need to trust in this week?