

Romans 4:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

Analysis

How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. Paul answers his own rhetorical question with devastating simplicity: Abraham was justified while still *en akrobystia* (ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ, "in uncircumcision"), not *en peritomē* (ἐν περιτομῇ, "in circumcision"). The chronology of Genesis is irrefutable: Chapter 15 (justification by faith) precedes Chapter 17 (institution of circumcision) by at least 14 years. Abraham believed and was credited with righteousness while he was, in Jewish reckoning, a Gentile!

This temporal sequence has profound theological implications. Circumcision cannot be the means of justification since Abraham was already justified before receiving it. At most, circumcision could be a sign or seal of a righteousness already possessed, which is exactly what Paul will argue in verse 11. For fourteen years, Abraham stood before God as righteous while uncircumcised—proving that the covenant sign is not the ground of acceptance. This demolishes any notion that ritual observance contributes to justification.

Historical Context

Paul's chronological argument would have been familiar to his Jewish readers who knew the Abraham narrative well. However, his interpretation challenged the prevailing view that circumcision was essential for covenant membership. By showing Abraham was justified as 'uncircumcised,' Paul establishes that Gentile

believers need not become Jewish to be saved—they stand in the same relationship to God as Abraham did before Genesis 17.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. Why is the timing of Abraham's justification so crucial to Paul's argument, and what collapses if circumcision preceded faith?
2. How does Abraham's fourteen years of justified-but-uncircumcised status provide a pattern for Gentile inclusion?
3. What modern 'circumcisions'—sacraments, rituals, practices—do Christians mistakenly treat as grounds rather than signs of salvation?

Interlinear Text

πῶς	οὖν	ἐλογίσθη	ἐν	περιτομῇ	ὄντι	ἢ	ἐν
How	then	reckoned	in	circumcision	when he was	or	in
G4459	G3767	G3049	G1722	G4061	G5607	G2228	G1722

ἀκροβυστία·	οὐκ	ἐν	περιτομῇ	ἀλλ'	ἐν	ἀκροβυστία·
uncircumcision	Not	in	circumcision	but	in	uncircumcision
G203	G3756	G1722	G4061	G235	G1722	G203

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 6:15 (Parallel theme): For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Galatians 5:6 (Parallel theme): For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

