

Romans 4:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

Analysis

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; Paul states negatively then positively what Abraham did. Negatively: *ou diekrithē tē apistia* (οὐ διεκρίθη τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ, "he did not waver in unbelief") at the promise. The verb *diakrinō* (διακρίνω) means to be divided, hesitate, doubt—Abraham was not double-minded (cf. James 1:6-8). The instrumental *tē apistia* (τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ, "by unbelief") identifies the mechanism of wavering—unbelief produces instability and doubt.

Positively: *enedunamōthē tē pistei* (ἐνεδυναμώθη τῇ πίστει, "he was strengthened in faith"). The passive voice is crucial—Abraham didn't generate strength, he was strengthened. Faith's power comes from its object (God) not its subject (the believer). The result was *dous doxan tō theō* (δοὺς δόξαν τῷ Θεῷ, "giving glory to God"). To believe God's promise is to glorify Him; to doubt it is to dishonor Him. This connects to 1:21's indictment—fallen humanity fails to glorify God. Abraham's faith reversed this, treating God as trustworthy and powerful, thus glorifying Him.

Historical Context

In ancient honor-shame cultures, to question someone's word was to dishonor them. Abraham's unwavering trust in God's promise honored God by treating His word as utterly reliable. Conversely, unbelief implicitly accuses God of being either untruthful or impotent. Paul's emphasis on faith as glorifying God shows that justification is ultimately about vindicating God's character and trustworthiness.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Why does Paul say Abraham was 'strengthened' (passive) in faith rather than that he strengthened his own faith?
2. How is believing God's promise a way of glorifying Him, and how does unbelief dishonor Him?
3. What promises of God do you struggle to believe, and how might embracing them bring glory to God?

Interlinear Text

εἰς	δὲ	τὴν	ἐπαγγελίαν	τοῦ	θεῷ	οὐ	διεκρίθη	τῇ
at	G1161	G3588	the promise	G3588	of God	not	He staggered	G3588
G1519			G1860		G2316	G3756	G1252	
ἀπιστίᾳ	ἀλλ'	ἐνεδυναμώθη	τῇ	πίστει	δοὺς	δόξαν		
through unbelief	but	was strong	G3588	in faith	giving	glory		
G570	G235	G1743		G4102	G1325	G1391		
τῷ	θεῷ							
G3588	of God							
	G2316							

Additional Cross-References

Luke 1:45 (Faith): And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

1 Corinthians 16:13 (Faith): Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

2 Corinthians 12:10 (Parallel theme): Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Daniel 10:19 (Parallel theme): And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me.

Isaiah 35:4 (References God): Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.

Isaiah 7:9 (Faith): And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.

2 Timothy 2:1 (Parallel theme): Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Zechariah 8:13 (Parallel theme): And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.

Zechariah 8:9 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built.

2 Kings 7:19 (References God): And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.