

Romans 4:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Analysis

For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Paul appeals to Genesis 15:6, the hinge text of his entire argument. The verb *elogisthē* (ἐλογίσθη, "it was counted/reckoned/imputed") is a financial term meaning to credit to one's account. God credited (*logizomai*, λογίζομαι) righteousness to Abraham's account based not on performance but on faith. The aorist tense marks a definitive moment: when Abraham believed God's promise of innumerable offspring despite his aged, childless state.

This occurs in Genesis 15, before circumcision (Gen 17) and before the offering of Isaac (Gen 22). Paul's chronological argument is devastating to any works-based reading of Abraham's justification. The patriarch's faith was simple trust in God's promise—not heroic obedience, not ritual observance, but believing God's word. Paul will quote this verse repeatedly (Rom 4:9, 22-24) because it encapsulates the gospel: righteousness comes through faith, not works. This is *sola fide* centuries before the Reformation articulated it.

Historical Context

Genesis 15:6 was already recognized in Second Temple Judaism as a crucial text about Abraham, but it was typically interpreted within a framework of covenant faithfulness demonstrated through obedience. Paul's radical reading—that this verse teaches justification by faith alone, apart from works—represents a Christ-

centered reinterpretation of Israel's Scriptures that would have been controversial in his day.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Why does Paul keep returning to Genesis 15:6 throughout Romans 4, and what makes this single verse so crucial to his argument?
2. What does it mean that righteousness was 'counted' or 'imputed' to Abraham rather than infused or earned?
3. How does Abraham's faith in God's promise despite impossible circumstances model the faith that justifies sinners today?

Interlinear Text

τί	γὰρ	ἡ	γραφὴ	λέγει	Ἐπίστευσεν	δὲ	Ἀβραὰμ
what	For	G3588	the scripture	saith	believed	G1161	Abraham
G5101	G1063		G1124	G3004	G4100		G11
τῷ	θεῷ	καὶ	ἐλογίσθη	αὐτῷ	εἰς	δικαιοσύνην	
G3588	God	and	it was counted	unto him	for	righteousness	
	G2316	G2532	G3049	G846	G1519	G1343	

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 15:6 (Faith): And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

James 2:23 (Faith): And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

Romans 4:9 (Faith): Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

Romans 4:5 (Faith): But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Romans 4:11 (Faith): And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

Psalms 106:31 (Righteousness): And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore.

Romans 11:2 (Word): God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying,

Romans 10:11 (Faith): For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.