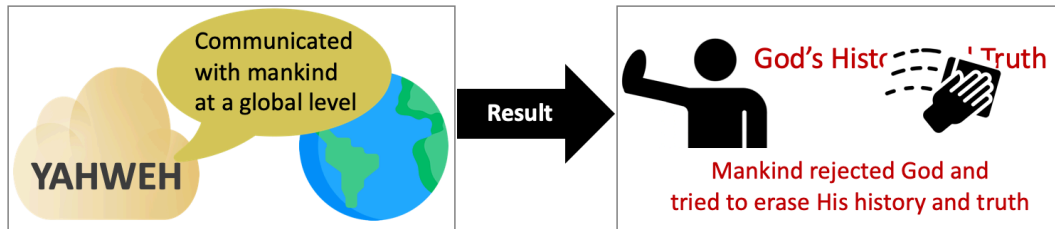


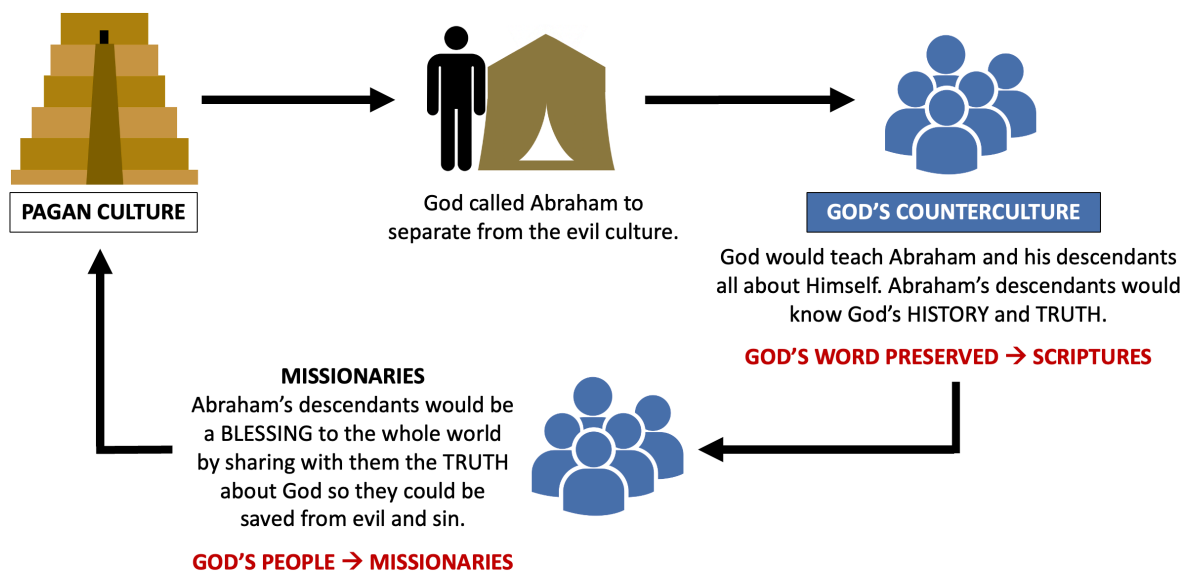
Lesson 10: Abraham—A Picture of Faith

Previously...

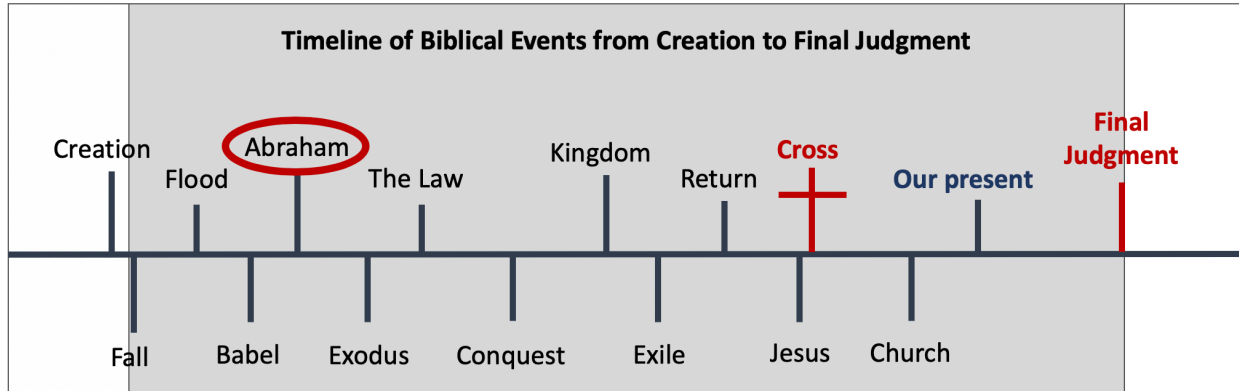
We learnt that from the time of Creation till the generations after the global Flood, Yahweh shared information about Himself and about world history at a global level. However, the majority of the people chose to reject God.



In order to preserve His history and truth, God changed the way He interacted with mankind. Instead of sharing about Himself directly with everyone, He disrupted world history to work with Abraham and his family.



God planned to use Abraham and his descendants to record Scripture and then return as missionaries to the pagan world. So God called Abraham out of his pagan culture and made a covenant with him. God promised Abraham (i) land, (ii) descendants, and told him that he would be a (iii) worldwide blessing.

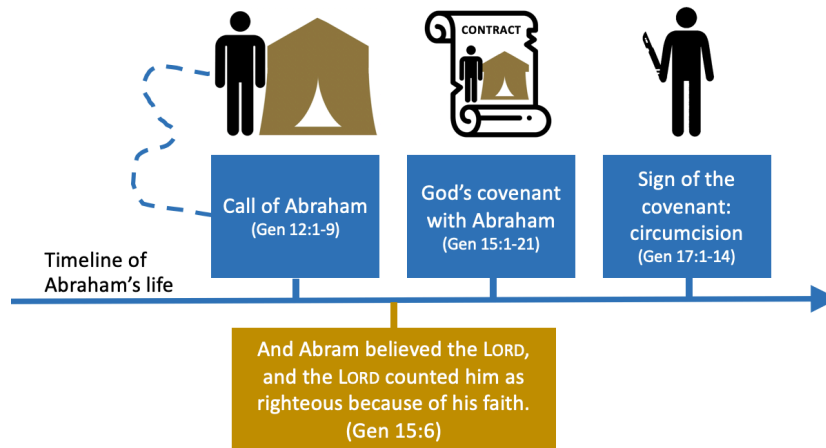


How did Abraham respond? He believed God’s promises.

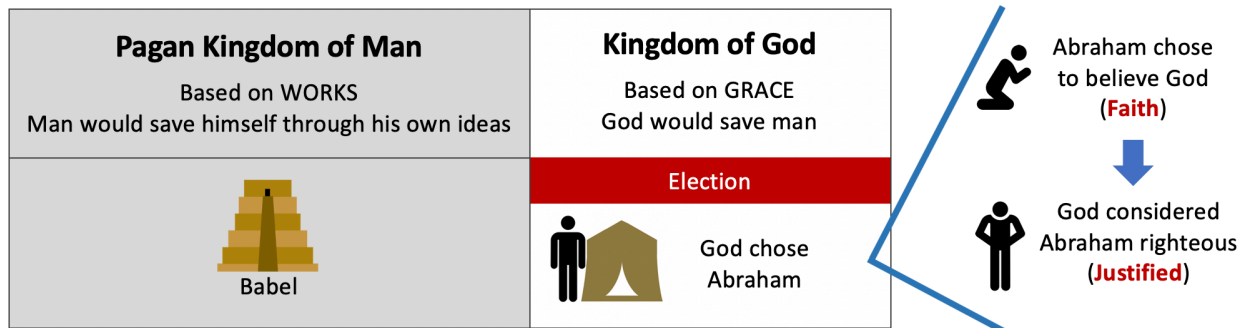
When God first called Abraham to leave Ur, Abraham packed up and left. Even before God made any official covenant with him, Abraham believed God and His promises.

Genesis 15:6

And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.



1. What does the Bible mean when it says Abraham “believed”?
2. And what does it mean that God counted him as righteous?





1. Faith: Abraham chose to believe God

Abraham grew up in a culture where the moon god was worshipped. The pagan beliefs at that time were that gods ruled in certain areas only. Moving out of a particular god's area meant they would lose that god's protection. Yet when a different God, Yahweh, spoke to Abraham, he made a conscious choice to believe. Abraham did exactly as Yahweh told him.

Genesis 12:1–4

¹ The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. ³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you." ⁴ So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

When Abraham chose to believe Yahweh, he must have believed this God was different from all the other "localised" and limited gods he was familiar with. He must have understood that Yahweh was not limited to being god over any particular area only.

Abraham's act of leaving Ur showed he must have believed that Yahweh was the sovereign God of the universe, over all other gods and over all locations. He must have trusted that He would be able to deliver on all His promises.

Abraham's faith was a response to God's gracious invitation to a friendship.

It is important for us to know that God approached Abraham first. God must always be the One to approach man first.

This is because sinful man is no longer innocent and therefore has no right or ability to approach God. Mankind had broken their friendship with God.



When Adam and Eve sinned, they hid. They knew they had offended and sinned against the holy God. So Yahweh lovingly and graciously invited them to be friends again. He called out to them.

Genesis 3:8–9

⁸ When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. ⁹ Then the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

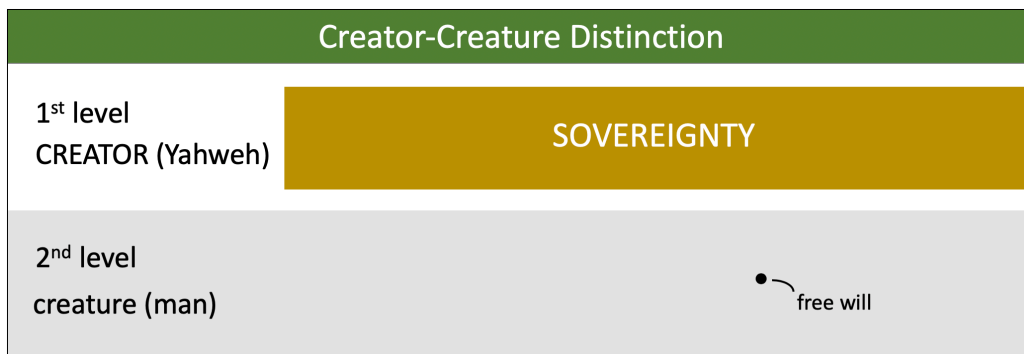
God must be the One to initiate reconciliation. Man has no right to approach God. Similarly, Abraham was not looking for God. God approached him first.

God gave Abraham the choice to respond to Him.

God did not force Abraham to do something he didn't want to. While God is sovereign and in control of everything, He can control without taking away man's personal responsibility in making decisions.

We must always remember the Creator-creature distinction. God is absolutely and totally on a different level of being than man. We must never think of Him as just a "super-human".

God is sovereignly in control of everything; and man can make real choices. We will not be able to fully understand or explain how this works, but nevertheless both are true.



So in this case, Yahweh called Abraham, made him promises, and Abraham, of his own free will, decided to believe this God. He chose to trust that this God could and would deliver on His promises.



2. **Justification:** God considered Abraham righteous

Right after Abraham believed God, God counted him as righteous because of his faith. What exactly did this mean? What actually happened? And how was this possible?

First, we need to understand that the holy God, Yahweh, cannot have a relationship with sinful man.

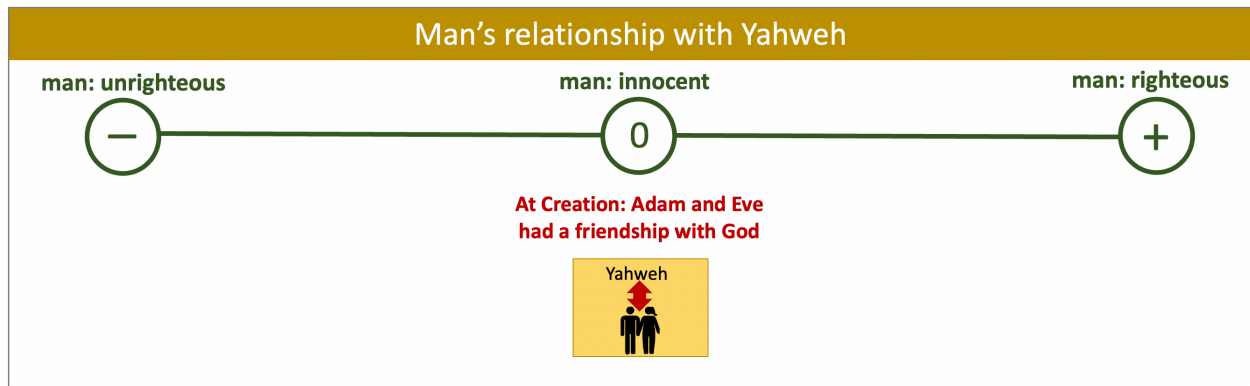
Isaiah 59:2a

It's your sins that have cut you off from God.

When God first created Adam and Eve, they were innocent because they had not done anything good or bad yet. Being innocent, they could enjoy friendship with God. In fact, it appears that it was usual for God to walk with them in the garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:8a

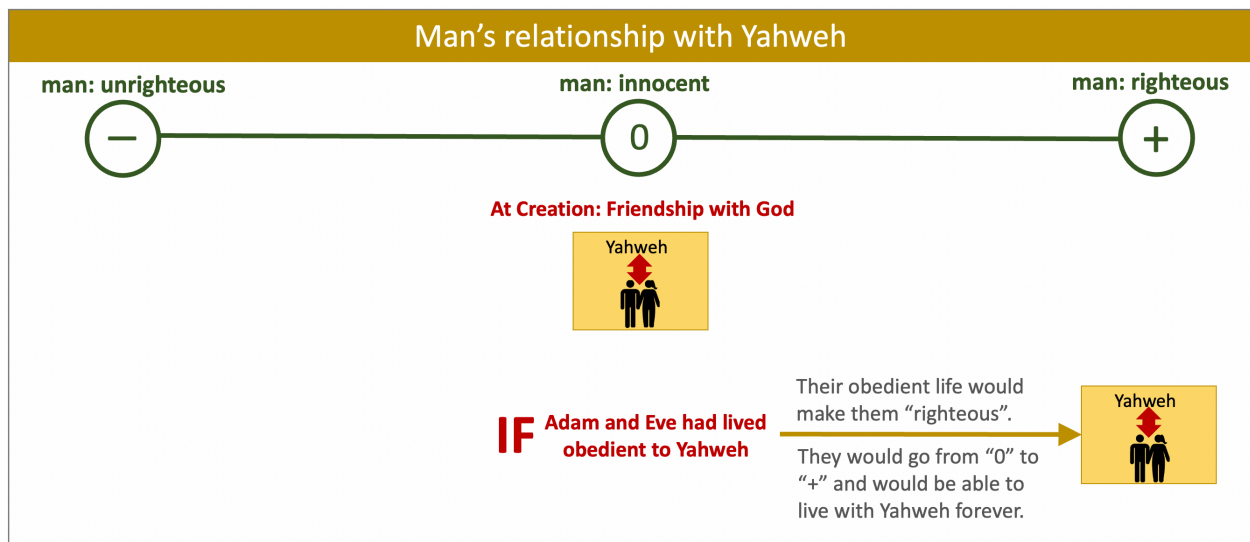
When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden.



God gave Adam and Eve one command, which was not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Day after day, as they lived and made the decision to obey God's command, they would have done what is good and right in His sight. In this way, they would have gained righteousness and therefore be able to continue living with God forever.

Deuteronomy 6:25

For we will be counted as righteous when we obey all the commands the LORD our God has given us.

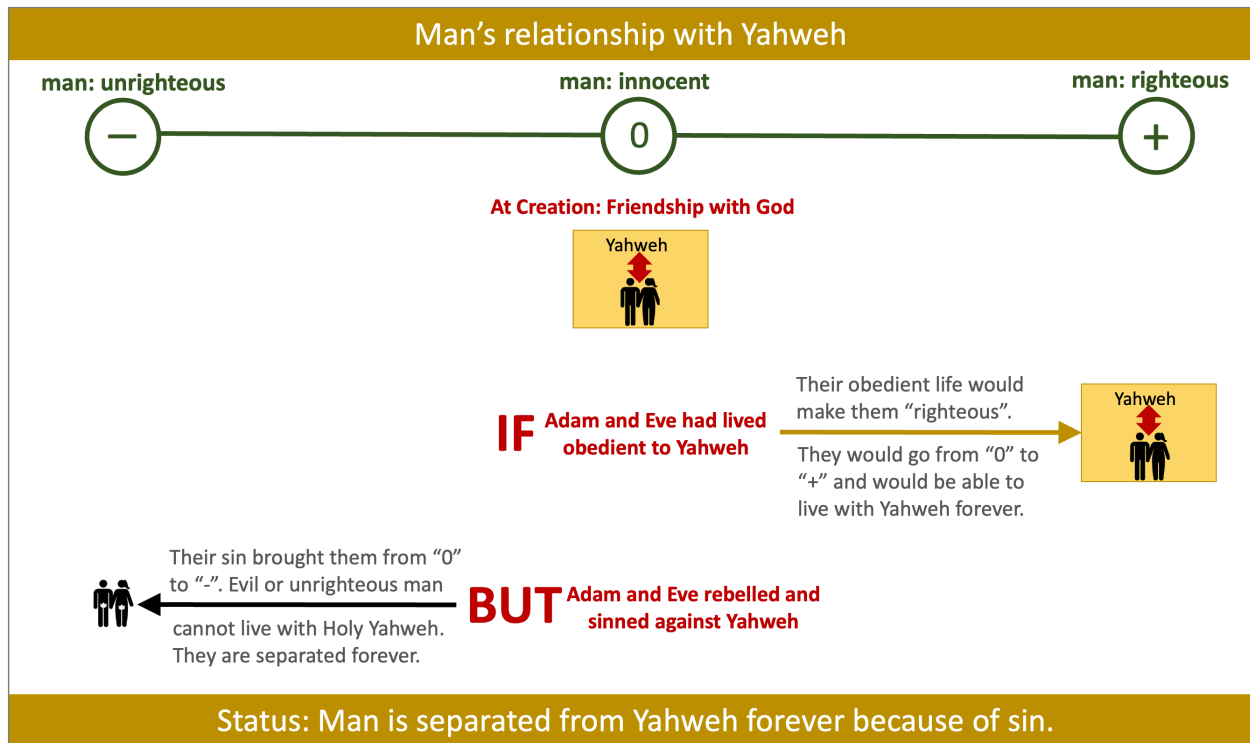


However, instead of trusting God and obeying His command, they mistrusted Him and disobeyed His one instruction. They rebelled and sinned against Him. They broke off their friendship with God. This act of disobedience caused them to become unrighteous before God. Not only that, this sin impacted every one of their descendants.

Romans 5:12

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.

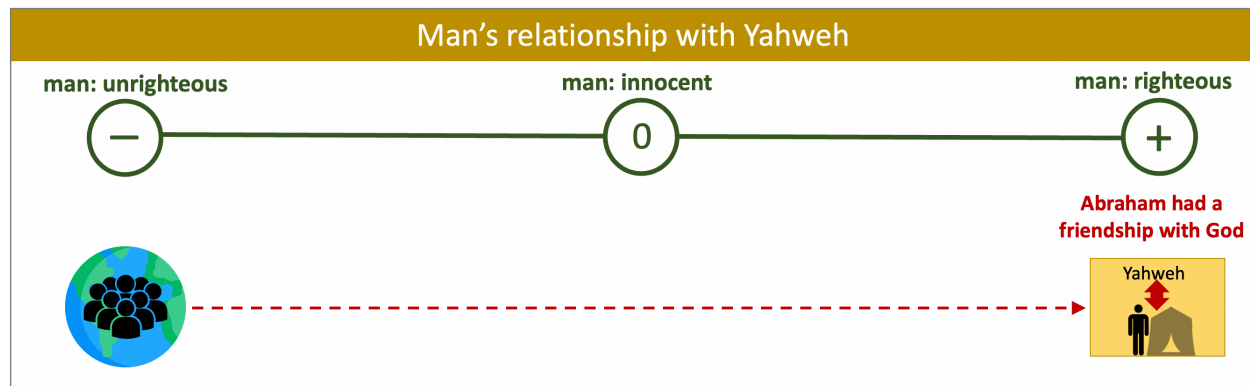
This means that every single descendant of Adam and Eve is now separated from God, including Abraham.



However, subsequently, God said He counted Abraham as righteous because of his faith (Genesis 15:6). In fact, the Bible even calls Abraham God's friend!

James 2:23

And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God.



How did Abraham suddenly become God’s friend? Did God just randomly decide to count Abraham as righteous because He liked Abraham better than others? Definitely not.

From our vantage point in history, we know that in Abraham’s future, God provided Jesus as the promised Saviour. And it was Jesus who made it possible for Abraham to go from “unrighteous” to “righteous”.



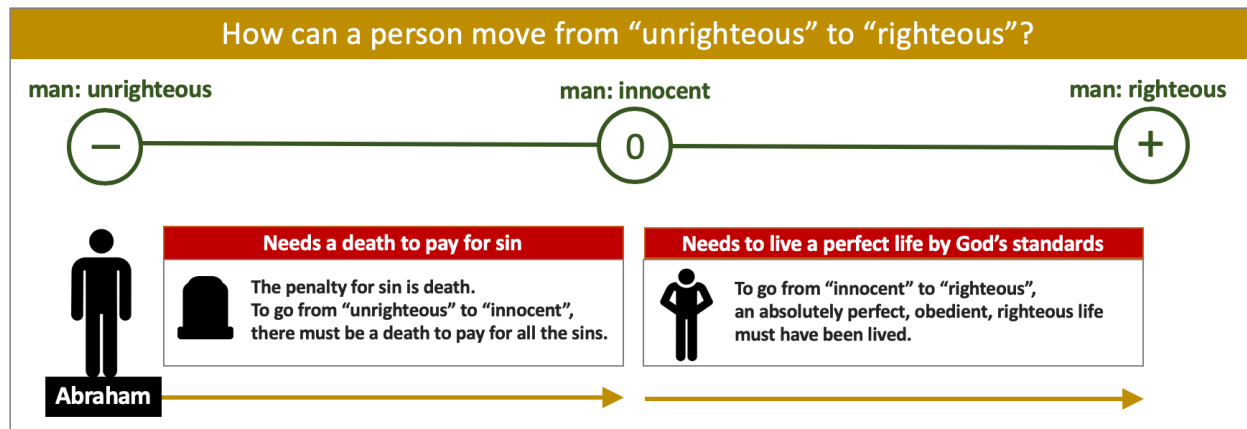
But how does this happen? How can anyone go from unrighteous (“-”) to righteous (“+”)?

First, to go from unrighteous (“-”) to innocent (“0”):

- The sin problem in man needs to be eliminated. Because the penalty for sin is death, people would have to pay for their sin by dying for their own sin.

Second, to go from innocent (“0”) to righteous (“+”):

- People would need to live an absolutely perfect life: not one sin, bad thought, word or action throughout their whole life.

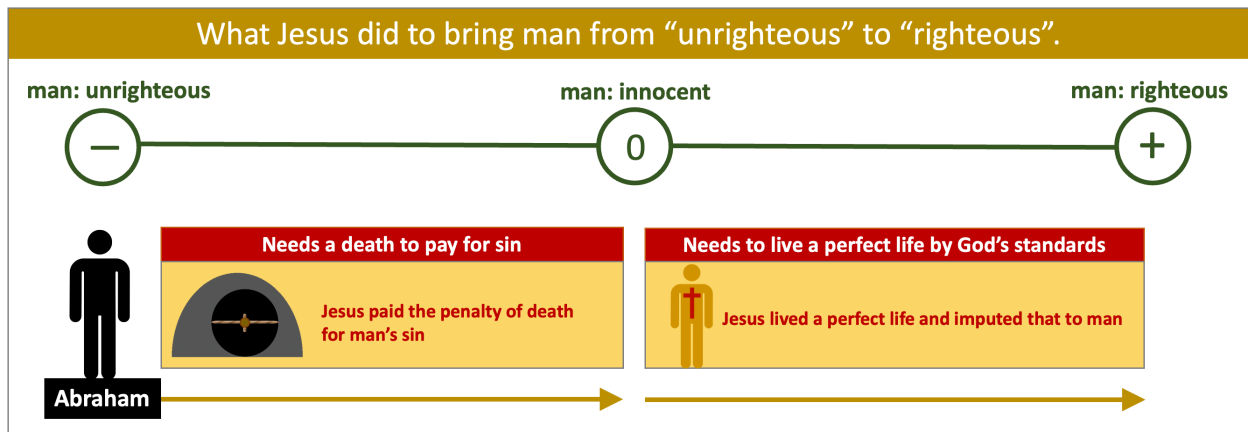


However, this is not good news for mankind! Why?

- If people do die for their own sin, it means they would be in the lake of fire forever!
- Moreover, the Bible’s record of the history of mankind from Adam and Eve down to Abraham shows that humans are not able to live a perfect life by God’s evaluation.

This means that it is impossible for people to get themselves to “righteous” (“+”).

However, when Jesus came as the promised Saviour to rescue mankind from the sin problem, He performed two acts on Abraham's (and all mankind's) behalf.



- A. **Jesus died in mankind's place, so that people do not need to die the eternal death.**
With no sin of His own, Jesus could die as a sufficient substitute in place of all mankind, fully satisfying sin's death penalty.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

Colossians 2:14

He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

- B. **Jesus lived a perfect life and then imputed (or credited) His life to mankind's account.**
Jesus was the only One who could live a perfectly obedient life that would please God. Such a life was considered righteous by God.

Romans 5:18–19

¹⁸ Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. ¹⁹ Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.

Christ's "one act" was the perfectly righteous life He lived as a man during His time on earth. He imputes or deposits or credits this perfect life into everyone who trusts God.

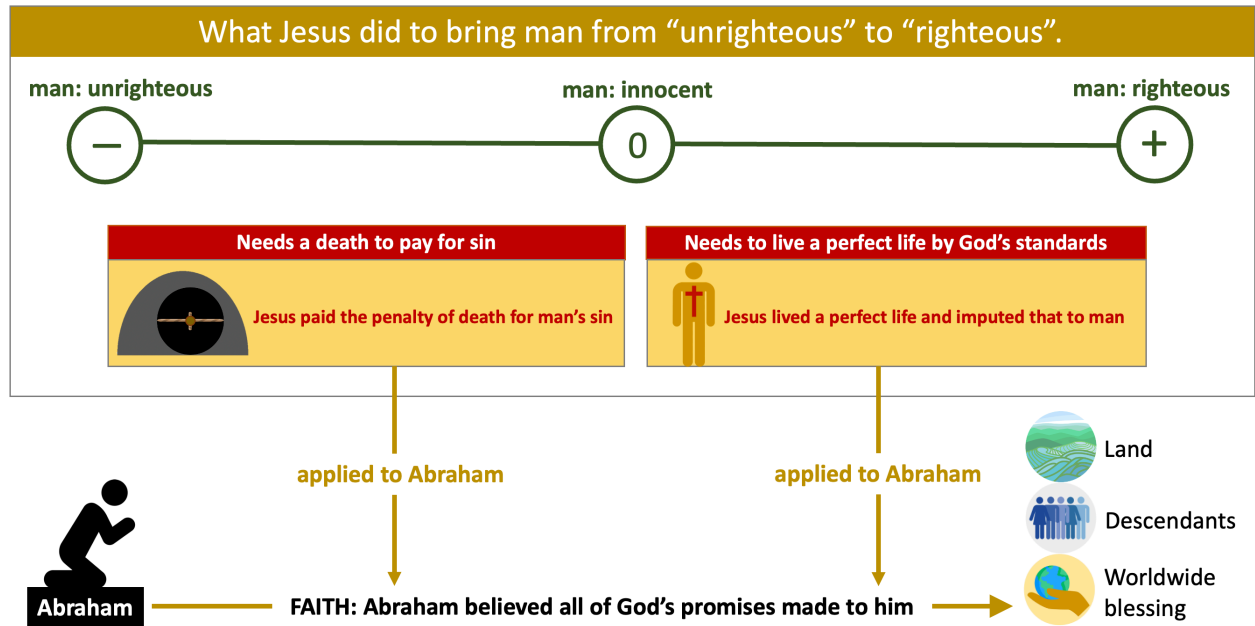
This was the way God planned to rescue man—it would be through Jesus!

But Abraham did not know any of these details. He didn't even know the name of Jesus! So how could God make him righteous?

God may not have told Abraham any of this, but with the little that God had said, Abraham believed everything. Abraham had faith, or full confidence, that Yahweh could and would somehow deliver fully on the promises of land, descendants and worldwide blessing that were made to him.



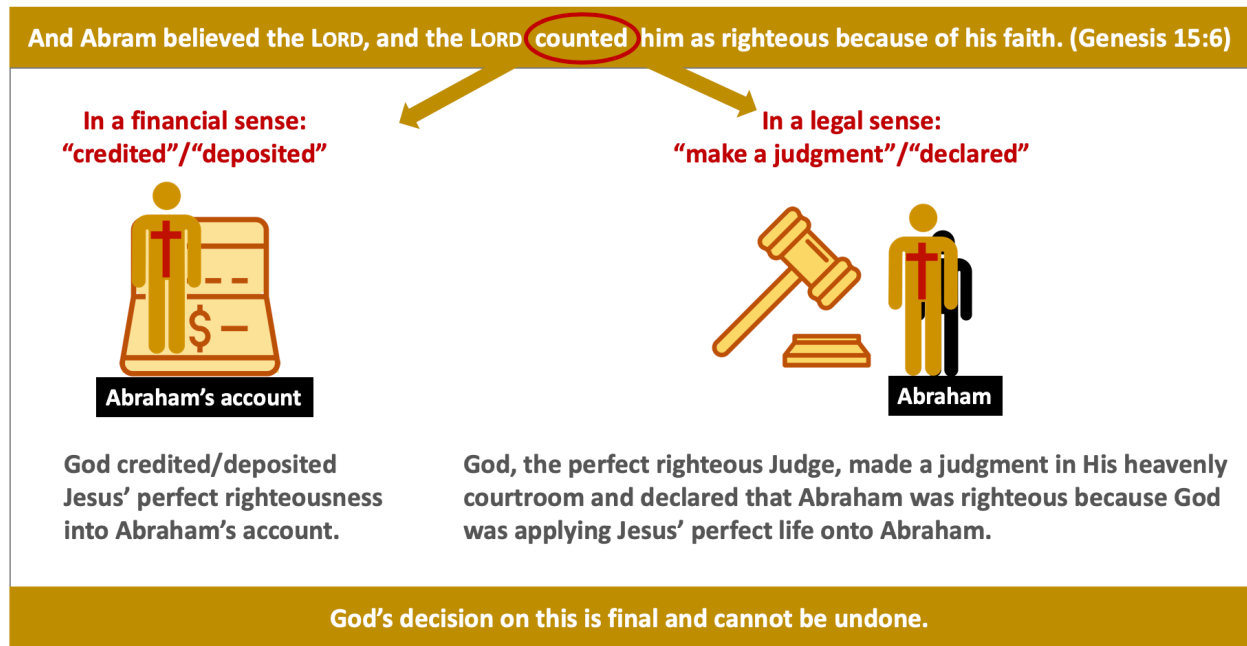
And because of Abraham's faith in God's promises, God counted him as righteous. So Yahweh applied the benefit of the future work accomplished by Jesus (His death, resurrection and righteous life) to Abraham. Because of his faith, Abraham got to enjoy the benefits of what Jesus did, even before Jesus came to earth as a human.



The word "justify" means "to declare righteous" (there is no such English word as "righteousify", hence, the word "justify" is used). So we can say that God justified Abraham.

However, Abraham did nothing to deserve God's justification. Abraham did no work, nor did he promise God anything. He trusted Yahweh and God **counted** him as righteous.

The word “counted” has the meaning of “calculate” or “judge”. The word is both a financial and a legal term.



From then on, when Yahweh saw Abraham, He saw the righteousness of Christ that He Himself had placed into Abraham. God could therefore say that Abraham was righteous, or justified.

The financial and legal pictures help us understand the nature of justification. It is a one-time act that cannot be reversed. Scripture does not have any event that describes Abraham (or anyone else) being “de-justified”, “unjustified” or “unrighteousified” by God. There are no biblical words to describe such a situation because it doesn't happen.

When did God justify Abraham? Before he did anything.

What's more, God justified Abraham even before He made a covenant with him and even before Abraham started practising circumcision.

Romans 4:5–10

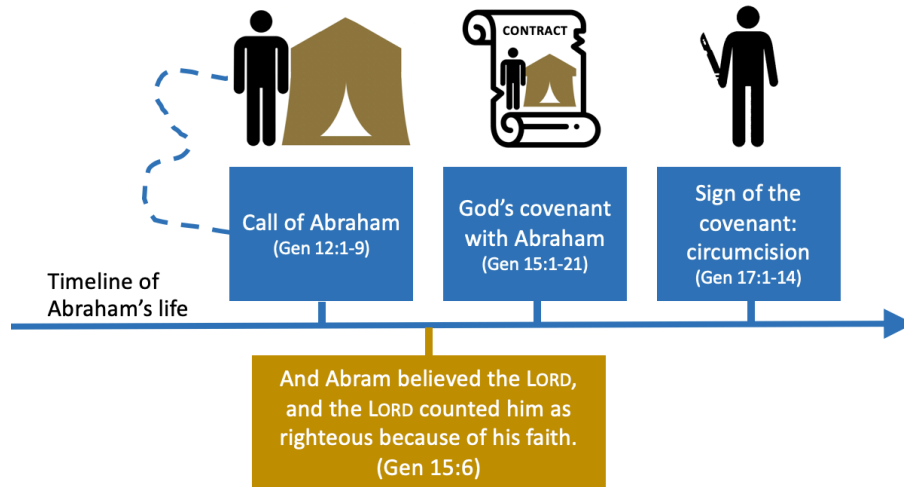
⁵ But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. ⁶ David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it:

⁷ “Oh, what joy for those
whose disobedience is forgiven,
whose sins are put out of sight.

⁸ Yes, what joy for those
whose record the LORD has cleared of sin.”

⁹ Now, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles? Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith.

¹⁰ But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised!



Abraham did absolutely nothing to earn or deserve his justification before God. God considered Abraham righteous simply because Abraham believed God.

The apostle Paul said that if Abraham could do good deeds and then be considered righteous, he would have something to boast about. But instead, there was no work, action or good deed that could make Abraham righteous. Only trusting in God would work.

God looked into Abraham's heart and knew he had faith.

Romans 4:1–3

¹ Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? ² If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way. ³ For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith."

But faith is invisible. Only God could see what was going on in Abraham's mind and heart and know what he was thinking and what he believed. Other people cannot look into hearts like God can.

Then how can we know if Abraham believed God?

We can "see" Abraham's faith through his actions. Abraham's outward actions are proof of his inner beliefs.





Example 1

Inner belief Abraham trusted in God's promise of land.	Outward action Abraham left Ur.
	

Hebrews 11:8–10

⁸ It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. ⁹ And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. ¹⁰ Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.

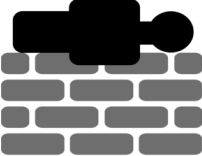
Example 2

Inner belief Abraham trusted in God's promise of descendants.	Outward action Abraham continued to have sexual relations with Sarah for 25 years, even though she was infertile.
	

Romans 4:18–21

¹⁸ Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, “That’s how many descendants you will have!” ¹⁹ And Abraham’s faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. ²¹ He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises.



Example 3

Inner belief Abraham trusted in God's promise of descendants.	Outward action Abraham obeyed God's instruction to sacrifice Isaac, his promised son through Sarah.
	

Hebrews 11:17–19

¹⁷ It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God's promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, ¹⁸ even though God had told him, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted." ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead.

Example 4

Inner belief Abraham trusted in God's covenant or contract.	Outward action Abraham circumcised all the males in his family.
	

Genesis 17:22–23

²² When God had finished speaking, he left Abraham. ²³ On that very day Abraham took his son, Ishmael, and every male in his household, including those born there and those he had bought. Then he circumcised them, cutting off their foreskins, just as God had told him.

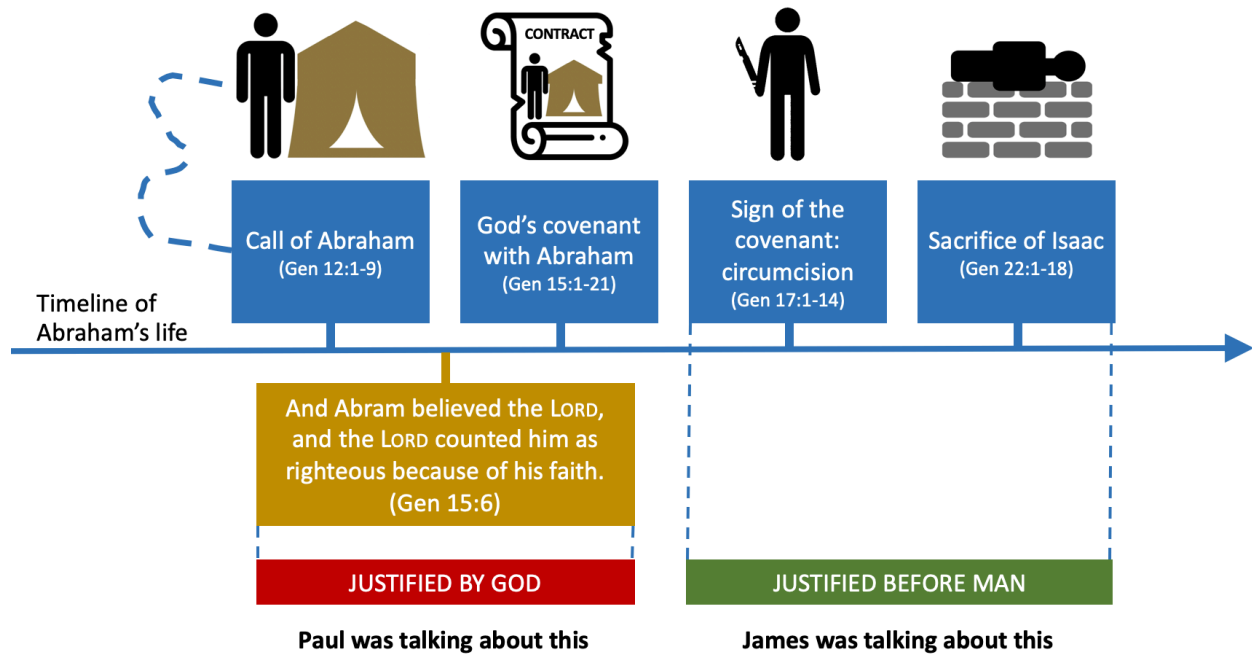
The book of James says the same thing: that we can "see" Abraham's inner faith through his outward actions.

James 2:21–24

²¹ Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. ²³ And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. ²⁴ So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

In reading this passage in the book of James, some people wonder if God justified Abraham because of his faith and his actions. No. That is not the case.

Abraham was Justified BY God and BEFORE Man



When Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac, he was already considered righteous by God. But now, others could see his faith as he laid Isaac on the altar. Others now saw the faith that God already knew Abraham had. Abraham's faith was made visible, or complete, in the eyes of other people. To be clear, this visible act of obeying God did not make Abraham righteous.

So, there is absolutely no contradiction between what the apostle Paul said in the book of Romans and what James is talking about.

- Paul was talking about Genesis 15:6, when Abraham was **justified by God** because Abraham had faith in Yahweh.
- James was talking about Genesis 22, the event of the sacrifice of Isaac that happened **years later**, after Abraham had already been justified. James was talking about Abraham being **justified before man**.

The same is true for circumcision. The act of circumcision did not justify Abraham. Abraham was already justified.

Circumcision **came later** and was an outward physical sign of Abraham's inward "invisible" faith.

Romans 4:11–12

¹¹ Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith. ¹² And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised.

The Bible says that it is **through faith in God's** promise of future salvation that a person is declared righteous.



And a person's acts of obedience to God's Word **show other people** their faith in God.

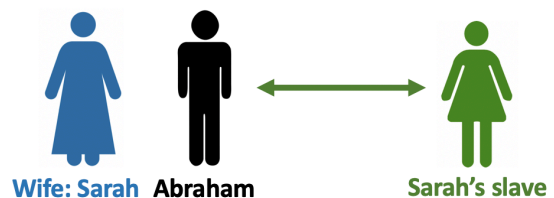
**Abraham's faith was not perfect**

With all the accounts of Abraham's faith, we might think that his faith in God was perfect. However, God wants us to know that his faith was far from perfect so He included some examples in the Bible to explain more about the nature of faith.

These incidents help us understand that it was not the quality or amount of Abraham's faith that kept him justified but rather, it was Yahweh who did the justification.

1. Abraham and Sarah thought they could help God out.

Being concerned with how God could provide a son to a barren couple, Abraham and Sarah thought they could help God out by finding their own solution to their lack of children. They decided to "help" Yahweh fulfil the promise of a son by getting Abraham to have a baby through Sarah's servant, Hagar.



Genesis 16:2

So Sarai said to Abram, “The LORD has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her.” And Abram agreed with Sarai’s proposal.

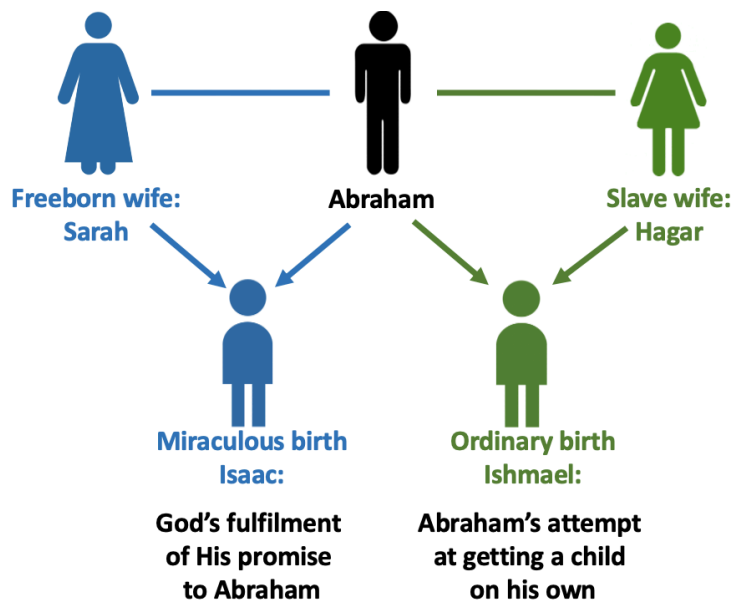
Having a child through the servant of one’s wife was an acceptable way during that time to solve the problem of childlessness. The child of the servant would still be considered Sarah’s child. Abraham and Sarah thought they could help God’s plan to provide a nation of descendants to Abraham.

2. Abraham laughed when God told him it was time to have a son.

Years later, Abraham reacted with disbelieving laughter when God told him it was time for Sarah to have a son. Abraham thought he could make things “easier” for God by pointing to the solution he came up with: Ishmael, the son he had with Hagar, Sarah’s servant.

Genesis 17:15–18

¹⁵ Then God said to Abraham, “Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai. From now on her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly, and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings of nations will be among her descendants.” ¹⁷ Then Abraham bowed down to the ground, but he laughed to himself in disbelief. “How could I become a father at the age of 100?” he thought. “And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?” ¹⁸ So Abraham said to God, “May Ishmael live under your special blessing!”



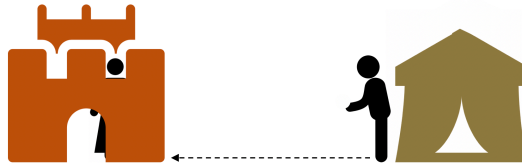
God did not accept Abraham’s man-made solution and as He promised, He caused Sarah to have a son with Abraham. God told Abraham to name his promised son “Isaac” which means “he laughs”. It would be a reminder to Abraham of when his faith faltered.

3. Abraham showed a lack of trust in God’s protection.

As a wanderer, Abraham moved his flocks and herds about. Once he moved south into the region known as the Negev. There, he encountered a king named Abimelech and he greatly feared that Abimelech would take Sarah from him by force, possibly killing Abraham to do so. So Abraham asked Sarah to say that they were brother and sister, to prevent himself from getting killed. But this plan failed as Abimelech still took Sarah to be his wife.

Genesis 20:2

Abraham introduced his wife, Sarah, by saying, “She is my sister.” So King Abimelech of Gerar sent for Sarah and had her brought to him at his palace.



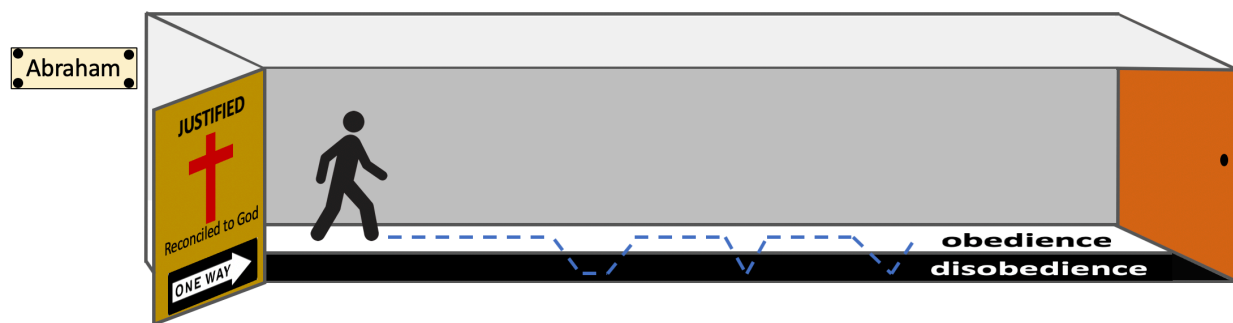
Abraham’s actions showed his lack of trust in God to protect them both. God was of course, not powerless. He intervened in a remarkable way, speaking directly to Abimelech in a dream and told him to return Sarah to Abraham or face severe consequences.

These incidents showed Abraham’s faith at its weakest. But throughout all these “low periods” in his life, God’s justification of him did not change. In fact, this is God’s overall evaluation of Abraham.

Romans 4:20–22

²⁰ Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. ²¹ He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. ²² And because of Abraham’s faith, God counted him as righteous.

With all these accounts of the “low points of faith” in Abraham’s life, how could Yahweh claim that Abraham “never wavered”? It is because God looked at the overall span of Abraham’s life and his faith throughout all those years.



Though he went through ups and downs in the faith journey, God’s overall assessment of Abraham was that his faith matured and grew over his lifetime. As he walked with God, he learnt and experienced more about Him.

So Abraham grew in both his understanding and relationship with God. His faith did not mature overnight. It did not happen suddenly. But during this whole time, his justification was secure because it was God who ensured it.

Abraham, friend of God

While most of the people of the world had rejected God, Abraham was called the friend of God. But what does being a friend of God look like? There is a fascinating account in the Bible of the time when God appeared in human form, together with two angels, to see Abraham.



1. Yahweh had fellowship with Abraham by having a meal with him. Abraham was reverent and humble towards God.

Genesis 18:1–8

¹ The LORD appeared again to Abraham near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. One day Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day. ² He looked up and noticed three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran to meet them and welcomed them, bowing low to the ground.

³ “My lord,” he said, “if it pleases you, stop here for a while. ⁴ Rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to wash your feet. ⁵ And since you’ve honored your servant with this visit, let me prepare some food to refresh you before you continue on your journey.”

“All right,” they said. “Do as you have said.”

⁶ So Abraham ran back to the tent and said to Sarah, “Hurry! Get three large measures of your best flour, knead it into dough, and bake some bread.” ⁷ Then Abraham ran out to the herd and chose a tender calf and gave it to his servant, who quickly prepared it. ⁸ When the food was ready, Abraham took some yogurt and milk and the roasted meat, and he served it to the men. As they ate, Abraham waited on them in the shade of the trees.

The God of the Bible is not a god that is far away and uninterested in mankind. God has a personal relationship with Abraham. It is important to remember that God is totally self-contained and all-sufficient. He does not have any needs at all: He does not need to rest, wash his feet, eat or drink. He is the One who sustains the whole world. Yet He lowered Himself to go to Abraham’s tent to spend time with him and even have a meal with him.

Abraham rightfully showed great reverence for God. Abraham was a respectable elderly man with a household of servants under him. Yet, when he saw God, he personally ran (not walked) to meet Him and bowed before Him. Then he personally arranged for a lot of food to be prepared and he humbly served God himself. Abraham too, related to God personally and intimately.



2. Yahweh chose to have an authentic relationship with Abraham by revealing His heart to him.

Genesis 18:16–21

¹⁶ Then the men got up from their meal and looked out toward Sodom. As they left, Abraham went with them to send them on their way.

¹⁷ “Should I hide my plan from Abraham?” the LORD asked. ¹⁸ “For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through

him. ¹⁹ I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. Then I will do for Abraham all that I have promised.”

²⁰ So the LORD told Abraham, “I have heard a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, because their sin is so flagrant. ²¹ I am going down to see if their actions are as wicked as I have heard. If not, I want to know.”

God defined what an intimate personal relationship with Him looks like by sharing His own heart with Abraham. This is shocking!

God and man are on totally different levels. As Creator-God, He has every right to choose how to interact with mankind. He does not owe mankind anything. And He does not need to tell mankind anything.

Yet, we see Yahweh’s sincerity in being a friend to His own creation, Abraham. God chose to communicate and share His plans with him!

Biblical Creation: Creator-Creature Distinction	
1 st level	CREATOR
2 nd level	Creature: what God created

Some people might wonder why the all-knowing Yahweh needed to “go down” to see if Sodom and Gomorrah were really that wicked. It is true that God knows everything and He does not need to “go down” to see anything. But God also wants us to see that He is not a reckless, sloppy or hasty judge. He is careful, thorough and measured. No one would be able to accuse God of being random or “not actually knowing the real situation” when He judges.

As God of all creation, He did not “need” to be considerate to mankind in this way, personally checking on their behaviour before judging. But it is in Yahweh’s character: He is just, loving and righteous. He is the standard of what it means to be all-holy and all-good.

And out of His own perfect character, God chose to communicate and relate to Abraham in a personal way, as a friend.



3. Yahweh offered Abraham the opportunity to intercede and pray for Sodom and Gomorrah.

After God shared His plan with Abraham, He intentionally stayed behind while the two angels left. It was almost as if God was inviting Abraham to talk to Him about the plan.

Genesis 18:22–26

²² The other men turned and headed toward Sodom, but the LORD remained with Abraham. ²³ Abraham approached him and said, “Will you sweep away both the righteous and the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose you find fifty righteous people living there in the city—will you still sweep it away and not spare it for their sakes? ²⁵ Surely you wouldn’t do such a thing, destroying the righteous along with the wicked. Why, you would be treating the righteous




and the wicked exactly the same! Surely you wouldn't do that! Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"

²⁶ And the LORD replied, "If I find fifty righteous people in Sodom, I will spare the entire city for their sake."

Abraham approached God boldly but respectfully to plead for Sodom and Gomorrah. He knew that God is a righteous and just Judge and therefore, he appealed to God's own character. And God encouraged him by agreeing to his request. In fact, Abraham persisted in his request till God agreed to spare the cities even if only ten righteous people were in it.

One thing we see from this is that God is approachable. He wants a genuine relationship with His creation and He encourages it. Also, He is intentional about allowing Abraham into His plan; not just telling Abraham about it, but encouraging him to be involved in it by being a mediator and pleading for God to show mercy to Sodom and Gomorrah.

Through this account, God showed Abraham the kind of relationship He expected to have with him. Since Yahweh planned to deliver His worldwide blessing through Abraham and his family, He involved Abraham in what He was doing. He was teaching Abraham what it meant to be a friend of God.

Abraham's Friendship with God	
	1. Fellowship between God and Abraham
	2. God reveals His heart
	3. God invites Abraham to participate in His work

Looking at Abraham's life, here are several lessons we can learn about what it means to have faith in God and to be a friend of God.

Lessons from Abraham's life and God's covenant with him

- 1. Just as Yahweh made Abraham promises and invited Abraham to trust in Him, God promises us reconciliation with Him if we place our trust in Him. It is our responsibility to respond to God's call and invitation.**

Yahweh called to Abraham when he was in Ur. Abraham chose to believe in Him, the only true God of the whole universe.

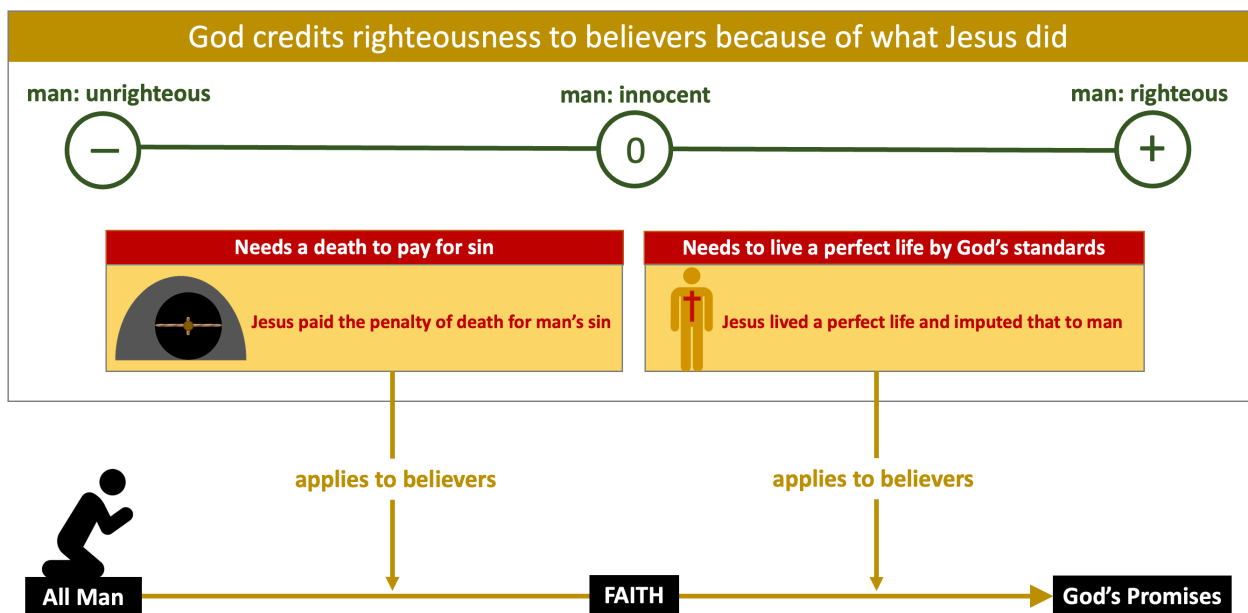
Today, God calls all people to believe in Him. People have a choice. It is not God's will that people perish in their rebellion.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.

Galatians 3:8–9

⁸ What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would make the Gentiles right in his sight because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "All nations will be blessed through you."⁹ So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.

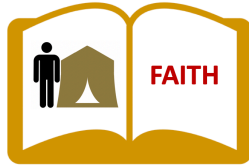


2. Just as Abraham was made righteous based entirely on his faith, likewise, we too are justified by Yahweh entirely based on our faith. Works are excluded.

One reason why the Bible records the account of Abraham in such specific detail is because God wants us to know that the way He handled Abraham will be the way He handles us as well. And He wants us to have the same assurance that when we believe in Him, we too will be counted as righteous, just as Abraham was.

Romans 4:22–24

²² And because of Abraham's faith, God counted him as righteous. ²³ And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was recorded ²⁴ for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.



How God counted
Abraham righteous
because of his faith

...was recorded
so we know
it is also...



...how God counts
us righteous
because of our faith

Therefore, for our own assurance and security, it is important we understand that, just like Abraham, we can do nothing to earn or deserve justification. It is purely by the gracious invitation of God that He makes us right in His sight when we place our trust in Him.

3. Yahweh wants to have a genuine relationship with us, where He fellowships with us, speaks with us and we come to Him in prayer.

Just as God had a relationship with Abraham, God wants to have a personal relationship with us as well. God left us His Word in the form of Scriptures so that we can know His heart. God reveals so much of Himself in the Bible. From the Bible, we learn about His character, His love for His creation, His will, His plan for all creation and even His feelings.



And just as He invited Abraham to speak with Him and play a part in His work, God also invites us to pray to Him. He wants us to come boldly in prayer to Him, knowing that He is all-good and all-loving. But He also wants to involve us in His work of saving sinful mankind. He wants us to pray and intercede for others, so that more people will be saved.



Just as God chose Abraham and made him a friend, God also calls us to be His friends, joining Him to play a part in His work. Jesus said:

John 15:14–16

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. ¹⁶ You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.

What a great privilege it is that the Creator-God of the universe wants to be our friend! This is something we should never take for granted! We should treasure His Word, the Bible and spend time in prayer with Him. What a great honour it is for mere created beings like us to have a personal relationship with our Creator-God!

Can we tell if a person is justified or not by looking at how he lives his life?

Unlike God, no human is all-knowing or all-seeing. Even with our best friends, we can never know everything there is to know about them. We are limited and finite in our ability to judge. Only God is infinite in His ability to judge accurately.

YAHWEH	Mankind
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All-knowing • Infinite • Just judgments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited • finite • warped judgments

Just like Abraham, our faith can look like it is wavering even if our justification is sure. Our faith in God and His promises may not always look constant nor consistent. People who may have met Abraham when he was at his weak points may have wondered if Abraham did believe in his God at all. But despite what Abraham's faith looked like during those times, God gave him an excellent overall evaluation.

This is good for us as believers to remember. We too, will continue to mature in our faith. And while we are growing, we should not be overly discouraged when we feel like we're in a "low season". We have the assurance that just as God had justified Abraham, God has justified us.

Also, we have to be careful that we do not determine a person's justification by looking at their lives.

Firstly, as fallen people, our judgments are warped. We make poor judges. For example, in the New Testament, everyone, including Jesus' disciples, assumed that Judas Iscariot was a faithful believer and disciple of Jesus. Even when Jesus claimed that one of his disciples would betray Him, none of the other disciples could guess who it was.

John 13:21–25

²¹ Now Jesus was deeply troubled, and he exclaimed, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me!" ²² The disciples looked at each other, wondering whom he could mean. ²³ The disciple Jesus loved was sitting next to Jesus at the table. ²⁴ Simon Peter motioned to him to ask, "Who's he talking about?" ²⁵ So that disciple leaned over to Jesus and asked, "Lord, who is it?"

The disciples did not immediately turn to Judas and think that it was him. This was probably because Judas looked, spoke and behaved just like the rest of them. However, while Judas may have been a disciple of Jesus, he was certainly not a believer. This is what Jesus said of Judas:

John 6:64

But some of you do not believe me." (For Jesus knew from the beginning which ones didn't believe, and he knew who would betray him.)



Despite what he looked like, Judas was not justified before God. Even though the rest of the disciples lived with Judas for three years, none of them knew this. Only Jesus knew. This shows that human judgments are not very reliable.

Secondly, while God is unlimited in knowledge, we humans are extremely limited. So, good deeds alone are a slippery measure of a person's justification. Here are four examples why.

1. **Good works are relative.** An unbeliever may swear 50 times a day, but after trusting God and becoming a believer, by the power of the Holy Spirit he is able to limit his swearing to just once a day. This is a miracle and a good work. But we may see him and think, "Goodness, he's a believer, how can he swear?"
2. **Good works can be invisible.** God tells us to pray in secret (Matthew 6:6) and do good works in secret (Matthew 6:3). So it shouldn't be surprising that we often cannot see each other's good works.
3. **Good works can be passive in nature.** One type of good work is self-control (Galatians 5:23). And that means to stop doing bad things. So if someone used to do lots of bad things and now he stops, it's a good work. But in our eyes, he's doing nothing!
4. **Good works can be inconsistent.** The Bible allows for the possibility of believers failing to live good lives. If there are lapses in good works, how long can the lapse continue before one is judged as never justified? If I do good works for ten years and then I stop for the rest of my life... do I become unjustified? That's simply not true. Abraham himself is a good example of this.

Thirdly, God did not call us to be faith inspectors. The Bible does not contain detailed instructions on how we are to sift out true believers from among churchgoers. In fact, it appears that Jesus wants us to be more concerned about our own relationship with God.



Towards the end of Jesus' time on earth, after Jesus told Peter the kind of death that he would suffer, Peter asked Jesus what would happen with John, the other disciple. Jesus did not tell him. Instead, Jesus chided Peter for being a busybody. He told Peter to just focus on following Him.

John 21:20–22

²⁰ Peter turned around and saw behind them the disciple Jesus loved—the one who had leaned over to Jesus during supper and asked, "Lord, who will betray you?"

²¹ Peter asked Jesus, "What about him, Lord?" ²² Jesus replied, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? As for you, follow me."

Our biggest concern should not be another person's justification, but our own. We need to ask ourselves if we have faith in God. Are we trusting that Yahweh is the One who declares us righteous? In other words, do we believe that the Creator-God of the universe is justifying us by applying the righteousness of Christ into our life? If we trust God to do this for us, then just like Abraham, we can be certain that our justification is secure forever.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. Seeing Abraham's faith life in all its ups and downs, how does that make you feel? Does Abraham's faith journey reflect your own? In what ways?
2. In the moments when Abraham's faith was at its lowest, if he had died at those times, how do you think God would have viewed him? Would he have been righteous or unrighteous? Justified or unjustified?
3. How do we use the account of Abraham to encourage ourselves or others in their journey of faith? How would we explain the nature of faith with his life?



Pre-reading for next lesson: Genesis 13, 24, 27–32, 37–47; Exodus 1–12