

Romans 4:18 by Wayne Barber

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Romans 4:18:
The Detail of God's Good News, Part 5
 by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

Have you ever wondered what Abraham believed that was accounted unto him as righteousness? I want to assert to you that Abraham put his faith into Christ just like we put our faith into Christ. The difference is, he looked forward to Christ; we look back to Christ and the fact that He has already come. Immediately you might have questions, so I want to take you on a journey through the Old Testament to see if we can't document this for you.

Christ, the Messiah, was the one promised to come to suffer and die for our sin. Abraham, along with other Old Testament figures, looked forward to it, knowing that they were sinners and could not justify themselves. They put all their faith and hope into the one who would come. We now rest our faith and hope on the one who has already come and has died for us on the cross.

When I was a child, I always liked it better when my parents were up and awake when I went to bed. I felt more secure when I could hear voices somewhere in the house. I remember my Mama would come and check on me. I knew she was going to come and check on me. I always liked that. She would open up the door just a crack. I couldn't see her, but I knew she was out there. If I was moving around, I knew she would open the door just a little bit further. I could just about see her then. I could see the outline of her. If I coughed or did something to make her have to come into the room, she would open the door all the way up and there she was! When she just cracked the door, I really couldn't see her. I didn't really get a full picture of her, but I knew she was there. But the more the door opened, the more I could see that she was there. When the door finally opened, there she was!

I know that is a simple illustration, but I think that is the way it is in Scripture as God begins to reveal the Messianic Redeemer. All the way back in Genesis He cracks the door just a little bit. Now, they didn't understand it like we understand it, but they got a

glimpse. Then in Abraham, He opens it a little further. Then you jump 500 or so years to the Mosaic period, the Law. He really opens it up and you start seeing the sacrificial system and the suffering Savior in that, the coming Redeemer. Then you get into the Prophetic period and all the prophets. The door is opening more and more. Then another 400 years go by and the door swings open and there He is.

You can't take the fact that He is a suffering Savior and put it only in the New Testament. He was the Lamb standing in the portals of heaven before the foundation of this world, ready to come and die for our sins. Faith in Him and what He alone could do is the only means by which a person can ever be justified and made righteous before God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

Genesis 3:15 gives us the first glimpse. The door cracks open just a little bit. This is right after the fall. God comes and is speaking to the serpent, the devil, who has tempted man in the garden. Man has sinned. Verse 15 reads, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." The Lord is speaking to the serpent, who was the devil, in the garden after the fall. "Sin" had become, for the first time, a word in the human vocabulary. Man now had been separated from God.

In Genesis 2:16-17 God had said, "If you eat of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, you shall surely die in that day." Well, now they had eaten of it. They didn't die instantly, but they began to die physically. They didn't die mentally, but they began to die because they couldn't think anymore like God wanted them to think. They immediately died spiritually. They were immediately estranged from God. Just a quick glimpse at the passage lets you know the seriousness of when sin entered the world. You can see the estrangement and the guilt and the depravity that came in man's heart.

The awful consequence of sin had happened. Man had sinned. He was separated now from God. The Lord Himself came into the garden and foretold an age-long conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. He also said the conflict will be won by the seed of the woman.

I want you to see something. In the Hebrew here, the word "seed" is singular and masculine. Here is Adam, here is Eve and here is the serpent. God comes and promises that there is going to be a seed to come. A man is going to come. Here is the beginnings of the door cracking open of the Suffering Savior, the Messianic Redeemer who will one day come, the Messiah of Israel, the Christ in the New Testament to us, the one who is promised even in Genesis 3:15. He will come one day, born of a woman, and He will be no ordinary man. When God tells you this, you know it will be no ordinary man.

In verse 21 the fact that there would be a sacrifice, a costliness for sin, a shedding of blood, is seen even more clearly. It says, "And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them." Remember, they tried to clothe themselves. It is the depraved nature of every man's heart to cover his sin, to do something to mask it. But God shows them that covering won't work. He killed an animal. You don't have skins of an animal without an animal having to die. We know from the Old Testament that is the beginning of the foreshadowing of the Messianic Redeemer who will come one day, who will not only come to rule and to reign over the seed of the serpent, but the way He will come is one who will die for our sin.

You are probably saying, "They didn't understand all of that." I know. The door was only cracked a little. But they got enough of it to know that it would be a man, no ordinary man, born of a woman and what He will do will be so costly that only what He can do will be the covering of man's sin. Only God can cover man's sin. Only God can deal with all of that. So we see in a very primitive part of history God cracking the door open to a plan He had before the creation of this world.

The scarlet thread, the suffering Savior, the suffering Redeemer, the God-man, starts in Genesis 3 and runs all the way through Scripture to Revelation. You cannot take the blood out. You cannot take the suffering out. You cannot take away the fact that man is desperate for someone to come and redeem him from his lowly, sinful estate.

Well, let's follow the Scriptures. God judged the world with the flood. He saved a family. He covenanted with Noah and spared a family in the Ark, another picture of that Redeemer who would one day come. The people in the water died. The people in the Ark were saved.

Then in Genesis 9 we find Noah, the great hero, drunk. You see, these are sinners like you and me. Man was not a good person. In Genesis 11 they all get together at this point. There are no nations on this earth. This is a group, one big family of creation. They come together and say, "You know, we can build a tower unto God." So they built the Tower of Babel. It angers God. God destroys the Tower, scatters the people and confuses their languages

Now you don't have one family on the earth, you have families on the earth which later on are going to be called nations. Those nations one day would be called the Gentile world. It is out of that Gentile world that God, in Genesis 12, extracts a 75-year-old Chaldean from the city of Ur by the name of Abram who later became Abraham. God begins to open the door just a little bit more.

The fact of a Redeemer was certainly known in their day. As a matter of fact, Job is the oldest book in Scripture, and Job 19:25 says, "I know that my Redeemer lives." The idea of a kinsman Redeemer was in their culture. They understood that a kinsman redeemer was one who came and paid a price to get you out of the mess that you were in. That is exactly what Job talks about. They had an understanding way back in primitive times of a Redeemer, of the promise of a coming Messiah. So God decides to really crack the door open and give us more and more light of what He is doing.

He singles out Abraham. Genesis 12:1 says, "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" That is not a physical promise. That is a spiritual promise to Abram. Who was he? A 75-year-old Chaldean. He was not a good man or a worthy man, but a man God chose to work through.

At this point it doesn't record that Abraham believed and it was accounted unto him as righteousness. We do know that he believed. Hebrews 11:8 (note) says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place where he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going." If you want to see the fact that he was a sinful man like you and me and wanted to do things his way and at the same time doing what God was saying, you don't have to go very far. Verse 1 says, "You get up and go away from your relatives and away from your father's house." But verse 5 says, "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his nephew." What did the Word say? Leave your relatives. But he takes Lot, his nephew, with him.

You don't have to go very much further to find that he has his own road map. Ge 12:10 says "Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. And it came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, 'See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; and it will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, "This is his wife"; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you.'"

Abraham has a lot to learn, doesn't he? Abraham, you don't lie. You don't run down to Egypt because there is a famine. But at the same time, he exercised faith by following the Lord Jesus Christ.

The door is cracking more and more. The light is coming in. He finally gets to the land that God directs him to. Then God speaks to him again, but this time, Abram has some questions he wants to ask the Lord. You see, he heard what He had said, "Through you all the families on this earth will be blessed." What does that mean to you? It means somehow you are going to have a child. At this time he is still childless and 75-years-old. Watch what happens in the conversation. Genesis 15:1 says, "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great.' And Abram said, 'O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Since Thou hast given no offspring to me [In other words, "How can the promise be fulfilled through me if I don't have any children?"], one born in my house is my heir.' Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.' And He took him outside and said, 'Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Now, right there, the door has opened enough that Abraham now knows that through him one day the promised Messiah, the one who will redeem the world, will come. When? He doesn't know. But he knows he is going to have a child. It starts with Isaac. But one day the Messiah will come through that child. You say, he couldn't have known that. Hold that question. I am not through yet.

Abraham and Sarah tried for ten years. "Okay, Lord, you said He was going to come through us." Ten years they tried. He is now 85-years-old. Things are getting a little more difficult. We are getting older and older. Look at Ge 16:1: "Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, 'Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go into to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her.' And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. And after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife."

Skip down to Ge 16:16: "And Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him." Please understand something. Abraham wasn't wavering in his faith. He was growing in his faith. He still believed God. God had said, "It will come through your loins. It will come through you." He didn't understand that it would be through Sarah. They did the best they could. They put their own best human effort forward. As far as he knew everything was fine. Almost 24 years go by before God really shows up and says anything.

Look at Ge 17:1: "Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.' And Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of

a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations."

Now very obviously here, that is spiritual seed. It says "father of a multitude of nations" in the plural. He is not talking about Israel. He is talking about the spiritual descendants, the spiritual seed that will come from him.

Now Abraham's response, when God finally tells him this, is interesting. Look Genesis 17:17: "Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, 'Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?' And Abraham said to God, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!'" That is not wavering in his faith. That made pretty good sense. That was his human effort. He was saying, "If it was going to come through me, let it be through Ishmael. He is my son."

God answered him in Ge 17:19: "But God said, 'No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.'"

Now skip over to Genesis 21:5: "Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him." It started with a little crack of light in Genesis 3. It began to broaden in Genesis 12. It began to broaden even more in Genesis 15. But now it is opening up and they are beginning to see, "Yes, one day the Messiah is coming. Someone will come from God. God will become a man. He will redeem the world from sin, and it will be through the line of Abraham, through Isaac." He begins to understand.

Then God begins to test him to see if he really did understand. In Genesis 22 God asks him, "Do you really believe He is coming through Isaac?" (He really didn't say that, but I am reading in between the lines.) Abraham said, "Absolutely." He said, "Okay, let's just see if you believe it. I want you to take Isaac up on the mountain and kill him." Abraham didn't blink an eye, because it was getting clearer and clearer to him. He knows now that it is coming. Look at what he does. In chapter 22 he takes his son and some men and they go to the mountain. Ge 22:5 says, "And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you.'" We will worship and return to you. Wait a minute! How are you going to kill your son and return with him after you have worshipped?

Then Ge 22:7 says, "And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' And he said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' And Abraham said, 'God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together." You are seeing more and more of the Light that is coming.

Hebrews 11:17 (note) says, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. And he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son. It was he to whom it was said, 'In Isaac your descendants shall be called.' He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type." You have a picture of what our redemption is all about in the father and the son and resurrection of the son. When Abraham went up, he understood this. When he went up he said, "God, if you want me to kill him, I will kill him because that promise is coming through him. You will raise him from the dead. I believe your promise is right."

You are seeing the door open wider and wider to get a glimpse of the Messianic Redeemer. They understood in their day. It seems significant to me that he knew God would do what He promised. He knew if He told him to kill him, God would raise him back up from the dead. That seed would still come through Isaac.

Well, Abraham passed the test. Here is where I am going. I could have started here and saved you all of this, but I wanted to take you on the same journey I went on to see this thing unfold. You think Abraham didn't understand about Jesus Christ? In Ge 22:16 he has passed the test. "'By Myself I have sworn,' declares the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore.'" Right here you will miss it if you are not careful. If you will get a Hebrew Interlinear Bible it will not read the way the translation brings it out. The verse goes on to say, "and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies." That is not a good translation of the Hebrew. The masculine singular is used there. Instead of "your seed," you could put "he." It would read, "He shall possess the gate."

It also should not read "their enemies." It should read "His enemies." It is right there that you know for a fact that Abraham knew that Christ was coming. He knew that He would be the Redeemer, the promised Messiah. The term "seed" is the key. It is the same way it is rendered in Galatians 3: He shall rule over the seed of the serpent.

Now you may say, "I can't buy this." Well, hold it. The Apostle Paul gives commentary on Genesis 22:18. Look at Galatians 3. Let's just find out if it means one seed or more than one seed. Did he say "seeds" or did he say "seed?" Paul brings it out as only Paul could bring it out. Galatians 3:8 reads, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations shall be blessed in you.'"

Abraham understood that. You may ask, "Did he understand it as much as we understand it?" I don't know how much he understood it. I know the door is cracking wider and wider and wider. I do know he understood it from what Paul says. Look at John 8:56 if you don't think that. Jesus is talking to some skeptical, religious Jewish people: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."

Now go back to Galatians 3:13: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

Gal 3:15 shows that you can't change a covenant. He says, "Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it." You can't change it. It stands like it was told to Abraham. Gal 3:16 goes on, "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed." If you go back to Genesis 22:18 and make that plural, Paul is going to clear up your misunderstanding. "He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one." Then Paul quotes it like it should read, "And to your seed, that is, Christ."

Abraham saw it, understood it and based his faith upon it. Here Paul is quoting from Genesis 22:18. The seed is a man, the God-man. Oh, the door has swung open. He has come. Way back in Genesis it is barely cracked. With Abraham, it begins to open and expand. The Mosaic period, when the Law came out, it began to get wider and wider. With the prophets, it became more and more open. Now it is swung open and here He is, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Savior, the Redeemer of the world. It has never been anything different. This is God's plan before He ever created man because He knew when He created him, man would sin against Him.

They looked forward to the Christ who was coming. On the basis of placing their faith on the suffering Messiah that would come, they were justified, just like we look back to the suffering Savior that has come, the Messiah, when we put our faith into what He did for us on the cross. They were no more worthy back then than we are today. The Law did not make them worthy. Oh, no. They obeyed the Law out of expectancy of one day a Redeemer coming, not so that they could be made righteous. The ones who perverted it are the ones who are to this day confused. We do the very same thing on this side of the cross. Good news, good news, good news.

Oh, what is salvation, folks? The Apostle Paul is going through all this to try to tell us one simple message—you can't save yourself. It doesn't matter how good you think you are. No man could ever measure to the righteousness of God. Jesus came to do what no man could have ever done in his own power or energy. He fulfilled the Law, became our perfect sacrifice on the cross, identified with our sin completely on that cross, and resurrected, proving who He was.