

# Romans 4:19-21 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

CLICK VERSE

To go directly to that verse

[Romans 4:1](#)  
[Romans 4:2](#)  
[Romans 4:3](#)  
[Romans 4:4](#)  
[Romans 4:5](#)  
[Romans 4:6](#)  
[Romans 4:7](#)  
[Romans 4:8](#)  
[Romans 4:9](#)  
[Romans 4:10](#)  
[Romans 4:11](#)  
[Romans 4:12](#)  
[Romans 4:13](#)  
[Romans 4:14](#)  
[Romans 4:15](#)  
[Romans 4:16](#)  
[Romans 4:17](#)  
[Romans 4:18](#)  
[Romans 4:19](#)  
[Romans 4:20](#)  
[Romans 4:21](#)  
[Romans 4:22](#)  
[Romans 4:23](#)  
[Romans 4:24](#)  
[Romans 4:25](#)

---

**Romans 4:19** [Without becoming weak](#) in [faith](#) he [contemplated](#) his [own body](#), now as good as [dead](#) since he was [about a hundred years old](#), and the [deadness](#) of [Sarah's womb](#); ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [kai me asthenesas](#) (AAPMSN) [te pistei katenoesen](#) (3SAAI) [to heautou soma ede nenekromenon](#), (RPPNSA) [ekatontaetes pou huparchon](#) (PAPMSN) [kai ten nekrosin tes metras Sarras](#).

**Amplified:** And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though he knew that he was too old to be a father at the age of one hundred and that Sarah, his wife, had never been able to have children. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though he knew that he was too old to be a father at the age of one hundred and that Sarah, his wife, had never been able to have children ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** With undaunted faith he looked at the facts - his own impotence (he was practically a hundred years old at the time) and his wife Sarah's apparent barrenness. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** And not being weak with respect to his faith, he attentively considered his own body permanently dead, he being about one hundred years old, also the deadness of Sarah's womb.

**Young's Literal:** And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;

**ROMANS ROAD**  
to **RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Romans 1:18-3:20	Romans 3:21-5:21	Romans 6:1-8:39	Romans 9:1-11:36	Romans 12:1-16:27
SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	God's Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " <a href="#">Jensen's Survey of the NT</a> "				

#### AND WITHOUT BECOMING WEAK IN FAITH: kai me asthenesas (AAPMSN) te pistei:

- Ro 4:20,21; 14:21; Mt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; Mk 9:23,24; John 20:27
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Romans 4:16-22: The Nature of Saving Faith](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:13-17 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [Romans 4:18-25 Salvation by Divine Power-Not Human Effort](#) - John MacArthur

**Romans 4:19-21** in the Greek form a single sentence which is intended to illustrate from the life of Abraham how he believed and hoped when there was no grounds for hope from a human perspective.

Abraham knew his own body was in a dead condition and he was therefore wholly hopeless in himself. He also knew that Sarah was past normal child bearing age. So on one hand Abraham had before him - his body as dead, and the deadness of Sarah's womb. On the other hand he had before him the promise of God He would "become a father of many nations". **"In faith"** he laid hold of the promises of God as of greater "weight" than the physiological realities of their aged bodies! **Faith** is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen (Heb 11:1). Abraham was choosing to walk by faith not by sight (2Cor 5:7).

**Without becoming weak** (770) (**astheneo** from **a** = without + **sthénos** = strength, bodily vigor) means to be in a state of limited capacity to do or be something. In the present context it would be synonymous with powerlessness or impotence to bring about life in Sarah's dead womb. To become weak in faith is to allow doubt to cloud and partly undermine belief.

Compare this statement to the declaration of the father in Mark 9 - And Jesus said to him, "If You can! All things are possible to him who believes. Immediately the boy's father cried out and [began] saying, "I do believe; help my unbelief." (Mark 9:23-24)

**Faith** (4102) (**pistis-word study**) is synonymous with trust or belief and is the conviction of the truth of anything. In Scripture **pistis** usually speaks of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it.

#### HE CONTEMPLATED HIS OWN BODY: ou katenoesen (3SAAI) to heautou soma:

- Ge 17:17; 18:11-14; Heb 11:11-19
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Romans 4:16-22: The Nature of Saving Faith](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:13-17 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [Romans 4:18-25 Salvation by Divine Power-Not Human Effort](#) - John MacArthur

**Contemplated** (2657) (**katanoeo** from **kata** = down [kata can be used to intensify the meaning] + **noéo** = to perceive or think) means literally to put the mind down on something and so to observe or consider carefully and attentively. It means to fix one's eyes or mind upon and to perceive clearly. **Katanoeo** means to look carefully, cautiously, observantly. The idea is to think about something very carefully or consider closely which denotes the action of one's mind apprehending certain facts about a thing so as to give one the proper and decisive thought about the thing considered.

**Vine** writes that **katanoeo** "denotes the action of the mind in apprehending certain facts about a thing."

**TDNT** writes that **katanoeo** "is closely related to the simple **noeo**, whose literal meaning is intensified, "to direct one's whole mind to an object," also from a higher standpoint to immerse oneself in it and hence to apprehend it in its whole compass... It can also denote 2. critical observation of an object: "to consider reflectively," "to study," "to examine,"... 3. In literary Greek **katanoeo**... means especially apprehension of a subject by intellectual absorption in it: "to consider," "to ponder," "to come to know," "to grasp," "to understand"... The emphasis in NT usage lies in the visual sphere. As a verb of seeing... especially in Luke... denotes perception by the eyes (Mt 7:3 = Lk 6:41, here paradoxically impossible; Acts 27:39), attentive scrutiny of an object (James 1:23, 24), the observation or consideration of a fact or process, whether natural or miraculous (Lk. 12:24, 27; Ro 4:19; Acts 7:31 f.; 11:6). ([Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans](#))

**Katanoeo** - 14x in 14v translated in NAS: consider, 4; contemplated, 1; detected, 1; look, 1; look more closely, 1; looked, 1; looks, 1; notice, 2; observe, 1; observing, 1. KJV translates it: behold, 4; consider, 7; discover, 1; perceive, 2.

**Matthew 7:3** (note) And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not **notice** the log that is in your own eye?

**Luke 6:41** And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not **notice** the log that is in your own eye?

**Luke 12:24 Consider** the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; and they have no storeroom nor barn; and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!... 27 **Consider** the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these.

**Luke 20:23** But He **detected** (took note of, perceived) their trickery and said to them,

**Acts 7:31** And when Moses saw it, he began to marvel at the sight; and as he approached to **look more closely** (observe carefully), there came the voice of the Lord: **32** 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.' And Moses shook with fear and would not venture to **look**.

**Acts 11:6** and when I had fixed my gaze upon it and was **observing** (carefully reflecting upon) it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air.

**Acts 27:39** And when day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did **observe** (describing an intensive sensory perception of) a certain bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could.

**Romans 4:19** (note) And without becoming weak in faith he **contemplated** his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;

**Hebrews 3:1** (note) Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, **consider** (aorist imperative) Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

**Hebrews 10:24** (note) and let us **consider** how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

**James 1:23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who **looks** (gives attentive scrutiny, studies, examines carefully) at his natural face in a mirror; **24** for once he has **looked** at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

**Katanoeo** - 23x in the Septuagint (LXX) = Gen 3:6; 42:9; Ex 2:11; 19:21; 33:8; Nu 32:8-9; 1Ki 3:21; Job 23:15; 30:20; Ps 10:14; 22:17; 37:32; 91:8; 94:9; 119:15, 18; 142:4; Isa 5:12; 57:1; 59:16; Da 7:21; Hab 3:2).

For example, the **psalmist** prays...

Open my eyes, that I may **behold** (LXX = **katanoeo**) wonderful things from Thy law. (Psalm 119:18)

**Isaiah** records a negative use...

And their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; But they do not pay attention to the deeds of the LORD, Nor do they **consider** (LXX = **katanoeo**) the work of His hands. (Isaiah 5:12)

**Katanoeo** is the verb Jesus used in His famous question...

"And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not **notice** (**katanoeo**) the log that is in your own eye?" (see **note** Matthew 7:3)

Jesus uses **katanoeo** twice exhorting His listeners to...

**Consider** (aorist imperative) the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; and they have no storeroom nor barn; and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! (Luke 12:24)

**Consider** (aorist imperative) the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. (Luke 12:27)

The writer of Hebrews uses **katanoeo** in his command...

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, **Consider** (aorist imperative) Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. (Hebrews 3:1) (**Comment: Katanoeo** is a strong verb meaning "to fix the mind on". It implies attention and continuous observation. The idea is, "Put your mind on Jesus and let it remain there, that you may understand Who He is and what He wills." They were allowing their attention to relax so far as Messiah was concerned, and their gaze was turning back upon the Old Covenant sacrifices)

**James** uses this verb twice writing...

if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who **looks** (**katanoeo** = carefully looking = not a hasty superficial glance) at his natural face in a mirror for once he has **looked** (**katanoeo**) at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. (James 1:23-24)

The picture painted by Paul's use of **katanoeo** here in Romans 4:19 is striking --

Not being weak as respects faith, Abraham **considered attentively** his physical condition -- **he stared his obstacles right in the face!**

The point, however, is that Abraham was not blind to facts, nor did he ignore difficulties. The life of faith is not a life with no problems or obstacles but it is a life that is lived by faith in the One Who is able to do exceeding abundantly. Abraham's circumstances, so impossible to nature, in no way weakened his faith. What is your impossible situation? Are you growing weak in faith? Or are you holding steadfastly to His sure Word?

Abraham thought about the matter. He fixed his thoughts, his mind, his attention upon the matter. But he did not give in to the thoughts. He was not weak in faith.

**NOW AS GOOD AS DEAD SINCE HE WAS ABOUT A HUNDRED YEARS OLD: ede nenekromenon (RPPNSA) ekatontaetes pou huparchon (PAPMSN):**

- [See Table below](#) correlating Abraham's age with specific Scriptural events
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Romans 4:16-22: The Nature of Saving Faith](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:13-17 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [Romans 4:18-25 Salvation by Divine Power-Not Human Effort](#) - John MacArthur

**Dead** (3499) (**nekroo** from **nekros** = dead; English = necropsy) means literally in the **active** sense to put to death or slay. To put an end to the life of something. In the **passive** sense it means to be put to death or to die. **Thayer** adds that the passive sense here in Romans 4 is used hyperbolically to mean worn out as one might describe an impotent old man.

**Nekroo** is used figuratively in all 3 NT occurrences (Ro 4:19, see **note** on Colossians 3:5, Hebrews 11:12 - there are no uses found

in the Septuagint) meaning to cease completely from activity or to be deprived of force, strength or vigor (and thus impotent).

In **Colossians** Paul commands...

Therefore **consider** the members of your earthly body as **dead** (aorist imperative) (KJV = mortify) to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (see **note** on Colossians 3:5) (**Comment:** Note that in this verse nekroo is in the **active voice** which Vine says conveys the "sense of destroying the strength of, depriving of power, with reference to the evil desires which work in the body". "Put an end to the life of" your bodily members and functions in regard to immoral purposes)

The writer of **Hebrews** records Isaac's birth writing that...

therefore, also, there was born of one man (Abraham), and him as good as **dead** (perfect tense = pictures the permanence of his condition of "impotence") at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. (see note Hebrews 11:12)

**Nekroo** as used here in Romans is in the **perfect tense** which means in essence that Abraham's reproductive organs had stopped functioning and were dead forever and could never again function (the perfect tense = speaks of permanence).

Abraham could never have a son. It was not humanly possible. Any modern day fertility expert would diagnose Abraham and Sarah as "permanently infertile". But Abraham's "attending Physician" was not a human physician but the Great Physician Who Alone is able to give life to the dead! If you are a believer, He is also your "attending" Physician. Have you gone to Him for a regular check-up recently?

#### AND THE DEADNESS OF SARAH'S WOMB: kai ten nekrosin tes metras sarras

- Heb 11:11-19; Ge 18:11-14
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Romans 4:16-22: The Nature of Saving Faith](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:13-17 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [Romans 4:18-25 Salvation by Divine Power-Not Human Effort](#) - John MacArthur

**Deadness** (3500) (**nekrosis** - see **nekroo**; English = **necrosis** {medical term describing a localized death of cells most often secondary to interruption of the blood supply}, necrotic) describes a putting to death or state of death. In this context describes the result of putting to death and thus means "deadness" or the state of being virtually dead. **Sarah** herself was of course not dead but in respect to her womb was in essence "dead" describing her barrenness or inability to bear children as a result of being post-menopausal.

In the only other NT use **nekrosis** is used figuratively to describe the act of killing or putting to death, Paul writing that he was...

always carrying about in the body the **dying** (nekrosis) of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (2Cor 4:10) (**Comment:** Death to self is the way of victory. As believers suffer for the sake of Christ, His very vital life is manifested in and through such a vessel of honor. see notes on "Christ... our life" Colossians 3:4)

**Nekrosis** was a Greek medical term for the mortification of a member or the body.

**TDNT** - (Nekrosis) means among physicians the withering or mortification of the body or of a sick member. ([bid](#))

**Womb** (3388) (**metra** from **meter** = mother) means the uterus, a specific area of female reproduction where the fertilized egg is implanted and undergoes embryogenesis.

Sarah was only 10 years younger than Abraham (Ge 17:17), 90 years old (well past childbearing age) when they received the promise of Isaac.

**Moses** records...

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' 'Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a

son." (Ge 18:11-14)

Romans 4:20 **yet**, with **respect** to the **promise** of **God**, he did not **waver** in **unbelief** but **grew strong** in **faith**, **giving glory** to **God**, ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [eis de ten epaggelian tou theou ou diekrithe](#) (3SAPI) [te apistia all' enedunamothe](#) (3SAPI) [te pistei, dous](#) ([AAPMSN](#)) doxan [to theo](#)

**Amplified:** Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Yet he refused to allow any distrust of a definite pronouncement of God to make him waver. He drew strength from his faith, and while giving the glory to God, ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Moreover, in view of the promise of God, he did not vacillate in the sphere of unbelief between two mutually exclusive expectations but was strengthened with respect to his faith, having given glory to God,

**Young's Literal:** yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

ABRAHAM'S FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISE OF A SON		
ABRAHAM'S AGE	PASSAGE	EVENT
75	Genesis 12	Called by God from Haran
86	Genesis 15:6	Abraham Justified by Faith
99	Genesis 17	Abraham Circumcised
100	Genesis 21	Isaac is born

**YET, WITH RESPECT TO THE PROMISE OF GOD HE DID NOT WAVER IN UNBELIEF:** [eis de ten epaggelian tou theou ou diekrithe](#) (3SAPI) [te apistia](#):

- Nu 11:13-23; 2Ki 7:2,19; 2Chr 20:15-20; Isa 7:9; Jer 32:16-27; Luke 1:18,45
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Romans 4:16-22: The Nature of Saving Faith](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:13-17 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [Romans 4:18-25 Salvation by Divine Power-Not Human Effort](#) - John MacArthur

Literally Abraham "did not doubt the promise of God (of a son, an heir) by unbelief".

Paul is not saying that Abraham never had momentary hesitations, but that he avoided a deep-seated, permanent attitude of distrust in the promises of God. Abraham believed God in the face of discouraging facts and despite the knowledge that what God had promised could not happen naturally. In fact Paul says Abraham actually grew stronger in faith as time passed.

**Promise** (1860) ([epaggelia/epangelia](#) form [epi](#) = intensifier or upon + [aggello](#) = tell, declare) describes an announcement made with certainty as to its performance. In secular Greek it was primarily a legal term denoting summons or a promise to do or give something. In the NT, [epaggelia](#) is with rare exception (except Acts 23:21) used only of the promises of God, referring to a thing promised, gift or graciously given, and not a pledge secured by negotiation

**Not** (3756) ([ou](#)) absolute negation. He absolutely did not waver. This is amazing to me. Won't it be something to talk with Abraham some day in eternity about what this was like in time.

**Waver** (1252) ([diakrino](#) from [diá](#) = separation + [krino](#) = judge, decide) means literally to separate one from another.

Metaphorically, **diakrino** means to distinguish, discern, judge, decide, and came to mean to be divided in one's mind, to hesitate and to doubt. In the present verse **diakrino** means to think that something may not be true or certain and thus to waver, doubt or be divided in one's own mind. In a number of languages 'doubt' is expressed by means of idioms, for example, 'to have two thoughts' or 'to think only perhaps' or 'to believe only a little' or 'to question one's heart about.'

**Godet** explains **diakrino**, noting that it "properly signifies to be parted, or to be divided into two men, one affirming, the other denying; one hoping and giving himself up, the other waiting to see: "but in regard to the promise, there was no division in him." (Godet, F: The Epistle of St Paul to the Romans)

The idea of **diakrino** is that Abraham was not divided, did not vacillate between two opinions, between belief and unbelief or between faith and doubt like many believers do. When from the human viewpoint things are going well, it is easy to trust God. But when things seem impossible, it is often easier to not to trust Him.

Don't misunderstand. A struggling faith is not necessarily a doubting faith, any more than temptation to sin is not actually sin. Tests of our faith are designed to strengthen our faith, not to strip us of faith. Abraham was tested as few have been tested and his faith grew as a result.

If you are being tested and struggling in your faith don't be discouraged. **John Calvin** put it well when he said that believers "are never so enlightened that there are no remains of ignorance, nor is the heart so established that there are no misgivings."

**Unbelief (570)** (**apistia** from **a** = without + **pistós** = believing, faithful) (Click word study on apistia) means literally not believing = faithlessness, distrust, lack of belief. It describes an unwillingness to commit oneself to another or respond positively to the other's words or actions.

Faith turns from natural impossibilities to rely upon the word of God. Faith therefore becomes the instrument of man's part in putting him into definite relationship with God Himself.

Abraham's faith was not perfect, just as no believer's faith is perfect. The first test he had to face was a famine in Canaan, and Abraham went to Egypt for help instead of to God. That disobedience put him in a compromising situation with the Pharaoh. He claimed that his beautiful wife was his sister, fearing that the Pharaoh might kill him in order to have her for himself. In so doing, Abraham dishonored the Lord and caused plagues to come upon the pharaoh's family (Ge 12:10-17). Despite his spiritual imperfection, Abraham always came back to the Lord in faith, and the Lord honored that faith and continued to renew his promises to Abraham.

The Lord gave repeated assurances to Abraham, and Abraham responded in faith, which God "reckoned ... to him as righteousness" (Ge 15:6). But again, when testing came, he relied on his own judgment rather than the Lord's word. When Sarah was getting beyond normal childbearing age and remained barren, Abraham took her foolish advice and took matters into his own hands. He committed adultery with Hagar, Sarah's maid, in the hope of having a male heir by her. But (as always happens with disobedience) his disobedient act backfired and again caused misery to the innocent (Ge 16:1-15). He also brought future misery to his own descendants, with whom the Arab descendants of Ishmael, the son by Hagar, would be in continuous conflict, as they are to this day.

Despite his spiritual imperfection, Abraham always came back to the Lord in faith, and the Lord honored that faith and continued to renew his promises to Abraham. God miraculously caused Sarah to bear a son in her old age, the son whom God had promised to give Abraham. And when the greatest test of all came, Abraham did not waver in his trust of the Lord. When God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, the only human means through which the promise could be fulfilled, Abraham responded with immediate obedience, and God responded by providing a substitute for Isaac (Ge 22:1-18 Heb 11:17-19). As is always the case with true belief, the Holy Spirit enlightened Abraham's mind and heart to recognize the true and only God, and enabled him to respond in faith. Abraham saw the Promised Land and wandered through it as a nomad, but he never possessed it. Even his descendants did not possess the land until more than a half century after the promise of it was first given. Just as Abraham trusted God's word to give him a land he had never seen, he trusted God's power to raise Isaac from the dead, if necessary by a divine miracle he had never seen.

**Newell** tells the story of "Two travelers on their way home came to a river frozen over, but evidently not as yet with thick ice. One said, "I am afraid that ice will not bear my weight, " and he sat down in the cold. The other said, "I am going home, " and strode forward over the ice with steady step. He had committed himself! He refused to look at circumstances; and every step strengthened his resolve to go ahead. He reached the other bank, and eventually his home. The other man stayed back in the cold. Mr. Moody used to say, "Unbelief sees something in God's hand, and says, I wish I had that. Faith sees it, and says, I will have it!-and gets it." As one has said "The steps of faith fall upon the seeming void, And find the rock beneath!" ([Romans 4](#))

- Isa 35:4; Da 10:19; 11:32; Hag 2:4; Zech 8:9,13; 1Cor 16:13; 2Cor 12:10; Eph 6:10; 2Ti 2:1
- Ro 1:21; Isa 61:3
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Romans 4:16-22: The Nature of Saving Faith](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:13-17 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [Romans 4:18-25 Salvation by Divine Power-Not Human Effort](#) - John MacArthur

**But** ([235](#)) (**alla**) is more strongly adversative than the usual Greek conjunction (**de**) for "but". It could be rendered "But quite to the contrary".

**Godet** writes that **but** (**alla**) "forcibly contrasts the idea of the strength drawn from the promise with the weakness arising from doubt." (Ibid)

**Grew strong** ([1743](#)) (**enedunamoo** from **en** = in + **dunamóo** = strengthen) (Click for word study on enedunamoo) in simple terms means "to put power in" (like a car needs gas for power) and so to make strong, vigorous, to strengthen, or to be strengthened, enabled or empowered inwardly. This word is found only in biblical and ecclesiastical Greek. The idea is to cause one to be able to function or do something. **Dunamóo** is derived from **dúnamis** which means to be able or to have power (Click for in depth word study of dunamis). **Dúnamis** refers to inherent strength residing in a thing by virtue of its nature. The best spiritual example is the "gospel" which is the inherent, omnipotent power of God operating in the salvation of a lost soul that accepts it.

Abe was strengthened. Note the **passive voice** describing the effect of his faith growing stronger signifies that the growth come from outside himself, ultimately from God the Source of our faith.

**Leon Morris** comments on the strengthening of Abraham noting that "The verb was **strengthened** is in the **passive** in the New Testament more often than in the active, which accords with the fact that the believer's strength is derivative. I have reservations about translations like "his faith filled him with power" (GNB) or "he grew strong" (RSV). Paul is not saying that faith, so to speak, took a weak Abraham and put strength into him. He is saying that God took a weak Abraham and put strength into him. Abraham was made strong because of his faith indeed, but it was God, not faith, that provided the strength. Faith was no more than the means by which he received it. The Greek may be understood as "he was strengthened in his faith" (his faith grew stronger), or "he was strengthened through his faith". Either way it was God who gave the strength. ([Morris, L. The Epistle to the Romans. W. B. Eerdmans: Inter-Varsity Press](#))

**Faith** ([4102](#))(**pistis**) (Click for word study of pistis) is synonymous with trust or belief and is the conviction of the truth of anything, but in Scripture usually speaks of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it. As **pistis** relates to God, it is the conviction that God exists and is the Creator and Ruler of all things well as the Provider and Bestower of eternal salvation through Christ. For Abraham, faith was a trust in God to fulfill His promises.

**Faith** turns from natural impossibilities to rely upon the word of God and the promises of God. Adverse circumstances did not stand in the way of Abraham's faith. What an example to every believer of every age.

**Hughes** has an interesting note on "**faith**" writing that "Some people are under the impression that when a person has "faith" he inwardly agrees to ignore the facts. They see faith and facts as mutually exclusive. Faith without reason is fideism; reason without faith is rationalism. In practice there must be no reduction of faith to reason. Likewise, there must be no reduction of reason to faith. Biblical faith is a composite of the two. Abraham did not take an unreasonable leap of faith. ([Hughes, R. K. Romans: Righteousness from heaven. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books](#))

**Abraham's** supreme manifestation of faith is seen in Genesis 22 and recounted in Hebrews 11 where we read that "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. (see **notes** on Hebrews 11:17-19)

**Steven Cole** - Abraham's faith was solidly God-centered. He didn't believe in himself. He didn't have faith in faith. He wasn't an optimist who practiced positive thinking. He didn't think, "If Sarah and I just visualize the goal and try again, we'll succeed." Rather, looking away from the circumstances and away from himself, he believed God and His promise, so that God got the glory. In Romans 1:21, we saw that the fundamental sin of the human race was, "even though they knew God, they did not glorify [lit.] Him as God or give thanks." But here, by way of contrast, Abraham grew strong in faith and gave glory to God. This teaches us that our



faith should grow. Weak faith (or little faith) is still faith, but we should grow strong in faith. The Greek verb is passive, "was strengthened in faith." Although some scholars take it in an active sense, I think that Paul could have used the active verb if he had meant to; but he used the passive. It implies that faith must come from God. It is His gift to us. And yet, like so many gifts of God, we have a responsibility to appropriate it and grow in it. **How do we grow in faith? The key is to grow in your knowledge of the object of our faith, namely, God. Faith is only as good as its object.** You can have strong faith in a faulty bridge and it will collapse under you in spite of your strong faith. Or, you can have weak faith in a strong bridge and it will hold you up, along with a semi-truck that rumbles over it next to you. But your weak faith does not glorify the strong bridge for what it is. The right way to have strong faith that glorifies the bridge is to know that the engineer who built it is competent and the company that constructed it has a solid reputation of not cutting corners. Your knowledge of that bridge would increase your faith in it, even though it may go over a frightening chasm below. Your strong faith stems from your knowledge that this is a trustworthy bridge. The bridge, not your faith, gets the glory. **To grow in faith, study God's attributes (The Attributes of God) and His ways as revealed in His Word (Ed: cp God's "ways" and "acts" in Ps 103:7-[note](#) = "saw less than Moses, for they beheld the deeds of God without understanding his method therein").** See how He has been faithful to His Word in the past. See how He has kept His promises to His people, even in the face of staggering odds against them. Read how He has acted in the history of the Bible. Read the history of His saints who have trusted Him. In some cases, He delivered them miraculously. At other times, they were tortured, thrown in prison, stoned, sawn in two, and put to death by the sword (Heb. 11:37). **But in no case did God ever abandon His people or act unfaithfully to His promises.** Revelation 6:9-11 tells us that He has a precise number of martyrs who will be killed before He finally judges the wicked. But the evil deeds of the wicked do not threaten God's sovereign power or plan. Study His attributes and His ways and you will grow in faith. Then, put your faith into action. As you act in faith and see God work, your faith is strengthened to trust Him the next time. We need to be careful not to misapply His promises. John the Baptist in prison was confused because he thought that if he was the Messiah's forerunner and Jesus was the Messiah, then he should not be in prison (Mt 11:2-11). Jesus gently assured John that He was indeed the Messiah, but as you know, John did not get out of prison alive. But even if God's will is our death, we can glorify Him by dying in faith as we look to His promise of eternal life. Faith does not glory in human effort or human will power, but rather in God alone. Salvation is totally from God and so saving faith properly gives Him all the glory. ([The Nature of Saving Faith Romans 4-16-22](#))

**Glory** ([1391](#)) (**doxa**) means that which gives a proper opinion of. Abraham gave a "proper opinion" of God, to His faithfulness to fulfill His covenant promises, becoming an example to all who would believe after him.

**Godet** agrees writing that "**To give glory to God** means in Scripture, to render homage either by word or deed, to one or other of God's attributes, or to His perfection in general. Wherein, in this case, did the homage consist? The apostle tells us in Ro 4:21: in the firm conviction which he cherished of God's faithfulness to His word and of His power to fulfil it. (Ibid)

**Giving glory to God** means ascribing to God what is due to Him, Abraham's actions standing in stark contrast to the attitude and actions of unregenerate men Paul described in Romans 1...

For even though they knew God, they **did not honor** (literally **glorify** = doxazo) Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (See **note** Romans 1:21)

Abraham, by relying upon the word of God, acknowledged the attributes of God, and thus adopted a right attitude toward Him. This is the immediate effect of faith. Believing God affirms His existence and character and thus gives Him glory.

**John MacArthur** comments that "Godly faith glorifies God; the One who gives faith receives all the credit. Conversely, any faith that does not glorify God is not of or from Him. Faith in God, because it affirms His trustworthy character, is the supreme way that men glorify Him, while without faith, any attempt to worship, praise, or honor Him is a worthless, self-righteous sham." ([MacArthur, J: Romans 1-8. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

Abraham's faith was made strong. Faith grows. Jesus said it would. If you have faith like a tiny little grain of mustard seed, but the object of your faith is trustworthy and has promised to do something, then exercise your faith and it will grow. Obey. Abraham did; and as he believed and obeyed, he was strengthened in his faith and he gave glory to God. Faith never glorifies man. It glorifies God. It is God who acts, not we. What is accomplished is not something we do on behalf of God. It is God Who does it by us and through us, on his own behalf. God, therefore, is thanked and God is glorified. So faith grows, and faith glorifies.

One of the times of many that Abraham gave glory to God is recorded in Genesis 17 where we read...

Genesis 17:1 Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am **God Almighty (El Shaddai)**; Walk before Me, and be blameless.

2 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly."

3 And **Abram fell on his face**, and God talked with him, saying,

4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.

Abraham, by relying upon the word of God, acknowledged the attributes of God (El Shaddai = God Almighty = All Sufficient) and thus adopted a right attitude toward Him. This is the immediate effect of faith. Keep in mind also that the primary purpose of the gospel is not to save men but to glorify God.

The psalmist, like Abraham, also gives glory to **El Shaddai**

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High (see study of El Elyon) will abide in the shadow of the **Almighty (Shaddai)**. I will say to Jehovah, "My Refuge and my Fortress, My God, in Whom I trust!" For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper, and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His pinions, (the terminal section of a bird's wing ) and under His wings you may seek refuge His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark." (Ps 91:1-4)

*Oh, what wonder! how amazing!  
Jesus, glorious King of kings,  
Deigns to call me His beloved,  
Lets me rest beneath His wings*

**William Newell** ([lbid](#)) has an interesting analysis of the progressive revelation of God's character to Abraham noting that...

There was a seven-fold revelation of God to Abraham:

**First**, it was as "**the God of glory**" that He appeared first in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2).

**Second**, He revealed Himself to him as **Jehovah** (Ge 12:8; 14:22; 15:2, 8), although not opening to him, as afterwards to Moses in Israel the meaning of that Name (Ex 3:15);

**Third**, as **El Elyon**, God Most High, "Possessor of heaven and earth": and the Disposer of lands, and kings: (Ge 14:19-22; Dan 3:26; 4.2; 5:18,21);

**Fourth**, as **Lord** (Adonai, Jehovah-Ge 15:2,8);

**Fifth**, as **El Shaddai**, the Almighty God (Ge 17:1);

**Sixth**, as "**the Everlasting God**" (Ge 21:33);

**Seventh**, as **Jehovah-Jireh**" (Ge 22:14): The God who will Provide, -Especially, a Lamb for sacrifice (Ge 22:8).

**Applying this section**, we need to remember that if God is Who He says He is (and of course He is), none of His "precious and magnificent promises" will fail because He forgets us or He thinks that our situation is beyond His power. Our problem too often is that we have these wavering doubts and suspicions that what we say we believe about God's power is not really true. We say like the coin "in God we trust" but we live our lives relying primarily upon what we can do ourselves. If you find yourself caught in this spider web of doubt, look again at the promises and truths we have already believed about God. As someone has said a good measure of how much spiritual truth we have appropriated is how long is our worry list is!

**Romans 4:21** and being **fully assured** that **what** God had **promised**, He was **able also** to **perform**. (**NASB: Lockman**)

**Greek:** [kai plerophoretheis](#) ([AAPMSN](#)) [hoti o epeggeltai](#) ([3SRMI](#)) [dunatos estin](#) ([3SPA1](#)) [kai poiesai](#). ([AAN](#))

**Amplified:** He was absolutely convinced that God was able to do anything he promised. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** He was absolutely convinced that God was able to do anything he promised. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** remained absolutely convinced that God was able to implement his own promise. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** and was fully persuaded that what He had promised with finality He was able also to do

**Young's Literal:** and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.

- Ro 8:38; 2Ti 1:12; Heb 11:13
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Romans 4:16-22: The Nature of Saving Faith](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:13-17 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [Romans 4:18-25 Salvation by Divine Power-Not Human Effort](#) - John MacArthur

## A GREAT DESCRIPTIVE DEFINITION OF FAITH

**Kent Hughes** writes that "Some argue convincingly that verse 21 is one of the best definitions of faith in the Bible as it describes Abraham as "being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." ([Romans: Righteousness from heaven. Preaching the Word](#))

**William Newell** - What a blessed assurance of faith, resting wholly upon God's performance of what He had promised. How that puts us to shame! Since Abraham's day we have the written Word and Christ has come. Yet how often we doubt! ([Romans 4](#))

**Being fully assured** (4135) (**plerophoreo** from **pleres** = full + **phero** = to bear or bring) means literally to carry fully and so to bring to fullness or to bring to a full measure. To fill completely. To satisfy fully. To be completely certain or absolutely sure as here in Romans 4:21 which speaks of Abraham's faith. To fulfill or fully accomplish as in (2Ti 4:5-note) This verb is frequently used in the papyri in the sense of finishing off.

All of the meanings in the NT are figurative and can be divided into either (1) to fulfill, accomplish or achieve, carry out fully or (2) to be fully convinced, to be wholly certain or to be persuaded as in the present verse. The primary idea is, being filled with a thought or conviction.

**Plerophoreo** pictures Abraham filled to the brim with no room for doubt.

**Vine** writes that **plerophoreo** "is used of the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus, Luke 1:1; of the preaching of the gospel, 2Timothy 4:5, 17; this is the objective use of the word, in these places it is concerned with external things. In Romans 4:21 it describes the grasp by the mind of the promises of God and of His ability to make them good; in Ro 14:5 it is used of the apprehension of the will of God for one's conduct, see also Colossians 4:12; this is the subjective use of the word, in these places it is concerned with an effect upon the mind ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

**Plerophoreo** is used 5 times in the NT...

**Luke 1:1** Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things **accomplished** (plerophoreo - here speaking of what is carried through to completion) among us,

**Colossians 4:12** (note) Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and **fully assured** (**plerophoreo** - here means to be brought to full measure - referring to the apprehension of the will of God) in all the will of God.

**Romans 14:5** (note) One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man **be fully convinced** in his own mind.

**2 Timothy 4:5** (note) But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, **fulfill** (aorist imperative - bring to fullness or to a full measure) your ministry.

**2 Timothy 4:17** (note) But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation **might be fully accomplished** (plerophoreo), and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth.

There is a single use of **plerophoreo** in the Septuagint (LXX)...

Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them **are given fully** (LXX = plerophoreo) to do evil.

Paul though suffering in a Roman prison cell and doomed to soon be executed (as best we can discern from secular writings) was fully assured unto the end of his life writing to Timothy...

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. (see **note 2** Timothy 1:12) (Play and sing the great hymn [I Know Whom I Have Believed](#))

Hebrews 11 records a list of men and women (read Hebrews 11:1-12) who were fully assured and then sums it up writing...

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13)

**Faith** grounds us on the truth, as it did Abraham. He was fully persuaded. This is the faith that was credited to him as righteousness. Faith grasps the promise. **Faith** lays hold of what God has offered. As Abraham's faith grew, he grasped the promise and found himself a friend of God.

**THAT WHAT HE HAD PROMISED HE WAS ABLE ALSO TO PERFORM: hoti o epeggeltai (3SRMI) dunatos estin (3SPAI) kai poiesai (AAN):**

- Ro 14:4; Ge 18:14; Ps 115:3; Jer 32:17,27; Mt 19:26; Lu 1:37,45; 2Cor 9:8; Heb 11:19
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Romans 4:16-22: The Nature of Saving Faith](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:13-17 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [Romans 4:18-25 Salvation by Divine Power-Not Human Effort](#) - John MacArthur

### **GOD ALWAYS PERFORMS WHAT HE PROMISES!**

**That what He had promised** - The Bible is full of God's promises so the truth of this passage can be applied to every one of His **precious and magnificent promises**. He was able and present tense "He **IS** able!" (See study on the phrase "**He is Able = [GOD IS ABLE](#)**").

**Promised** (1861) (**epaggello** from **epí** = intensifies meaning + **aggéllō** = to announce, to report, to tell, to declare) means to announce with certainty as to what one will do. Notice that the verb **promised** is **perfect tense** which speaks of the finality, certainty and permanence of God's promise. To paraphrase Titus 1:2 He is the "non-lying God!" **What promise in your life do you think He cannot perform? Is their anything too difficult for the Lord?** This of course does not mean a believer will skate through this life free of afflictions, for in fact the Scriptures plainly state that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God!" (Acts 14:22)

**Morris** adds that "The essence of saving faith is taking God at His Word, no matter how difficult it may seem. God's promise to Abraham was beyond all reason and human experience, but Abraham believed it. This should be our example with regard to the promises that are yet to be fulfilled. ([Defenders Study Bible - Online](#))

**Able** (1415) (**dunatos** from **dunamai** = be able, have power by virtue of inherent ability and resources) means to possess the ability to perform some function.

**Abraham** was not just wistfully hoping that God might be able to fulfill His promise. Abraham knew what the Bible clearly teaches, that what God promises, He always performs! Abraham's faith in God was complete and unqualified. But note that Abraham's faith was not merely in what had been promised, but was faith in the God Who had promised (He is able).

This verse reiterates the thought in Genesis 18 "Is anything too difficult for the LORD? (Clearly not for) At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." (Ge 18:14)

As **MacDonald** points out "Abraham did not know how God would fulfill His word, but that was incidental. He knew God and had every confidence that God was fully able to do what He had promised. In one way it was wonderful faith, but in another way it was the most reasonable thing to do, because God's word is the surest thing in the universe, and for Abraham there was no risk in believing it! ([Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

**Matthew Henry** writing on the phrase "**He was able to perform**" notes that "Our waverings rise mainly from our distrust of the divine power; and therefore to fix us it is requisite we believe not only that he is faithful, but that he is able, that hath promised.