

ROMANS 4:9–25

Faith, the Promise, and What Makes Us Righteous

BIG IDEA: Abraham was counted righteous by faith before circumcision was given. The covenant sign mattered, but the sign did not create righteousness. Genesis, Romans 4, and Acts 15 together point us to God's promise, grace, and faith.

1. ABRAHAM'S STORY — GENESIS

Genesis 12:1–3	God calls Abram and promises to bless him and make him a blessing.
Genesis 15:5–6	God promises descendants. Abraham believes God, and his faith is counted as righteousness.
Genesis 17:1–11	God gives circumcision as the sign of the covenant.
Genesis 18:14	God reminds Abraham that nothing is too hard for the LORD—connecting to trust in God's promise.

2. ROMANS 4:9–12 — WHY CIRCUMCISION MATTERS

Paul points back to Genesis 15:6 and emphasizes that Abraham was declared righteous **before** he was circumcised. Circumcision was an important covenant sign, but it was not the source of Abraham's righteousness. Paul's point is especially important for Gentile believers: belonging to God's people is not based on a physical sign or religious achievement, but on faith.

Remember the order: Faith → Righteousness → Covenant Sign.

3. ROMANS 4:13–17 — THE PROMISE COMES THROUGH GRACE

Paul explains that God's promise to Abraham did not come through the Law. It comes through the righteousness of faith, so that the promise rests on grace. The promise begins with God; Abraham responds by believing God.

4. ROMANS 4:18–22 — ABRAHAM BELIEVED THE PROMISE

Abraham's circumstances gave him reasons to doubt, yet he trusted God's ability to do what God had promised. Faith did not require Abraham to ignore reality; it meant he trusted the God who stood behind the promise.

5. ROMANS 4:23–25 — THIS STORY IS FOR US

Paul says Abraham's story was written for our benefit. We are called to believe in the God who raised Jesus from the dead. The passage ultimately points to justification through faith in Christ and God's grace.

6. ACTS 15 — THE CIRCUMCISION QUESTION COMES BACK

Acts 15 shows that circumcision was not merely a side issue in the early church. Some argued that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and keep the Law. Peter responded that God had already given the Gentiles the Holy Spirit and purified their hearts by faith, and he affirmed salvation through the grace of Jesus. This connects directly to Romans 4: what Paul explains through Abraham, the early church had to apply to Gentile believers.

Connection: Genesis gives us Abraham's faith and promise. Romans 4 explains why the order matters. Acts 15 shows the early church wrestling with the same question of what is required to belong to God's people.

7. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

GENESIS 15:6	Abraham believes God	Faith is counted as righteousness
GENESIS 17	Circumcision is given	A covenant sign
ROMANS 4	Paul explains the order	Righteousness is by faith, not the sign
ACTS 15	Gentile believers face the question	God accepts and purifies hearts by faith

8. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Paul emphasize that Abraham was counted righteous before circumcision?
2. What is the difference between a sign of a relationship with God and the source of that relationship?

3. What does Genesis 15:6 teach us about faith?
4. Why was circumcision such a serious issue in Acts 15?
5. How does Peter's statement in Acts 15:8–11 connect with Romans 4?
6. What can Christians sometimes use as "proof" that they are right with God, even though those things may not reveal the heart?
7. Where are you being asked to trust God's promise even when your circumstances make it difficult?

9. SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES

Genesis 15:6 — Abraham believes God and it is counted as righteousness.

Genesis 17:9–11 — Circumcision is given as the covenant sign.

Acts 15:7–11 — God purifies Gentile hearts by faith; salvation is through grace.

Galatians 3:6–9 — Those who have faith are blessed with Abraham.

2 Corinthians 5:7 — We walk by faith, not by sight.

TAKE-HOME TRUTH

"The promise rests on grace, the response is faith, and the sign points to the covenant — but the sign does not replace faith."

Personal Reflection: What would it look like this week to trust God because of who He is, rather than because you can already see how He will fulfill His promise?