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Justification in the TaNaKh

4: 1-8

Justification in the TaNaKh DIG: How does Abraham's faith illustrate justification? What's the problem with trying to do things in order to earn favor with God? Why is it never enough? What does justification mean? How were the righteous of the TaNaKh justified? How are B'rit Chadashah believers justified today?

REFLECT: Why should it be a comfort to you that you are not justified by your good works? How are you displaying your faith by the way you live your life? What is the blessing that you will receive for your faith/trust/belief in Yeshua Messiah? How will our "good works" benefit us when we appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ?

Abraham was not justified by good works, but by faith, which brings blessing.

Paul had just talked about pagans who were lost, "good" people who were lost, and even **Jews** who were lost. So, bringing up **Abraham** is a logical first example of what it means to be **righteous**. Were **the righteous of the TaNaKh justified by works** or **faith/trust/belief**?

Abraham was not justified by good works: Having just offered reassurance to **his** hypothetical **Jewish** questionnaire that the gospel's focus on **faithful trusting** does not **abolish Torah** but **confirms (3:31)**, **Paul** anticipates a second objection: **Then what should we say Abraham, our forefather, obtained [righteousness] by his own efforts (4:1)?** In other words, what about the Hebrew concept of *z'khut-avot*, meaning *the merits of the fathers (11:28-29)*? There can be no doubt that in First Century Judaism, the doctrine was widespread that descendants can benefit, and even claim salvation on the grounds of their ancestor's **righteousness**. **Yeshua's** opponents made exactly that claim by saying: **We are the seed of Abraham (John 8:33)**. **Paul's** own opponents were obviously making use of the same idea in **Second Corinthians 11:22**, and **John the Immerser** rebuked **his** investigators before **they** had a chance to say, "**Abraham is our father**" (**Matthew 3:9**).

However, there was a kernel of truth to **their** confusion. **Moshe** had said: **Because He**

loved your fathers, He chose their descendants after them (Deuteronomy 4:37). **The rabbis took this one verse and built a whole doctrine out of it.** Then again, there is a perfectly biblical response to their faulty theology. The answer lies not in the rights of individual **Jews**, but to the nation as a whole (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy**, **to see link click Bf - God's Chosen People**).

Rabbinic literature does well in pointing out Abraham's faithful and trusting attitude toward God. For example, the Midrash Rabbah says, "In the 'olam haba [world to come] Isra'el will sing a new song, as it is said: Sing a new song to ADONAI, because He has done wonders (Psalm 98:1). By whose *z'khut* [merit] will they do so? By the merit of Abraham, because he trusted in the Holy One, blessed be He, as Genesis 15:6 says: And he trusted in ADONAI (Exodus Rabbah 23:5)."⁹⁰

For if Abraham came to be considered, or declared, righteous by God because of legalistic observances, then he has something to boast about. But not before God (4:2)! Hypothetically, if Abraham were justified by legalistic observances, or good works, he might be able to boast in himself, but not before God. It was assumed that Abraham had good works that counted before God. But they had nothing to do with his salvation, because his salvation was the result of being justified by faith.

You see, Paul and James did not contradict each other when James said: **Wasn't Abraham our father declared righteous because of his actions (works) when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar.** The works that James described are not the legalistic observances under the Torah, because the Torah had not been given yet. They were works of faith. James declared: **You see that his faith worked with his actions, and by his actions, his faith was made complete (James 2:21-22).** But then, James quoted the same verse that Paul did: **Abraham put his trust in God, and it was credited to his account as righteousness (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3; James 2:23).** The difference is that James pointed to a much later time in Abraham's life when he offered up Isaac. And even at that time, Abraham stood on the same ground as the weakest sinner stands. Granted that he did have many good works in which to boast, but he could never boast before God, because God doesn't accept the works of the flesh for salvation. Good works cannot stand before the holiness of YHVH, not even Abraham's good works. Paul then explains this, "not before God," by citing the TaNaKh.⁹¹

Abraham was justified by his faith: For what does the TaNaKh say? "Avraham put his trust in God, and it was credited to his account as righteousness" (4:3). The Greek word for credited, *logizomai*, was used in early secular documents, meaning to put

down to one's **account**, or let one's revenues be placed on deposit in a storehouse. Thus, **ADONAI** put to **Abraham's account**, placed on deposit for **him**, or **credited to him**, **righteousness**. The actual payment had not been made; the actual transfer of **righteousness** had not been completed, because **Messiah** had not yet paid the penalty of mankind's **sin**, and had not yet been raised from the dead. **Abraham** possessed **righteousness** in the same way as a person would possess a million dollars transferred to his **account** in a bank. Since the resurrection, **the righteous of the TaNaKh** share with B'rit Chadashah believers the possession of **Yeshua Messiah** as **the righteousness** in which **they** stand, guiltless, and **righteous**, for all eternity.⁹²



Paul quotes the same verse as cited in **the Midrash Rabbah** above. The one "deed" that "earned" **Abraham** being declared **righteous** by **YHVH** was not a "deed" at all, but the heart attitude of **trusting the LORD**. That is very interesting because **ADONAI** announced the **Abrahamic Covenant** in **Genesis 12** (see the commentary on **Genesis Dt - I Will Bless Those Who Bless You and Whoever Curses You I Will Curse**), but it's not until **Genesis 15** that **YHVH** brought him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars - if you can count them! Your descendants will be that many. He believed in **ADONAI**, and his trusting was credited to him as righteousness (see the commentary on **Genesis Ef - Abram Believed the LORD and He Credited It to Him as Righteousness**).⁹³ Thus, **Abraham** was chosen by **God** before he was declared **righteous**, excluding any possibility of being **justified** on the basis of **works**.

Using another analogy or **working** for wages, **Paul** again confronts the potential deceptions in this matter of godly **faith**. If a man works for a certain wage and at the end of the day or week goes to his employer to get his paycheck, is it a gift or a wage? Obviously, he is receiving what's due to him. A paycheck is not a gift. **Now, the account of someone who is working is credited not on the ground of grace but on the ground of what is owed him**. In other words, if **Abraham** became **righteous** by **his own work**, then **he** merely received **what** was **owed** to **him**. The very dependence of **work**, excludes grace. They are mutually exclusive. **However, in the case of one who is not working but rather is**

trusting in him who makes ungodly people righteous, his trust is credited to him as righteousness (4:4-5). There is only one **work** that we can count on, and that is **the work** of **Yeshua Messiah** on the cross. What saves is **faith** in **Him**.⁹⁴

Justification brings blessing: Of course, one could say, "But **Abraham** lived before **the Torah** was given, so it would be different for **him**." They would say, "It's not really valid to use **him** as an example because **the Torah** was not in existence in **His** day." So, **Paul** uses **David** as an example, because **he** lived in the Dispensation of **Torah**. **In the same way, the blessing which David pronounces is on those whom God credits with righteousness apart from legalistic observances.** The person of genuine **faith** is **blessed**, **David** proclaims, because of **God's grace**. **Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven; whose sins are covered over by grace (4:6-7).** We have been delivered by **grace through trusting, and even this is not our accomplishment - but God's gift to us (Ephesians 2:8).** **Abraham** was **justified** only by **faith**; **David** was **justified** only by **faith**, and every believer before and after them has been, and will be, **justified** only by **faith**. A **sinner's faith** is graciously accepted by **YHVH** and **reckoned** (Greek: *logizomai*, meaning *to count or credit*) as **righteousness** for **Messiah's** sake.

Blessed is the man whose sin ADONAI will not reckon against his account (Romans 4:8; Psalm 32:1-2). In other words, once we are **justified**, our record is wiped clean because **Messiah's** perfect **righteousness** can never be associated with our **sins**. Believers **do sin**, and our **sins** need to be forgiven if we are to have fellowship with **YHVH (First John 1:5-7)**, but our **sins** are not held against us. Is that Good News or what! But **ADONAI** does keep a record of our good **works** so that **He** can reward us when we stand before **Yeshua** face to face (see the commentary on **Revelation Cc - We Must All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ**). But **He** does not keep a record of our **sins**.⁹⁵

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, How gracious **You** are to pay the price of sacrificial death for our **sin's** penalty (**Leviticus 1:4, Second Corinthians 5:21**). **You** mercifully allow our **faith** to be the key to unlock the door of entrance to **Your** holy heaven. **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves - it is the gift of God. It is not based on deeds, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9).** Real **faith**, like **Abrahams**, is way beyond head knowledge of who **You** are. It is a solid and forever **trust** in **You**. **Faith** means **F**=Forsaking **A**=All **I**=I **T**=Trust **H**=Him.*

*Real **faith** trusts and rests in **Your love**- despite all the wrong that is happening in this world. **You** are still our **loving Father** who is **Sovereign** of the World and nothing can separate us from **Your love**. **But in all these things we are more than conquerors***

through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Messiah Yeshua our Lord (Romans 8:37-39).

Praise and thank **You** dear **abba daddy (Matthew 6:9)** that **You** are such a wonderful **Father! You** have all in the world in **Your** control (**Dani’el 7**). Troubles and trials will come, but soon they will be over. **For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).** Those who have **faith** like **Abraham** will spend eternity with you in **Your** holy heaven. I look forward to worshiping and praising **Your** great name forever! I love **You!** In the holy name of **Yeshua** and **His** power of resurrection. Amen