

# ROMANS 4 versus JAMES 2

Rom 4:1 **What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?**

2 **For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.**

3 **For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.**

We have a problem straight away!

Paul says '**For if Abraham were justified by works**' (v2), obviously implying that Abraham was NOT '**justified by works**'

But, James says he WAS!

James 2:21 **Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?**

22 **Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?**

23 **And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.**

24 **Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.**

Paul says that *if he was* then he could not have glorified '**before God**'. In other words, Paul is saying that if Abraham WAS justified by works, he would be glorying in his OWN works & NOT in God's grace!

So when James says that Abraham WAS justified by what he had done, then Abraham's works did not justify him *in the same way* that you & I are justified for salvation in the NT!

We need to get Romans 4 & James 2 IN CONTEXT!

Rom 4 – is talking about Abraham being justified by faith WHEN he believed God & RECEIVED IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS!

Yet James 2v21 says that he was justified by works!

The first thing to notice in these two comparisons is that the two passages aren't even talking about the same event!

Jam 2v21 continues... '**when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?**' So James is dealing with Genesis 22.

Go back to Rom 4v3... '**For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.**' That is a quote from Gen 15v6! '**And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.**'

James quotes the same verse in Jam 2v23 ‘...**Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness...**’, but Paul actually gives *the time frame* he is discussing. Rom 4v11... ‘**And he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision...**’ When did this take place? In Gen 17. ‘...**a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised**’ (Rom 4v11)

HE HAD ALREADY RECEIVED THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS BACK IN GENESIS 15!

Rom 4:13 **For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.** i.e Gen 15v6 **And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.**

So Paul says Abraham received God’s imputed righteousness IN Gen 15 BEFORE Isaac was even conceived!

James says that Abraham was justified when, *many years later*, he offered up Isaac as a sacrifice.

In Abraham’s case, you are dealing with TWO ‘separate’ events which are years apart!

That is NOT YOUR salvation! Salvation in the OT is NOT the same as salvation in the NT!

Christians often say it is& they use Abraham as an illustration! Now it is true that Abraham is saved BEFORE the Law (why?) & that he is saved by grace through faith! But Abraham is only a PICTURE of your salvation; his salvation is NOT YOUR salvation! When YOU got saved you received Christ as your Saviour; you didn’t believe God would give you children! You looked to the cross, NOT to the stars! You were promised Heaven, not the land of Palestine!

When you & I were saved we were justified by God & given the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ **at the same time!** Abraham exercised faith in what God said, but did not receive God’s righteousness until years later!

IMPUTE - to think, to reckon; properly, to set, to put. To charge; to attribute; to set to the account of; generally ill, sometimes good. We impute crimes, sins, trespasses, faults, blame, to the guilty persons. We impute wrong actions to bad motives, or to ignorance, or to folly and rashness. To attribute; to ascribe.  
IMPUTED - Charged to the account of; attributed; ascribed.

The way we are saved is NOT the way Abraham was saved!

You & I get saved the very instant that we place our trust in Jesus Christ for sins forgiven!

OT salvation is NOT like NT salvation – *before or after the giving of the Law*. In the OT (anywhere from Genesis to Malachi, even up until Mat 27 – see Heb 9v16+17 i.e. for the NEW covenant to take place the testator must have died! (TESTATOR - A man who

makes and leaves a will or testament at death.))... there is NO new birth, NO 'spiritual' circumcision, NO Body of Christ, & NO spiritual redemption of an individual sinner!

You are saved, justified, redeemed & sanctified in ONE SHOT! Abraham wasn't!

The two salvations are NOT the same!

When James wrote James 2v21, he was NOT writing NT doctrine for the Body of Christ! He was writing to the '**to the twelve tribes**' of Israel (Jam 1v1) IN the Tribulation! (see Rev 12v17)

Look at Jam 2v21.... '**Was not Abraham our father**' – He is talking to a race of people who could trace their origin back to Abraham. He is NOT talking about Abraham being the *father of 'the faithful'* as in Gal 3.

How was Abraham '**justified by works?**' He was justified in that the works he did showed that he had the right kind of faith! He showed his faith to MEN! Look at the context of v18... '**shew me thy faith..., I will shew thee my faith**' v22 '**Seest thou**' v24 '**Ye see then**' James is talking about a faith that men can see & say, 'That's the right kind of faith!'

The next thing we need to note in James 2 is that Abraham's faith was perfected (completed) *by his works*... Jas 2:22 ...**by works was faith made perfect?** That is NOT our faith or salvation! No works can complete *your faith!*

Our *faith* is perfect the moment we trust Christ, because the OBJECT of our faith IS PERFECT i.e. Christ! Our faith is fulfilled at salvation, even to the point where our destiny is predetermined - Ro 8:29 **For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

In the Pauline epistles, our faith is NOT what needs perfecting; it is us who needs perfecting...

Eph 4:12 **For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:**

13 **Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:**

Col 4:12 **Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.**

2 Tim 3:17 **That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**

It is the new man that needs to grow in grace & knowledge & go from perfection to perfection - Phil 3:12-15 **Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching**

forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. But your Christian growth has nothing to do with your justification before God! That was settled at salvation!

To sum it all up...In the OT, faith was a personal belief between a man & God on a specific thing God told him. That is why Hab 2v4 says... **Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.**

God's message wasn't necessarily the same thing for everyone. Today EVERYONE has the same message...

Ac 16:31 **And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...**

Eph 2:8 **For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:**

9 **Not of works, lest any man should boast.**

Tit 3:5 **Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;**

In the NT it is not just 'your faith' (Rom 1v8), it is 'the faith of God' (Rom 3v3), & 'the faith of Jesus Christ' (Gal 2v16).

When Abraham believed what God said in Gen 15, the Lord imputed His righteousness to Abraham. Abraham was faithful in his trust of God (Gal 3v9) & received the good news of Gen 18v18 (Gal 3v8), that someday all the nations of the world would be blessed through his seed. God reaffirmed His righteousness to Abraham (Gal 3v6). Abraham's faithfulness was proved in sacrificing the promised seed (while trusting God to keep His promise about that seed) for all men to see (Jam 2v21). When he did that, God says that... **'the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.'** He proved in a tangible way, the kind of faith that he had. In fact, God said, at that time... **for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.** (Gen 22v12).

And if we are to take Jam 2v24 at face value (**Ye SEE then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.**), then that gives at least one explanation for the name Abraham gave the place where he offered up Isaac... **And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.** (Gen 22v14).

Abraham's faith was completed (**made perfect**) in Gen 22, & the book was closed on his justification. His obedience to God (works) settled it! But it was *years* between the time Abraham *received* God's righteousness & the time *he was declared* righteous in the sight of men! In the OT, a man's faith produced works, & those works showed what kind of faith he had!

Now of course, we can apply this to ourselves PRACTICALLY but NOT 'doctrinally'!

As we have said on numerous occasions... the Bible is written FOR us but not everything in it is directed TO US doctrinally!

Remember there are three classes of people in Scripture...

1 Cor 10:32 **Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:**