

Justification Initiates a Covenant Relationship

1. Carefully observe this interaction between Abram and God. Review your understanding of “righteous” and “justify.” What is this covenant relationship?

After these things the word of Yahweh 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 Yahweh, what will You give me, as I go on being childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Since You have given no seed to me, behold, one born in my house is my heir.” Then behold, the word of Yahweh came to him, saying, “This one will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” And He brought him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your seed be.” Then he believed in Yahweh; and He counted it to him as **righteousness**. (Gen 15:1-6, LSB)

And He said to him, “I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.”

And he said, “O Lord Yahweh, how may I know that I will possess it?”

So He said to him, “Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” Then he brought all these to Him and split them into parts down the middle and laid each part opposite the other; but he did not split apart the birds. Then the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

Now it happened that when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. Then God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your seed will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation to whom they are enslaved, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.” Now it happened that the sun had set, and it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. **On that day Yahweh cut a covenant with Abram**, saying,

“To your seed I have given this land,
From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: (Gen 15:7-18, LSB)

2. While God made a covenant with Abraham, what does the apostle Paul say to New Testament Believers? How can a sinful person be justified (proven right and acquitted of sin) before the holy God? Is there a covenant relationship with the New Testament Believer and God?

Just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness, so know that those who are of faith, those are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Gal 3:6-9, LSB)

The Teacher Note for this lesson is at:

<http://Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/25Curriculum/Class9-12/print/Salvation.Justification.CovenantRelationship.9-12.pdf>

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Teacher Notes

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Ask the student: what is the difference between “righteous” and “justify?”

Righteous is a determination made by God based on whether you have faith in God and obey Him. While it may reflect upon your character, God’s determination is not based on it. Because Abram’s faith did not doubt God’s promise of descendants, God deemed Abram righteous.

Justify, from God’s perspective, is a judicial conclusion that a person is proved right and acquits a person of accusations or the charge of sin. For example, Jesus’ death for your sins justifies a Believer.

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Ask the student: did you observe the significance of God determining Abram righteous? What is happening here? What is the nature of this covenant? Who are the recipients of God’s promises?

God is making a covenant with Abram in which He makes promises to Abraham that included his descendants. The Abrahamic Covenant is a unilateral and unconditional covenant where God binds Himself to the conditions of the covenant. God trusts Abraham so much that he is free of any obligation to this covenant!

2. While God made a covenant with Abraham, what does the apostle Paul say to New Testament Believers? How can a sinful person be justified (proven right and acquitted of sin) before the holy God? Is there a covenant relationship with the New Testament Believer and God?

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Ask the student: is there anything you can do to be righteous before God? What justifies a Believer before God? Take some time to discuss.

This can be a tricky question. Many will say "yes, believe in Jesus Christ." However, what is the faith of Abraham that God would consider righteous?

When God tested Abraham's faith, He tested Abraham's greatest love: did Abraham love his only son and descendant more than God? The book of James speaks to this question of faith:

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected. And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. (James 2:19-24, LSB)

James is speaking of genuine faith – a faith that not only believes in the reality of God, but places a genuine trust in His words that engender a steadfast obedience to it. When faced with making a choice between His two greatest loves, Abraham chose God.

For the New Testament Believer, it is faith in God's provision of His only Son to pay for the penalty of sin. This faith is not something one does as a one time event; obedience to God's word is a whole new mindset and way of life. It is this right view that makes a Believer righteous. It is Jesus' substitution and sacrifice for our sins that justifies and proves a Believer right before God.

Ask the student: when a Believer is justified, does it initiate a covenant relationship for Believers today? Do you remember the Abrahamic Covenant?

With the Abrahamic Covenant, God made promises to Abraham that included his descendants:

God promised to be God to Abraham's descendants (Gen 17:8).

Through Abraham, God promised to bless all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3), which was Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ, Believers are entitled to eternal life.

God promised land (Gen 15:18). The dimension of this land matches the dimensions of New Jerusalem, where all Believers will reside after the end of human history, introduced in the book of Revelation (Rev 21:16).