



Abraham and the Righteousness of God

| Gaston, Lloyd

Most interpreters think that Paul operates with a sharp distinction between faith and law as the way to salvation. Could it be that we have misunderstood Paul on this point and that in fact he interprets the figure of Abraham not against but with the traditional Jewish understanding?

Abraham and the Righteousness of God

by Lloyd Gaston

A truly Biblical theology would be one which takes the whole Bible with equal seriousness and does not consciously or unconsciously subordinate the first half to the much smaller second half. The obstacles to the recovery of such a Biblical theology are great indeed. The displacement theory, which says that the church has effectively displaced Israel as God's people, goes back to the earliest days of the emerging church and is still the pervasive Christian presupposition for doing theology or Biblical study. Not only does this theory cut off all possibility of theological cooperation between Christians and Jews, but it introduced an unbridgeable chasm into Scripture itself. Insofar as the so-called New Testament is understood to be the "antithesis" of the so-called Old Testament, then a Biblical theology of continuity is impossible. Now in our time, however, has arisen the possibility of a renewed listening to the Biblical text on the part of those whose ears have been opened by understanding the Jewish holocaust as a major event also in the history of the church and the refounding of the State of Israel also as an end to the "fossil" dogma and as an invitation to dialogue with a living Judaism. It is my conviction that the Hebrew Bible can speak with its own voice to the Christian church when that church acknowledges also the full legitimacy of Judaism, and that when this happens, and only when this happens, it becomes possible to understand the New Testament in

continuity with the Hebrew Bible and parallel to Judaism rather than in opposition to them.¹

One of the instances where discontinuity is most clearly evident has to do with the Pauline understanding of Genesis 15:6, in which Abraham functions as a paradigm for a. Christian faith, and b. Justification by that faith. That Paul is thereby deliberately and provocatively contradicting the theology of the synagogue is said by almost all commentators. That he also effectively "desacralizes" and "paganizes" the history of Israel and thus calls into question in the most radical way the canonical status of the document of that history for the church has been asserted most strongly by G. Klein.² As was said earlier,³

insofar as Paul teaches a "system which allows for men before Christ no righteousness but only sin and wrath," then indeed he has "himself broken his system" by using Abraham as an example. As Klein⁴ put it, "If the possibility of experiencing the righteousness of God has a chronological *terminus ante quem non*, and if this is identical with the historical date of the death of Jesus, then how can the scriptural proof for the righteousness of God be attached to a figure like Abraham, who is a representative of that time in which the righteousness of God could not yet be experienced at all?" If such premises are true, then indeed Paul's own statements about Scripture and the continuity of his gospel with it would have to be seen as inconsistent and needing correction. It may be, however, that it is not Paul but the premises which need correction and that a new look at Gen 15:6 could aid in that correction.

The matter of continuity in the relationship between the Testaments was not a problem for the church when it ignored the Biblical understanding of the synagogue and before the rise of the historical critical method, and even today the Old Testament is commonly read through

New Testament glasses. Even so great an exegete as G. von Rad was not completely immune from

this temptation. It may be true that Gen 15:6 is "a striking and perhaps even revolutionary formulation,"⁵ but it is very doubtful

whether in the context "everything centres upon the subjective attitude of Abraham to the promise of Yahweh."⁶ When faith is defined as a

"spiritual self commitment of the human soul," and the story as "subjective

and inward looking, so that the accent is now upon the inward and personal attitude of the worshipper," then we can suspect that it is being read through Christian and

specifically modern Christian glasses. When F. Hahn⁷ then

honours von Rad's reading of the text, saying that "this text approaches the Pauline interpretation to a high degree," we are not particularly surprised. But perhaps there

is another way of relating Abraham and Paul.

We are accustomed to an acknowledged or covert "Christological reading of the Old

Testament;" what would it be like to try a "covenantal reading of the New

Testament?" What would happen if we were to assume that Paul specifically was not guilty of a "fundamental misapprehension"⁸ of the

place of Torah in Judaism nor was he engaged in polemic against Jews, when he proclaimed his gospel of the righteousness of God now made manifest to the Gentiles in Jesus Christ? What

if Paul did not share the modern Christian "view of Rabbinic religion as one of legalistic works-righteousness"?⁹ What if we were to take

seriously Paul's claim that "his" gospel is already proclaimed in the Old

Testament (Gal 3:8; Rom 1:2, etc.) and that he interprets current events through Scripture and not the other way around? To interpret Biblical texts against a major thrust of the

entire Christian exegetical tradition is an absolutely impossible task at the beginning. We therefore approach the task in a spirit of playfulness. It is precisely those interpretations which seem possible but most improbable which are most attractive to playfulness, and I hope that spirit will be allowed in this first experimental run at a very serious question.

Let us try to read Gen 15:6 not in the light of a Christian concept of justification by faith, but as if encountering it for the first time. We shall for the moment read vss 1-6 as a unit, without raising the question of sources. Abraham receives a vision/word of the LORD, promising that his reward will be very great (vs 1). The reason for the reward is not stated, and it is very doubtful if we should connect it (as do the Targumim) with Abraham's generosity with respect to the spoils of war (13:14-17). The nature of the reward is also not stated, but from the following we see that it concerns offspring (cf. earlier 12:1-3; 13:14-17). Abraham's first reaction is an objection, expressed twice (vs 2, 3), that he has no child as a link to his posterity. This is followed by a double promise from YHWH: that Abraham's own son will be his heir (vs 4b), and that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars of heaven (vs 5). The story then concludes with the reaction of Abraham to the promise.¹⁰

Let us interpret this verse completely in terms of Abraham's reaction, i.e. also the second clause. Let us also remember the phenomenon of Hebrew parallelism and refrain from a change of subject unless this should be indicated or necessary. The natural translation would then be:

And he (Abraham) put his trust in YHWH

And he (Abraham) counted it to him (YHWH) righteousness.

From the perspective of Hebrew grammar there is nothing to make such a translation impossible. Whether or not it is likely depends on a number of other factors. The following considerations would seem to speak against the translation given:

1. No interpreter of the Hebrew Bible has ever understood the sentence in this way.
2. The only other place in the Hebrew Bible where we have a combination of "righteousness" and "to count", Ps 106: 31, clearly understands the righteousness to be counted not to God but to Phinehas.
3. Also LXX and Targum Neofiti, which translate the second clause of Gen 15:6 by a passive verb, seem to clearly rule out an understanding which would attribute the righteousness to God.
4. There is no text earlier than these versions which would indicate that the clause was ever understood as we have suggested.
5. It would be most unusual to find in a text of the Pentateuch an understanding of God's righteousness which otherwise is most characteristic of Deutero-Isaiah and many Psalms.

I

To deal with the first objection first, there is indeed an interpretation of Gen 15: 6 which understands the righteousness to refer to God. Although it is not the majority interpretation in the Jewish tradition, it is nonetheless a significant voice, that of Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270). Although this text is available in almost every university or seminary library in the standard "Rabbinic Bible" (Mikraoth Gedoloth), it is not as well known¹¹ as it should be and so I translate it here:

And he believed in the LORD and he counted it to him righteousness." Rashi¹²

explained that the Holy One, blessed be He, counted to him righteousness and merit because

of the faith with which he had believed in him. But I do not understand what that merit is. Why should he not believe in the faithful God since he is a prophet in himself, and "God is not a man that he should lie" (Num 23:19)? And he who believed to sacrifice his son, his only son, the beloved son, and (endured) the rest of the trials, how should he not believe in the good tidings? What would be correct in my judgment is that it is said (= is to be interpreted as follows:) that he believed in the LORD and thought that in the righteousness of the Holy One, blessed be He, he would give him seed

in any case, not in the righteousness of Abram and as his reward, even though he said to him: "your reward will be very great" (vs 1). And from now on he need not fear that sin might prevent (the reward from being given). And even though at the first prophecy (i.e. Gen 13: 14-17) he had thought that it would be conditioned according to the

reward for his deeds, yet now he perceived that he (God) had promised him that he need have no fear of sin (vs 1) and that he would give him seed (vs 5), and he believed that "the word is established by God" (Gen 41: 32), "truth he will not depart from it" (Ps 132: 11). For it is the righteousness of the LORD and there is no ceasing in it in this matter, as it is written, "By myself have I sworn," says the LORD, "from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word, and it shall not return" (Is 45:23).

Or, it may be said (as an alternative interpretation) that Abram believed that he would have seed as an heir in any case, and the Holy One, blessed be He, counted to him further this promise, that he promised to him righteousness, for in the righteousness of the LORD it will be done so, as (it is written:) "God thought it for good" (Gen 50:20), and thus "it was counted to him for righteousness" (Ps 106: 30), as in the case of Phinehas, in which he (God) counted to him that trust with which he trusted in the LORD when doing this deed "for righteousness for all generations" (Ps 106:31). For forever God will keep his righteousness and steadfast love for him for the sake of it (his trust), in the sense of "I will keep my steadfast love for him forever" (Ps 89:29).

II

Let us look at the first possibility advocated by Ramban, that the righteousness of Gen 15:6 is God's righteousness in the same sense that this word is used in Is 45:23 and Deutero-Isaiah in general. Ramban insists that the promise of God to Abraham in this passage, whether or not it be also designated as his righteousness, should be understood in an unconditional sense. In no sense is Abraham being rewarded for his merit, whether this be understood in terms of faith or anything else. Insofar as Abraham should be understood as a model for the faithful Israelite, it is in terms of the ten trials, and particularly the binding of Isaac, but not Gen 15.¹³ Ramban's initial puzzlement is real. While it may be difficult to continue to trust in a God who commands bad news (Gen 22), there is certainly no merit to believing in a God who promises good news. One reason why the verb (*h'myn*) appears so often negated in the Hebrew Bible is that

faith is the natural and expected thing and it is only its lack that calls for comment. Seen in itself, Gen 15:1-6 is clearly about God and his promise and not about Abraham and his faith. The God of the covenant exercises righteousness in relationship to Israel prior to the response of Israel to his covenant grace, whether this response be expressed in terms of Israel's righteousness or Israel's faith.

Ramban of course read the text of Gen 15:6 in a kind of timeless dialogue with other Biblical and post-Biblical texts. We in the modern west seek to read texts within the historical context of their origin, which can be very illuminating as long as we understand that historical context correctly. Attempts to understand Gen 15 in terms of the classical sources of Pentateuch criticism have not been helpful. Indeed, as was long ago recognized, Gen 15 cannot be divided between J and E, and once such an attempt has been abandoned, the tendency has been to see the text as late rather than early.¹⁴

Most scholars understand 15:7 to be the beginning of a new unit, perhaps dependent on vs 1-6, and in spite of the obvious difficulties involved, vs 1-6 are read as a single unit.

Recently in a very stimulating study, J. van Seters¹⁵ has argued that the unit is dependent on the theology of Deutero-Isaiah. Fortunately this controversial question does not need to be discussed here; it is enough to point out that any objections to our thesis on the basis of dating would be very difficult to substantiate.

Van Seters has pointed out the parallelism between many concepts of Deutero-Isaiah and Gen 16:1-6 without unfortunately turning his attention to the word "righteousness".

In speaking of the form critical genre to which Gen 15: 1-6 might belong, we shall begin

with the assertion of O. Kaiser¹⁶ that it is an oracle of salvation. Kaiser thereby appeals to one of the most fruitful, if most problematic, discoveries in Old Testament form criticism, the "priestly oracle of salvation" identified by Beggich¹⁷ in 1934. Beggich brought together the lament of the individual found mostly in the Psalter (with a few hints of a pronouncement of salvation) and the oracle of salvation found mostly in Deutero-Isaiah (with a few hints of a situation of lament). While discussion of and further refinements in the whole concept are still going on, and while Gen 15:1-6 contains too many mixed motifs to be a pure form of anything, in general the combination of lament and promise fit so well with Beggich's hypothesis that Kaiser's identification has won wide acceptance. This is not the place to try to give definitive support to it, but we shall point out certain consequences such an identification has for the understanding of Gen 15:6b, which strangely have never been drawn.

C. Westermann¹⁸ outlines the structure of Gen 15:1-6 as follows:

- 1 a. Introduction: the word of YHWH comes to Abraham.
 - b. Pledge of salvation and prosperity.
2. Reply: statement of grievance.
3. Reply: statement of grievance.
4. God's answer: a. future salvation: a consanguineous heir;

5.

b. confirming sign.

6. Conclusion: Abraham believed ...

It is really not surprising that vs 6b should be missing completely from the structure, for the current translation of it does not fit at all. There is simply no room in the oracle of salvation for a structure which would look like this: Lament — Promise of Salvation — Reaction of the Laminator: faith and praise of God — Reaction of God to the Reaction: praise of the laminator. Westermann can maintain the relationship he sees to the oracle of salvation only by ignoring vs 6b or (a solution which did not occur to him) by translating it as a further expression of the praise of God. In accordance with the postulated form, it would not at all be inappropriate for Abraham to conclude by ascribing to God righteousness.

We can come at the form critical question from another angle by looking at the correlative of the oracle of salvation, the individual lament. It consists of the following elements: "address, lament, confession of trust or assurance of being heard, petition, vow of praise (or praise of God) where the petition has been answered."¹⁹ In Gen 15:1-6 the address to God has been replaced by an oracle from God, the petition is only implicit in the lament, and two separate promises (an heir, many descendants) have been combined in a brief narrative. Nevertheless, the analogy is very clear, and it is quite appropriate for the passage to end with both a "confession of trust" (6a) and a "praise of God" (6b). When we look at the element of praise in psalms of individual lament, we find frequent references to God's righteousness: typical is Ps 7:17,

"I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High" (cf. also Ps 5:7-8; 22:30-31; 31:1; 35: 28; 26:5-6,10; 40:11; 51:13-15; 69:27; 71:14-15a, 18b-19, 24; 88:12; 143:1,11). Once more, in accordance with the postulated form, it would be very appropriate for Abraham to ascribe righteousness to God. The major difficulty in such a suggestion is that the verb "count" is never otherwise used with God's righteousness as the object. As the verbs that are used are varied, however, and "count" is broad enough that it certainly could be used in this sense, we shall so understand it in the absence of arguments to the contrary. This explanation is certainly preferable to the technical sense von Rad²⁰

posits, when he combines the "liturgy of the gate" (e.g. Ezek 18:9) (which never refers to "count") with the pronouncement of a priest in connection with sacrifice (Lev 7:18; 17:4; Num 18:27) (which never refers to "righteousness").²¹

Besides, if the word really were being used in a technical sense of a priestly declaration, the *Qal* would seem to require the preposition *ל* or *כ*^e

which is lacking in Gen 15:6.²²

If Gen 15:1-6 is called an oracle of salvation, then it must have something in common with those oracles as they were first identified in Deutero-Isaiah. What interests us most is not the "fear not" assurance which first suggested the identification, but rather the use of the concept of God's righteousness in the context of oracles of salvation. We shall here examine only those two which also refer to Abraham, 41:8-13 and 51:1-8.²³

The assurance of salvation in Is 41:8-13 is expressed in both nominal and verbal form:

"Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness" (vs 10). This assurance of God's righteousness to intervene on the side of a despondent Israel is an answer to the implied lament "YHWH has cast us off" (vs 9, cf 54:6). In order to reassure an Israel whose very existence as a people has been radically called into question, the introduction is exceptionally long: "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off'" (vss 8-9). Here Israel's conviction of its election as God's people is supported by a reference to the call of Abraham, and Israel's return from the exile is paralleled with God's call of Abraham from Haran.²⁴

The word of salvation is addressed, however, not to Abraham in the past, but the righteousness of God is being exercised now in the present in his reaffirmation of Israel and in the future rescue from enemies (vss 11-12). That Abraham is called God's friend is not in a passive but an active sense ("he who loves me"), and one could ask whether Abraham's past act of love is related to God's present act of righteousness. It is in any case significant that Israel should be reassured both by the proclamation of God's righteousness now and a reference to their descent from Abraham.

The relationship between the righteousness of God as his present saving action for Israel and Israel's election in Abraham is even stronger in Is 51:1-8. Israel, those who "pursue righteousness"²⁵ and "seek YHWH" (vs 1a), are told to look to the rock and quarry, to Abraham and Sarah (vs 1b-2a). Those who seek YHWH and his righteousness are told to look to Abraham and Sarah, for there they will find the promise of YHWH's righteousness (viz. in Gen 15:6). That YHWH "called"

Abraham was that he might continue (imperf.) to "bless"²⁶

and "multiply" him (vs 2b). God's action was not only for the sake of the "one" but for the many, contemporary Israel, Zion which YHWH is in the process of comforting (vs 3). By reference back to Abraham, Israel is urged to take comfort in and rely on the righteousness of God which is now being exercised. Now are being fulfilled the promises contained in Abraham's call and blessing and multiplication, which really refer to Israel's election and blessing and peoplehood. Here (vs 1) and in the concluding lines of the poem (vss 7, 8) the blessing of Abraham now being fulfilled for Israel is called very impressively the "righteousness of God."

It is significant that the middle strophe (vss 4-6)²⁷

refers to the Gentiles in this connection:

Listen to me you peoples; you nations, hear me.

For Torah goes out from me; and my justice as a light to the peoples.

I bring near in an instant my righteousness; and my salvation has gone forth.

The islands wait for me; and for my arm they hope.

Lift up to the heavens your eyes; and look at the earth beneath.

For the heavens like smoke vanish; the earth like a garment wears out.

But my salvation will be forever; and my righteousness will not be shaken.

It is not necessary to see here like R. North²⁸ a conscious reference to Gen 15:5 in order to be impressed by the connection of salvation for the Gentiles with the figure of Abraham. That salvation both for Israel and the nations is called the "righteousness of God" may be an interpretation of Gen 15:6 (or Gen 15:6 may draw on this passage), but in any case it provides an association for the later tradition of the understanding of Abraham.

Two late additions²⁹ to the Pentateuch are of interest because they refer to a promise of God to Abraham concerning Gentiles and are probably dependent on the theology of Is 51. If they also reflect an understanding of Gen 15:6 it is in terms of the concept of the "merits of the fathers," a different understanding which will be discussed below. "By my self I have sworn, says YHWH, *because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you and I will multiply your seed... and by your seed shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice*" (Gen 22:16-18). "To you and to your seed I give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your seed... and by your seed all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves, *because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*" (Gen 26: 3-5). One very interesting text somewhat earlier than Deutero-Isaiah may connect the blessing of the nations with the righteousness of God, in connection with the faithfulness not of Abraham but of Israel: "If you swear 'As YHWH lives, in truth, in justice, and in righteousness,' then nations

shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory" (Jer 4:2).³⁰

"It is in the period of the exile that we find a radical new importance attached to the figure of Abraham, and to the tradition of the covenant made with him by God."³¹

Indeed Abraham is never mentioned in the pre-exilic prophets, and when he first appears, Ezekiel (30:24) rejects a saying of the people which anticipates Deutero-Isaiah:

"Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess." It is when Israel no longer has its land that the promises to the patriarchs are remembered, and especially when Israel was in danger of dying out as a people that it remembers the number of descendants promised to Abraham. But especially it is the blessing of Abraham that is remembered. To recall Abraham is to recall God's promises of faithfulness and is a way of appealing to the grace of God. Typical is Micah 7:18-20, "Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression?... Thou wilt show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as thou hast sworn to our fathers from the days of old." Israel's interest was never in the historical faith or righteousness of Abraham as a model to be imitated but in the righteousness of the God of Abraham who could be appealed to in the present.

Finally, we come to the objection that Gen 15:6 cannot mean that Abraham ascribed righteousness to God because no later text so understands it. The long prayer of confession in Nehemiah 9:6-37 is late enough to have known Gen 15 and close enough to its wording as to make such knowledge probable.³² The relevant verses are 7 and 8: "Thou art YHWH, the God who didst choose Abram and brought him from Ur of the

Chaldeans³³ and gave to him the name Abraham; and thou didst find his heart faithful before thee³⁴ and didst make with him a covenant³⁵ to give the land³⁶

of the Canaanite, the Hittite the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite³⁷ to his seed;³⁸ and thou hast fulfilled thy promise, for thou art righteous."³⁹ Here is a much more significant "thou art righteous" than the one von Rad posits, and it is found in a text with dependence on, or at the very least clear affinity to Gen 15:6.

III

Even if we have been correct in our understanding of the original meaning of Gen 15:6, we still have to account for the later transmission⁴⁰ of the verb "it was counted" in the passive. Here we shall turn to Ramban's alternative explanation for help. Even if God rather than Abraham is the subject of the verb "to count," and he must be the actual subject when the verb is passive, this still does not necessarily give the verb a declarative sense: "thou art righteous, Abraham."

Ramban suggests that the righteousness is still God's and that now the sentence is a promise that God will exercise his righteousness in the future for Abraham's benefit. As soon as the story is understood as having happened in the remote past, then the reversal of subject makes good sense. It is not so much that God acted righteously with respect to the historical Abraham as that he promised to continue to act righteously with Abraham's descendants.

Ramban refers to the one other verse where "count" and "righteousness" occur together, Ps 106:30f.

Then Phinehas stood up and interposed, and the plague was stayed.

And that has been counted to him for (ר) righteousness from generation to generation forever.

It is possible that Phinehas is being praised for his righteous deed and that his reputation for righteousness will be perpetual, but this is not necessarily the case. It is more likely that the reference in vs 31b is to the "covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God" (Num 25 12f; cf. Sir 45:23f). Ramban therefore is not wide of the mark when he interprets the statement as God's promise to keep his steadfast love to Phinehas's descendants. In any case, it is presumably the wording of Ps 106:31a which has influenced the rendering of Gen 15:6b in the LXX. The addition of a preposition (*eis*) in the LXX is just as significant as the change to a passive verb "was counted."

It is now much easier to understand the verb in the commercial sense, which it can have both in Hebrew and in Greek.⁴¹ It can almost mean "to deposit in someone's account," although when that account would be drawn upon depends on the context and is not inherent in the word itself.⁴² The LXX would then understand Gen 15:6 in terms of the concept that was later to be called the "merit of the fathers."⁴³ It should not be necessary to add that this has nothing to do with a kind of works righteousness, as many Christian interpreters assume.⁴⁴ The emphasis is not on the

"merit" that Abraham had but on the free grace of God, the righteousness of God, that is given to the children of Abraham.⁴⁵

Abraham was certainly considered in early Judaism to be the very model of righteousness, and it would be very natural to understand Gen 15:6b, particularly in Greek, as the occasion on which God applied this predicate to him. One of Philo's paraphrases⁴⁶ makes this explicit: "Abraham believed God and he was held to be righteous." Nevertheless, if the expression originally referred to the righteousness of God, one would expect also to find this understanding reflected, even in Greek texts. The sense would then be not that God says, "Good for you Abraham; I call that righteousness," but rather: "Good for you, Abraham; you have some righteousness coming to you, which I shall exercise on a later occasion." Such an understanding can indeed be found.

Perhaps the clearest example is found in Mekilta,⁴⁷ in the context of a series of answers to the question: why did God divide the sea for Israel? Abtalyon has God say, "'The faith with which they believed in Me is deserving that I should divide the sea for them' for it is said 'And the people believed'" (Ex 4:31). Shemaiah on the other hand has God say, "'The faith with which their father Abraham believed in Me is deserving that I should divide the sea for them,' for it is said, 'And he believed in the Lord' (Gen 15:6)," and (continuing with the paraphrase of A. Marmorstein)⁴⁸ "he counted it unto him (i.e. at the sea) for (doing) charity (with his children)." If Marmorstein is correct, and it is hard to follow Shemaiah's logic otherwise, the righteousness is God's and it is exercised not toward

Abraham as such but toward Israel at the Exodus.

James shows a similar understanding: "Abraham our father was justified on the basis of works (presumably his acts of hospitality, Gen 18⁴⁹ when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar" (2:21). Thereby "the scripture was fulfilled which says: Gen 15:6." (vs 23). Righteousness was promised to Abraham when he believed (Gen 15) and was "counted to" Abraham when God spared Isaac (Gen 22). To be sure, Abraham deserved that righteousness, according to James, on the basis of his faith and his works, but it is still the righteousness of God which is promised on one occasion and given "as a reward" on a later occasion. The understanding in 1 Mac 2:52 is not so clear: "Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and righteousness was counted to him?"⁵⁰ As often (cf. Sir 44:20; Jub 17:18; 19:8; Aboth 5:3; et al.) it is the *Akeda*, the sacrifice of Isaac, which is the supreme example of Abraham's faithfulness and, it may be, of his righteousness. But it is also possible that the reference is to Abraham's faithfulness being rewarded by God's righteousness in preserving Isaac. There is another interesting paraphrase in Philo on this point. After a long exposition on Gen 15:6a, the faith of Abraham in which Philo is mostly interested (de Abr 262-272), he comes to vs 6b as follows: God marveling at Abraham's faith in Him repaid him with faithfulness (*pistis*) by confirming with an oath the gifts which He had promised." (273). Gen 15:6 is probably reflected in Heb 11:11, "By *faith*, (even though Sarah was barren), he (Abraham) received strength for procreation, even though he was past the age, since he considered him faithful who had promised."⁵¹

Luke-Acts views the figure of Abraham in terms of promise for Israel (Acts 3:25). But the only clear reference to Gen 15 is to vs 13-14 (Acts 7:6f), with no mention of Abraham's faith.⁵²

One final reference to Abraham, and possibly to the theme of God's righteousness, will be cited because of the reference to the blessing of the nations.

Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations

And no one has been found like him in glory.

He kept the law of the Most High

And was taken into covenant with him.

He established the covenant in his flesh,

And when he was tested he was found *faithful*.

Therefore the Lord has assured him by an oath

That the nations would be blessed through his posterity,

That he would multiply him like the dust of the earth,

And exalt his posterity like the stars,

And cause them to inherit from sea to sea,

And from the River to the ends of the earth. (Sir 44:19-21)

If we have been correct in our exposition above, Abraham received the promise of the righteousness of God on one occasion, but it was "paid out" to him 1. on the spot (Philo, perhaps I Mac 2:52), 2. at the birth of Isaac (Philo, Heb 11:11) 3. when God spared Isaac (James 2:23, perhaps I Mac 2:52); 4. at the crossing of the sea (Mekilta), 5. whenever God was gracious to Israel (Is 41, Neh 9; cf. Ex 32:11-13, II Kgs 13: 23, Dt passim, Ps 105:42, Lk-Acts, et al.), or 6. in the blessing of the nations (Is 51, Sir 44). We shall see how it is with Paul.

IV

The question which must now be raised is whether when we turn to Paul we find a radically different conception of the importance of Abraham and the significance of Gen 15:6. Most interpreters think that we do and that Paul understands the passage to refer to Abraham being justified by faith apart from works as a model for Christians to do the same. It is assumed that Paul operates with a sharp distinction between believing and doing, between having faith in Christ and doing the works of the law, between faith and law as the way to salvation. Since the Abraham example is not a particularly good one to make this particular point (the most famous example of the one who does God's will being the faithful Abraham, the friend of God), it is further assumed that discussion of this figure has been forced on Paul by his opponents and that therefore he is driven to such a contrived reinterpretation. Apart from all the other difficulties such an assumption causes (such as a complete misinterpretation of early Judaism), it is not often noted how it makes Paul into the supreme legalist. The problem is that in Gen 15:6 the believing comes before the counting of righteousness, and with the emphasis on the faith of Abraham (and the Christian) the second

half of the statement becomes only God's reaction to the first half. It is only with great subtleties of interpretation that we escape the idea that "justification is reckoned as the reward given by God to man's achievement of faith," as Deismann⁵³ pointed out. Many interpreters seem to be saying: faith is well pleasing to God; if then one follows the good example of Abraham (difficult enough to do!) and believes, then the believer will be rewarded like Abraham by being called or made righteous and will thereby be justified. Most interpreters are a bit more subtle than Mussner⁵⁴ but mean the same: "The promised blessing is not simply freely given by God according to Paul, but the condition which must be fulfilled by the Gentiles in order to receive it is faith." Could it be that we have misunderstood Paul on this point and that in fact he interprets the figure of Abraham not against but with the traditional understanding?⁵⁵

Paul's major theological concern I understand to be not the justification of individuals by their faith but the justification of the legitimacy of his apostleship to and gospel for the Gentiles. He describes his commissioning as a revelation of Christ "in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (Gal 1:16), he calls himself apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 1:5; 11:13; 15:16, 18), speaks of "my gospel" (Gal 1:8,11; Rom 2:14; 16:25; II Cor 4:3; 11:4; I Thes 1:5), "the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles" (Gal 1:16- 2-2), "the gospel to the uncircumcised" (Gal 2:7). The content of that gospel is described as the righteousness of God, i.e. "the power of God for salvation, for the Jew of course but also for the Greek (Rom 1:16), or concretely, "that God would justify the Gentiles from faithfulness" (Gal 3:8). If Paul was concerned to find his gospel of salvation for Gentiles prefigured in the Torah, there is no other figure to whom he could turn but Abraham. If in addition he wanted to find the righteousness of God⁵⁶ applied to the salvation of Gentiles, there is no other passage in the Torah⁵⁷ to which he could

have turned but Gen 15:6.

Paul draws an astonishing conclusion⁵⁸ from his citation of Gen 15:6 in Gal 3:7: "Know then: those of faith (*ek pisteos*), these are the children of Abraham." Those who think that Paul is most interested in the statement that "Abraham believed" as a model to be followed by Galatian believers must speak here of an "unexpressed premise"⁵⁹ and cannot understand why Paul does not clearly conclude that "Christians, like Abraham, are justified by believing and not by works of law." In what follows, however, Paul speaks not of Abraham's faith (except perhaps in vs 9) but of the seed of Abraham (vss 16, 19, 29) the heirs of Abraham (vss 18, 29), the blessing of Abraham (vss 8, 14), the grace of God to Abraham (vs 18), and the promise to Abraham (vss 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 29). Paul's interest is in God's activity in "counting to Abraham for righteousness, and he hears in this passage "the gospel proclaimed beforehand to Abraham," the gospel which says that God would justify the Gentiles from faithfulness" (vs 8) All of this is possible only if Paul writes not against but in conformity with the exegetical tradition we have sketched particularly as it is mediated through Is 51 and Sir 44.

It is perhaps a bit much in the course of an essay arguing for the understanding of Gen 15:6 as referring to the righteousness of God also to assume that Rom 3:3 "the faithfulness of God" is determinative for many of the uses of the word *pistis* in Paul.⁶⁰ That the phrase *pistis Christou* (Rom 3:22,26; Gal 2:16,20; 3:22,26; Phil 3:9; Eph 3:12) is to be translated "the faithfulness of

Christ" has been argued by many.⁶¹ M. Taylor⁶²

has argued that also other instances of *pistis* in Gal 2-3 are to be understood as referring to the reliability of Christ as a kind of trustee, the *fidei commissum* of Roman law. The phrase "those *ek pisteos* of Gal 3:7 and 9 has its closest parallel in Rom 3:26, which says that God justifies 'the one *ek pisteos*' of Jesus."⁶³ In any case, the word *pistis* here seems to interpret the "righteousness" of vs 6 rather than the "Abraham believed," since the whole argumentation (cf. vss 6,9,14,18,29 for a skeleton) has to do not with the faith of Abraham but the children of Abraham.

The use of Gen 15 continues throughout the chapter. The human legal institution (vs 15) to which Paul draws an analogy may be the Roman *fidei commissum* or more likely the Jewish *mattanat bari*,⁶⁴ but in any case something is promised to Abraham in trust. This trust lies dormant until the coming of the seed (vs 19) or the *pistis* (vss 23, 25) or concretely Christ (vss 16, 22, 24), when it is "spent" by the seed for the benefit of the Gentile Christians. *When* was this trust given? Paul says that it was 430 years before the giving of the Torah, that is, according to Rabbinic chronology,⁶⁵ at the time of the covenant between the pieces, Gen 15. *What* was given at that time? Paul uses frequently the word "promise," which never appears in the Abraham stories in the LXX, and the word "blessing," which does not occur in Gen 15. Gen 15 does not speak explicitly of God's grace as does Gal 3:18. The phrase "to your seed" appears in Gen 15:18 and elsewhere (12:7; 13-15,18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3; 28:4,13; 35:12) only in connection with the promise of the land.⁶⁶ The promise that

Abraham's seed will be as numerous as the stars (Gen 15:5) could hardly be directly appealed to in a context where Paul emphasizes the singularity of the seed, and the same would be true of the heir (Gen 15:4; Gal 3:29). There remains as a locus for what Paul calls promise and blessing and grace in Gen 15 only the passage he explicitly quotes about the righteousness of God being counted to Abraham.

The contrast throughout this chapter is not between faith and works but between the law and promise, whereby the word "law" is used in at least two senses.⁶⁷

On the one hand it refers (in 3:2,5,10,11,13,23,24; 4:4,5) to law without covenant, the curse from which the Gentiles have been redeemed, the law administered over creation by the "gods who essentially are not (gods)" (4:8), the "elements of the world" (4:3,9), the guardians and administrators (4:2), the custodians (3:25), the angels of the nations (3:19). On the other hand the word "law" refers (in 3:27,18,21) to the covenant law given to Israel on Sinai, which is not "against the promises (3:21) but also is not *for* this specific promise to Abraham concerning Gentiles being blessed.

It is in this sense that the law cannot make alive and that "righteousness" does not come through law (vs 21). Righteousness does not come through law because it is equivalent to "the promise from the faithfulness of Jesus Christ" (vs 22). Also

Hab 2:4 must be understood in this way.⁶⁸ The law is not

"from faithfulness" (vs 12) because in the law "no one is justified before

God" (vs 11, citing Ps 143:2). Justification comes not from our doing or from our

believing but from "the faithfulness" or "the righteousness" of God, as

in Ps 143:1.⁶⁹ That from which the righteous will live is

then, according to Paul, the faithfulness of God of Hab 2:4, which is an interpretation of

the righteousness of God of Gen 15:6.

A major concern of Paul's theology and of Gal 3 in particular is the covenant and law of Sinai. If the reality of this inclusion is found in Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit, the primary scriptural basis for Paul's argument is Gen 15:6 understood through a long tradition. Paul's gospel, "that God would justify the Gentiles from faithfulness" is found in God's promise to Abraham that "in you all the Gentiles will be blessed" (vs 9). "Those from faithfulness" are identified with the Gentiles of the promise. The phrase has the same meaning in Paul's earlier conclusion (vs 7) directly from Gen 15:6: "know then, those *ek pisteos*, these are children of Abraham." Paul hears in this verse not a statement about the righteousness of Abraham's faith but a promise for the future, and a promise which has specifically to do with Gentiles. Christ has redeemed us "in order that for the Gentiles the blessing of Abraham might become a reality in Jesus Christ, in order that we might receive the promise, i.e. the Spirit, through the faithfulness" (vs 13). The interpretation in Galatians is then something like Ramban's first explanation.

V

The understanding of Gen 15:6 in Rom 4 is similar but much richer. That Paul understands the passage to speak of God's grace toward Christians and not just toward Abraham is stated explicitly at the end of the discussion: "These words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake only but also for our sake, to whom it is to be 'counted'" (vss 23-24a).⁷⁰ The preceding context also argues strongly in favour of an understanding of the righteousness being God's righteousness now being

exercised toward Gentiles.⁷¹ Romans as a whole can be understood to centre around the theme of the faithfulness (*pistis, dikaiosyne, aletheia*, Rom 3:3,5,7) of God, the firmness of which toward Israel is in no sense denied (3:3; 11:1,29, et al.) when Paul argues for the inclusion now also of Gentiles on the basis of God's faithfulness to his promises concerning them. At the end of the letter we read that "Christ became a servant to the circumcised for the sake of God's faithfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (15:8-9a).

That Rom 3:21-31 concerns the inclusion of Gentiles has been argued forcefully by G. Howard.⁷² "Now, however, apart from the law (but not against it, cf. Gal 3:21), that righteousness of God has been made manifest to which the law and the prophets have testified, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ" (3:21f). As in Gal 3:20 one argument for the inclusion of Gentiles is the unity of God;⁷³ God acts because he is God "also of Gentiles, since 'God is one,' who will justify the circumcised out of (his) faithfulness and the uncircumcised through the (same) faithfulness" (3:29-30). Paul leads into the discussion of Abraham with the assertion that he does not "render the law obsolete through this faithfulness;" on the contrary, he says that he "confirms the law" (3:31). In what way is Paul's gospel a confirmation of the law? Where does the law (the Torah) "testify to the righteousness of God"? It can only be in Gen 15:6!

Rom 4 is not about Christian faith, but differing from Gal it does speak of Abraham's

faithfulness. Attempts to understand Abraham as a hero of faith to be imitated by Christian believers cause insuperable difficulties, which the commentators gloss over. Thus, one cannot really say that the promise to Abraham came *through* the righteousness of his faith (vs 13), or that the inheritance depends on faith (vs 16). *Pistis* is parallel to "promise" in vs 14 and to "grace" in vs 16 and must refer to God's faithfulness to his promise, as does the phrase "(God's) righteousness, i.e. faithfulness" in vs 13. Abraham's *pistis* appears in a formula "the one *ek pisteos* of Abraham," which reminds us of "the *one ek pisteos* of Jesus" in 3:26 and "those *ek pisteos*" in Gal 3:7 and 9. The chapter is not about faith but about grace, expressed in the constantly recurring phrase that God "counts righteousness" to Abraham's heirs (vss 5, 6, 9, 11, 23, 24), and that "according to grace" (vs 4).

The content of the promise, that which Abraham believed, is that "he should be heir of the world," (vs 13), again in the tradition of Sir 44. The promise of Gen 15:5, "thus will your seed be," is interpreted in the light of 17:5, "I have made you the father of many Gentiles." God is faithful, who gives life to the Gentiles who are dead in their sins and calls into being the church which did not exist (vs 17).⁷⁴ Abraham's faith must not be interpreted as an existential abstraction,⁷⁵ as a quality, but it has a specific content, the future justification of Gentiles, and it seems that it has this for Paul also in the statement of Gen 15:6.

Abraham is understood in Rom 4 not primarily as the type of the later believers but as

the *father* of later believers, Jews and Gentiles. Differing from Galatians, Christ does not appear as the fulfillment of the promise for Gentiles until the very end of the chapter. Paul is much more careful here than in Galatians not to negate Abraham's fatherhood for Israel when he emphasizes that it is now also for Gentiles. The promise is sure for *all* the seed, 1. for those of law as well as 2. for those of the *pistis* of Abraham (vs 16). Abraham was a Gentile when he believed the promise concerning Gentiles, but he also later received "the sign of the circumcision covenant (*berith mila*)" (Gen 17:11) in order that he might become 1. the father of all who believe as uncircumcised, and 2. the father of the circumcised who also believe (vs 11-12). Paul's major concern of course is to demonstrate Abraham's paternity for Gentiles, and it is only to this group that we hear explicitly of the righteousness (viz. of Gen 15:6) being counted.

As in Gal 3 so also here Paul hears a promise concerning Gentiles specifically in Gen 15:6. That God is the one "who justifies the godless" (Rom 4:5, cf. 5:6) is best interpreted in the light of Gal 3:8, "Scripture, knowing beforehand that God would justify the Gentiles." The "one who does not work" is surely a contemporary Gentile,⁷⁶ and we may ask *whose* faith is counted as righteousness, his own or Abraham's. The counting of righteousness is called a blessing (cf. the similar word Gal 3:8,9,14) in the light of Ps 32:1f, which also refers to a "counting." The non-counting of sins, in a psalm which does not mention works but also does not mention faith, is an act of pure grace, which interprets the counting of Gen 15:6. Psalm 32, however, was understood to refer only to Israel, the circumcised blessed under the covenant and its cult. Paul then explicitly says it refers to a blessing for the uncircumcised also, and cites Gen 15:6 as the reason. That the promise was given to Abraham while he was a Gentile is a secondary argument, not found in Gal 3. There and here it is in

the "counting for righteousness" as such that Paul hears the promise that God would justify the Gentiles.

We have noted that Abraham's act of believing is emphasized more in Romans than in Galatians, and indeed it can even be spoken of as a kind of merit. That is the logic of the "therefore" after the impressive description of Abraham's faith in vs 19-21: "therefore 'it was counted to him for righteousness'" (vs 22). We recall that Ramban tried to explain God's expression of grace in Gen 15:6 alongside the statement of Abraham's great reward in 15:1. The word in the LXX is *misthos*, the same word that Paul says is "counted as a due to the one who works" (vs 4). In that sense Abraham was justified on the basis of works and *does* have grounds for boasting (vs 2). But ... Paul is not interested in Abraham's righteousness or in Abraham's reward but in God's grace toward those of whom Abraham is father, and then Abraham cannot boast. What Abraham "merited" for later generations is pure grace, as in the Rabbinic concept of the merits of the fathers. We know that Paul shared the concept of the merit of the fathers where Israel was concerned ("as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers" Rom 11:28); why should he not use this same concept also as a basis for speaking of God's gracious action toward the Gentiles? The interpretation in Romans is then something like Ramban's second explanation.¹⁷

Such a brief survey of the tradition of the understanding of Gen 15:6 down through the time of Paul can do little more than raise the question of the possibility of a fresh interpretation. What we have said about Paul's understanding of the significance of Abraham

in Gal 3 and Rom 4 in particular runs against the grain of the entire Christian exegetical tradition. The search for a new paradigm of understanding was occasioned by what must surely become for our time a fundamental hermeneutical principle. Every interpretation of Paul that is based on a misrepresentation of Judaism is to be rigorously excluded. Why should we assume "opponents," against whom Paul's words must be understood as "polemic", where none is indicated? (Paul had enough real problems in making himself understood to his churches without our conjuring up a fabricated *Spätjudentum* to be his enemy.) If it is possible to interpret Paul in continuity with the tradition before him, why should we not do so? (Paul strives hard enough to understand the relationship of the new revelation of the righteousness of God to the revelation of that righteousness in Scripture without our putting unnecessary obstacles in his way.) Why should we not use the understanding of Scripture of later Judaism to cast light on Paul's interpretation rather than as the negative foil which Paul *ex hypothesi* must be opposed to? (Paul might well feel more at home in the world of a Ramban than that of an Augustine or a Luther.) We might then look forward to the day when all of us, Jews and Christians, Paul and Ramban, can join together with the faithful Abraham in praising God for his righteousness.

Notes

1. Cf. now the exciting approach of a systematic theologian, P. van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* (3 volumes, second edition: Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1995).
2. "Römer 4 und die Idee der Heilsgeschichte" (1963), "Individualgeschichte und Weltgeschichte bei Paulus" (1964), "Exegetische Probleme in Römer 3, 21-4, 25" (1964) in *Rekonstruktion und Interpretation* (München: Kaiser, 1969) 145-169, 180-224, 170-179. There have been many reactions to his provocative theses, none of which I find adequate. Cf. U. Wilckens, "Zu Römer 3,21-4,25" (1964), in *Rechtfertigung als Freiheit* (Neukirchener Verlag, 1974) 50-76; K. Berger, "Abraham in den paulinischen Hauptbriefen," *Münch. Theolog. Zeit.* 17 (1966) 47-89; H. Boers, *Theology out of the Ghetto* (Leiden: Brill, 1971)

- 74-104; E. Käsemann, "The Faith of Abraham in Romans 4," *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 79-101. To interact with this literature, which was my original intention, would have made this paper much too long.
3. A. Jülicher on Romans in *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1907) II, 249.
 4. "Römer 4" (note 2) 150f.
 5. *Old Testament Theology I* (New York: Harper, 1962)
 6. "Faith Reckoned as Righteousness" (1951), *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 125-130, all quotations on p. 130.
 7. "Genesis 15:6 im Neuen Testament," *Probleme biblischer Theologie* (München: Kaiser, 1971) 90-107, p. 107.
 8. H. J. Schoeps, *Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 213-218.
 9. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 33-59.
 10. C. Westermann, Genesis; *Biblischer Kommentar I*, 2 (Neukirchener Verlag, 1979), 263.
 11. It was known to Calvin, who fatefully rejected it. "They also, no less skillfully, corrupt the text, who say that Abram is here ascribing to God the glory of righteousness, seeing that he ventures to acquiesce surely in his promises, acknowledging Him to be faithful and true; for although Moses does not expressly mention the name of God, yet the accustomed method of speaking in the Scriptures removes all ambiguity." *Genesis* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 406. Whether Calvin is apt to be more familiar with the "accustomed manner of speaking in the Scriptures" than Ramban is to be doubted. An isolated insight is a single sentence in G.A.F. Knight, *Deutero-Isaiah* (New York: Abingdon, 1965), 208: "The words of Gen 15:6. . . mean literally, 'And he found himself firm upon Yahweh, and he counted it to him as saving activity.'"
 12. Rashi had said: "The Holy One, blessed be he, counted it to Abram for merit (the *zkw* of the Targum) and for righteousness because of the faith with which he believed in Him."
 13. On the contrary, it is to this passage, 15:8, that later Rabbinic tradition appeals when it wants to speak of Abraham's lack of faith (Ned 32a).
 14. Cf. L. Peritt, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament* (Neukirchener Verlag, 1969); O. Kaiser (note 16); C. Westermann (note 10), J. van Seters (note 15); and the literature reviewed by them. I have not been able to consult J. Hoftijzer, *Die Verheissungen an die drei Erzzväter* (Leiden: Brill, 1956).
 15. *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), especially pp 249-278.
 16. "Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung von Genesis 15," *ZAW* 70 (1958) 107-126.
 17. "Das priesterliche Heilsorakel," *ZAW* 52 (1934) 81-92; cf. also C. Westermann, "Das Heilswort bei Deuterocesaja," *Ev. Th.* 24 (1964) 355-373.
 18. *The Promises to the Fathers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 15.
 19. C. Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (London: Epworth, 1965) 64.
 20. Art. cit. (note 6).
 21. Cf. Seybold, *hsb*, *TWAT* III, 243-261.
 22. It is interesting that J. Pedersen, *Israel; Its Life and Culture I-II* (London: Oxford, 1926) 530, citing from memory, thinks that Gen 15:6 does read "*hashabh P*!"
 23. Especially helpful have been A. Schoors, *I Am God Your Saviour; A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres in Is XL-LV* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) and F. V. Reiterer, *Gerechtigkeit als Heil; ZDQ bei Deuterocesaja; Aussage und Vergleich mit der alttestamentlichen Tradition* (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1976). It is to be noted that Westermann does not include Is 51:1-8 among the oracles of salvation but in a second category, related to the collective lament, which he calls "proclamation of salvation."
 24. Is it because of that or the righteousness of God that the Targum interprets Is 41:2 of Abraham rather than Cyrus? "Who brought Abraham quickly from the east, even the chosen of righteousness in truth."
 25. It is not possible to discuss here the importance of Israel "pursuing righteousness" (vs 1) and the Torah going out to the Gentiles (vs 4) for understanding Rom 9:30ff.

26. The incorporation of the concept of blessing into a history seen under the perspective of the promises of God is called by Westermann "one of the most theologically significant innovations of the early history of Israel," *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 53. Cf. also van Seters (note 15), 271-278.
27. See Reiterer (note 23) 59-69.
28. "It is not improbable that DI has in mind the story told in Gen xv 1-6, in which Abram is distressed because he is childless. Yahweh bade him 'Look (*habbet*, cf. the repeated *habbitu* in the present passage) at the heavens,' and promised him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars." *The Second Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964) 209.
29. Cf. Peritt (note 14) 66f; Westermann (note 18), 130.
30. A later midrash connects in an interesting manner Abraham, righteousness (of God?), and justification (of Gentiles?): "Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Abraham: 'Thou hast loved righteousness' (Ps 45:8); thou hast loved to justify my creatures" (Gen Rab 49:9).
31. R. E. Clements, *Abraham and David; Genesis 15 and its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (London: SCM, 1967) 69, who does not follow his own insight. Gen 15:1-6 "derives from a time in which the possession of the land began to be doubtful for Israel" (H. Gunkel, *Genesis* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1966⁷] 183); "emanates from the period when Israel's tenure of Canaan began to be precarious" (J. Skinner, *Genesis* [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1930²] 284); "derived from a period when matters of faith were a problem" (G. von Rad, *Genesis* [London: SCM, 1972] 190). But surely even more important than the land is the threatened loss of peoplehood, as the reference to many descendants (Gen 15:5; Is 51:2; cf. 54:1) indicates.
32. Cf. M. Anbar (Bernstein, "The covenant between the Pieces - Gen 15" (Hebrew), *Shnaton Lemiqra* 3 (1978-79) 34-52, p. 41.
33. "I am YHWH, who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans" Gen 15:7.
34. "And he (Abram) trusted in YHWH" Gen 15:6.
35. "YHWH made with Abram a covenant" Gen 15:18.
36. "I give this land" Gen 15:18.
37. A similar list, with these names in a different order and with the addition of the Rephaim is found in Gen 15:20f; vs 19 has three additional names.
38. "To your seed I have given" Gen 15:18.
39. "And he counted it to him righteousness" Gen 15:6.
40. LXX and the Greek tradition following it; Targum Neofiti; Peshitta.
41. Contrary to the overly subtle distinctions made by H. W. Heidland, "Logizomai"; *TWNT IV* (1942) 287-295, cf. Seybold (note 21).
42. M. Black, *Romans* (London: Oliphants, 1973) 76, is one of the few to notice the significance of the *eis*: "The view that Abraham's 'faith' was 'reckoned to him' as *equivalent* to 'righteousness' is less convincing than to take 'for righteousness' as meaning that Abraham's faith was counted to his credit 'with a view to the receiving of righteousness.'"
43. It is probable that this is the understanding of Targum Onkelos, which not only has a preposition but also uses the word "merit" *lzkw*. Such an understanding is also clear in Jub 30, where the deed of Simeon and Levi against the Shechemites was "counted to them for righteousness," defined as "written down to them for righteousness" (vs 18), "written for a blessing" (vs 23); "they inscribe as a testimony in his favour on the heavenly tablets blessing and righteousness" (vs 19); "until a thousand generations they will record it and it will come to him and to his descendants after him" (vs 20).
44. Cf. A. Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits in old Rabbinical literature* (New York: KTAV, repr. 1968); G. F. Moore, *Judaism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), I, 535-545; E. P. Sanders, (note 9) 183-198.
45. That Abraham and his seed were the recipients of God's righteousness (= mercy), cf. Jub. 31:25, "And Isaac blessed the God of his father Abraham, who had not withdrawn his mercy and his righteousness from the sons of his servant Isaac."
46. Leg. All. III, 228, *kai dikaios enomisthe*. For other passages where Philo cites Gen 15:6, cf. J. B. Lightfoot, *Galatians* (London: Macmillan, 1869) 158.

47. *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, Beshallah 4 (Lauterbach, Vol I, 220).
48. Op. cit. (note 44) 37.
49. Cf. R. B. Ward, "The Works of Abraham; James 2:14-26," *HTR* 61 (1968) 283-290.
50. So the reading of Alexandrinus, which may be original. The omission of the preposition (as in MT) seems to make it even clearer that it is a question of God's righteousness. At least the other examples cited in the context (Joseph, Phinehas, Joshua, Caleb, David, Elijah, Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael, and Daniel) all receive a later reward for their faithfulness, not a declaration at the time.
51. Translation according to M. Black, "Critical and Exegetical Notes on Three New Testament Texts, Hebrews xi.11, Jude 5, James i.27," *Apophoreta; Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964) 39-45, which is simpler than the textual emendation proposed by G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 16, 170.
52. Cf. N. Dahl, "The Story of Abraham in Luke-Acts," *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn (New York: Abingdon, 1966), 139-158.
53. Paul; *A Study in Social and Religious History* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926) 169.
54. F. Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 220. Berger (note 2, p 47) begins his article, "In Gal 3 the salvation gift of the Christians, the Spirit which they received (3:2-5) is presented as the content of the promise to Abraham; the attainment of which was dependent on the same condition as the obtaining of the promise: by faith."
55. For an important beginning in this direction, cf. G. Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia* (Cambridge: University Press, 1979) 46-65. Cf. also E. Jacob. "Abraham et sa signification pour la foi chretienne," *RHPR* 42 (1962) 148-156.
56. On this important concept cf. H. Cremer, *Die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre im Zusammenhang ihrer geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1901²); A. Schlatter, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit; Ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief*, Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1959³); E. Käsemann, "Gottesgerechtigkeit bei Paulus," *ZThK* 58 (1961) 367-378; P. Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1965); D. Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969) 82-162; K. Kertelge, "*Rechtfertigung*" bei Paulus (Münster: Aschendorff, 1967); J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972); F. Crüsemann, "Jahwes Gerechtigkeit im Alten Testament," *EvTh* 36 (1976) 427-450; M. T. Brauch, "Perspectives on 'God's righteousness' in recent German discussion," in E. P. Sanders, (note 9) 523-542.
57. According to modern interpreters *sdqh* refers to God's righteousness in the Torah only in Dt 33:21. Paul also hears God's righteousness proclaimed in Dt 30:11-14, although the word does not appear (Rom 10:6-8).
58. Cf. Berger, (note 2) 50.
59. "The unexpressed premise of this argument (vs 7) is that men become acceptable to God and heirs of the promise on the same basis on which Abraham was accepted" (E. W. Burton, *Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1921), 155). "The Unexpressed premise of the argument, necessary to make this passage (vs 11) prove the preceding proposition, is that no one does, in fact, continue in all the things that are written in the book of the law to do them" (Burton, p 164). It is the "unexpressed premises" that allow us to read our own theology into a text which does not contain it at all.
60. New Testament theology would have done much better to follow Barth's *Römerbrief* than Bultmann's *Theology* in this matter. Cf. F.-W. Marquardt, *Die Juden im Römerbrief* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1971) 39: "*Pistis* is the possibility, which has now been opened for Gentiles and is to be acknowledged by Jews, for Gentiles to be together with Jews under God's command and promise, in order to praise the one God."
61. J. Haussleiter, *Der Glaube Jesu Christi und der christliche Glaube* (Leipzig, 1891); H. Ljungman, *Pistis* (Lund: Gleerup, 1964) 38-40; E. R. Goodenough, "Paul and the Hellenization of Christianity," in *Religions in Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1967) 35-80; M. Barth, "The Kerygma of Galatians," *Interp* 21 (1967) 131-136; G. Howard, "On the Faith of Christ," *HTR* 60 (1967~ 459-484; "The 'Faith of Christ,' *ET* 85 (1974) 212-215;

- J. J. O'Rourke, "Pistis in Romans," *CBQ* (1973) 188-194.
62. "The Function of *PISTIS CHRISTOU* in Galatians," *JBL* 85 (1966) 58-76.
63. The reference seems to be to one group, the justified Gentiles, as distinguished from another group called those *ek nomou* (Rom 4:14, 16), those *ek peritomes* (Rom 4:12j Gal 2 12), those *ex Israel* (Rom 9:6).
64. Cf. E. Bammel, "Gottes *DIATHEKE* (Gal. iii.15-17) und das jüdische Rechtsdenken," *NTS* 6 (1959-60) 313,319.
65. Mekilta, Pisha 14 (Lauterbach, I, 111). This dating is already presupposed by the LXX and Josephus. Cf. D. Daube, "The Interpretation of Generic Singular," *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956) 438-444.
66. For the possibility that this is the promise Paul is claiming for his gospel, cf. the suggestive book by W. Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).
67. Cf. my "Paul and the Torah," *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. A. T. Davies (New York: Paulist, 1979) 48-71; and J. A. Sanders, "Torah and Paul," *God's Christ and His People*, ed. J. Jervell and W. Meeks (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977) 132-140.
68. Cf. D. M. Smith, "*HO DE DIKAIOS EK PISTEOS ZESEtai*," *Studies in the History and Text of the New Testament*, ed. B. L. Daniels and M. J. Suggs (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1967) 13-25; and H. C. C. Cavallin, "The Righteous shall live by Faith; A Decisive Argument for the Traditional Interpretation," *Stud. Theol.* 32 (1978) 33-43.
69. The righteousness of God is often contrasted with our unrighteousness in early Judaism; cf. Dan 9:16, "O Lord, according to all thy righteousnesses let thy anger and thy wrath turn away;" IQH 4:30f, "I know that a human being has no righteousness. . .to the Most High God belong all deeds of righteousness;" or the last petition of the Avinu Malkenu prayer, "be gracious unto us and answer us, for we have no (good) deeds; deal with us in righteousness and faithfulness, and save us."
70. This may provide a clue for translating the notoriously difficult vs 1. Along with Zahn and von Hofmann we would understand the "we" of the initial verb as the subject of the following infinitive and translate: "What shall we say then that we have gained in Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?"
71. Cf. R. B. Hays, "Psalm 143 and the Logic of Romans 3," *JBL* 99 (1980) 107-115.
72. "Romans 3:21-31 and the Inclusion of the Gentiles," *HTR* 63 (1970) 223-233. Cf. also his "Christ and the End of the Law; The Meaning of Romans 10:4ff," *JBL* 88 (1969) 331-337.
73. Cf. U. Mauser, "Galater iii.20: Die Universalität des Heils," *NTS* 13 (1967) 258-270; on the importance of Abraham in this connection, pp 263-265.
74. That this is the reference and not the resurrection of Jesus is said among others by D. Zeller, *Juden und Heiden in der Mission des Paulus* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1973) 105.
75. That we should not become all too spiritual in thinking of Abraham's faith and should recognize also its sexual implications is argued by M. Barth, *Foi et Salut selon S. Paul* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970) 59-63, as did Calvin (Romans, ad loc.) before him.
76. Insofar as the usual interpretation in terms of the justification of Abraham can be called "positively blasphemous even for non-Jewish ears" G. Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper, 1971) 143, perhaps we ought to give up the interpretation rather than really to accuse Paul of blasphemy.
77. M. Barth, *Justification* (Grand Rapids: Ehis ans, 1971) 67, has come very close to our understanding of Gen 15:6 (and to Ramban's use of Gen 50:20) when he writes: "Seeing the faith of his chosen, God confirms his gracious decision: he 'plans' faithfully, viz. 'in righteousness,' to carry out his promise at the proper time."

First published in *Horizons in Biblical Theology. An International Dialogue*, Vol. 2, 1980
With kind permission of the author.