

KINGDOM. LESSON 16

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God's kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> 2 CHRONICLES 32, 33, 34 and 36
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Take turns and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (2 Chronicles chapters 32, 33, 34 and 36). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH]</i> (4) ACTS 20:28
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Review two by two.

(4) The tasks of Church leaders. Acts 20:28. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

4	BIBLE STUDY (85 minutes) <i>[THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS]</i> ROMANS 4:17b-25
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Introduce. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study to study Romans 4:17b-25 together.

In Romans 4:1-17a, Paul proved that justification by faith has always been the only true method of salvation in the Bible. In Romans 4:17b-22, he shows the character of Abraham's faith in order to show us what is genuine faith. And in Romans 4:23-25, he teaches the relevance of Abraham's faith for believers today.

STEP 1. READ.	GOD'S WORD
Read. LET US READ Romans 4:17b-25 together. Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.	

STEP 2. DISCOVER.	OBSERVATIONS
Consider. WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU? Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART? Record. Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook. Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share). Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered. (Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things)	

4:17b-22

Discovery 1. The character of Abraham's faith has four characteristics.

(1) The first characteristic of faith is from Romans 4:17.

The object of Abraham's faith was the living God.

Abraham did not just believe. He believed in Someone and in something. He believed in the Living God (of the Bible) and in what God had promised to him. He believed that God was all-powerful and could give life to the dead. He believed that God was faithful and that God's promise was as good as its fulfilment.

(2) The second characteristic of faith is from Romans 4:18.

The aim of Abraham's faith was directly related to hope.

Abraham's faith and hope worked together. His faith was that he was sure of what he hoped for, what he expected. His faith was that he was very certain of the fulfilment of God's promise. Although Abraham knew that his circumstances made it humanly impossible to have a child, he nevertheless believed in God's omnipotence and hoped (expected) unswervingly in the fulfilment of God's promise. It was not only God's aim that Abraham should become the father of many nations (Romans 4:11), but also Abraham's conscious and deliberate aim (by an unswerving faith) to become the father of many nations (Romans 4:18). Abraham made God's goal for his life his own goal! He confidently believed in the certainty of his expectation, lest the promise should fail to go in fulfilment.

(3) The third characteristic of faith is from Romans 4:19-21.

The strength of Abraham's faith was determined by his view of God's character.

God had promised Abraham that he and his wife would have a son, and that God would use that son to bless all the families of the world. But because both he and his wife were very old, humanly and biologically speaking, it seemed impossible that such a promise could be fulfilled. Nevertheless, Abraham did not allow his circumstances to determine his faith. He faced his circumstances without weakening in his faith. How could he do that? Romans 4:20-21 says that his faith was determined by his view of God. Because he viewed God as omnipotent and faithful, he did not give room to doubt.

His faith was strengthened by God's repeated promises to him. His faith was strengthened every time he gave glory to God as being omnipotent and faithful. He held on to the unswerving conviction that God had the power to do what he had promised.

(4) The fourth characteristic of faith is from Romans 4:22.

The result of Abraham's faith was that God imputed (ascribed, reckoned) his faith to him as righteousness.

His faith was not merely an intellectual faith. It was also not the faith needed to perform miracles. Abraham's faith was salvation faith, that is, faith that leads to salvation or justification. His faith was directed to God and his promise with regard to the coming Messiah, who by his death and resurrection would bless all the families (nations) of the earth. His faith trusted God's promise and depended wholly on the righteousness which Jesus Christ would acquire with a view to salvation and not on any kind of human work.

4:23-25

Discovery 2. Abraham's faith has the following relevance for believers today.

In 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul says that the things that happened to Israel "happened to them as examples, and were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come." Here in Romans 4:23-24, Paul says that what was written with respect to Abraham was *not written for him alone, but also for us*. Faith was not only ascribed to Abraham as righteousness, but faith will also be ascribed to all believers today as righteousness.

Although the circumstances of Abraham in the Old Testament period and our circumstances in the New Testament period are different, the similarities between Abraham's faith and our faith show that the faith in the Old Testament was essentially the same as the faith in the New Testament.

(1) The first similarity between Abraham's faith and our faith is that the object of Abraham's faith was the God of the Bible (Romans 4:3; 4:24). Both Abraham and we believe in the God of the Bible who reckons (imputes, ascribes) faith (in him and his promise) as righteousness (cf. Romans 3:29-30).

(2) The second similarity is that Abraham's faith was directed to the God who gives life to the dead (Romans 4:17). Our faith is directed to the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead (Romans 4:24).

(3) The third similarity is that Abraham's faith was a sure conviction that God's promise would be fulfilled (Romans 4:21). Our faith is the sure conviction that God's promise has already been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 4:25).

However, we must not lose sight of God's progressive unfolding of his history of salvation. The main difference between Abraham's situation and our situation is that Abraham received a promise and we received the fulfilment of that promise! His faith focused on God's promise that would certainly be fulfilled and our faith focuses on the fulfilment of this promise with respect to the accomplishment of God's salvation work through Jesus Christ.

That is why Paul could write in 1 Corinthians 10:11, that "on us the fulfilment of the ages has come". And that is why the writer to the Hebrews wrote that Jesus Christ has appeared once for all "at the end of the ages" to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:26). Abraham lived in the beginning of the ages, while we live in the end or fulfilment of the ages.

STEP 3. QUESTION.

EXPLANATIONS

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 4:17b-25 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

4:17

Question 1. What did Abraham believe with regard to God? What is meant by God “who gives life to the dead” and “calls things that are not as though they were”?

Notes:

(1) Abraham believed in God, “who gives life to the dead”.

Romans 4:17 describes the characteristics of God that were the specific object of Abraham’s faith, when he believed in God and was justified. Abraham believed in the all-powerful God, who possesses power over death and life and can raise the dead to life. This distinguishes the living God from all other so-called “gods” in the world. He is not only the Creator and Sustainer of everything, but also the One who resurrects the dead and will judge everyone who has ever lived (John 5:28-29; Ephesians 1:19-20).

Because he has life-power to raise the completely dead, he also has life-power to raise the half-dead. Abraham believed that God would enable him to beget a child and enable Sarah to conceive a child, even though their bodies were very old and half-dead.

(2) Abraham believed in God who calls things that are not (that have not yet come about) as though they were (as though they already came about).“

Paul does not say that God was still busy creating things out of what was not observable (Hebrews 11:3). God had completed his creation by the seventh creation day (Genesis 2:1-2).

He says that God calls (names, speaks about) things that are not (do not yet exist, have not yet come about) as though they already are (exist, have come about)! “The things that are not” refer to things that God decided in the eternal past that they would come to pass in the future, but have not yet come to pass (for example, that Abraham and Sara would have a child in very old age). Because God had already decided that these things would happen, he speaks about them as if they have already happened, so certain it is that they will happen!

Thus, for Abraham, God’s promises (with regard to the future events) are as good as their fulfilment! Faith is being certain that the things you expect (hope) will really happen (cf. Hebrews 11:1).

4:18

Question 2. How did Abraham hope?

Notes. Romans 4:18 says, “Against all hope (in human resources), Abraham in hope (in God’s promise) believed (in God’s character: God’s omnipotence and faithfulness). The words “against all hope” refer to his human circumstances, described in verse 19. Looking only at his human circumstances would destroy all his hope. But looking at God and his promise kept his hope alive!

The words “believed in hope” do not mean that Abraham had faith in the contents of his hope. The object of Abraham’s faith was not “the things he hoped”, but God himself! Abraham’s hope was not “a wish that something may happen”, but “an unswerving expectation that something was certainly going to happen”. Abraham’s faith and hope were working together. The object of Abraham’s faith was God himself. Abraham’s faith was based on God’s character and directed to God’s omnipotence (God could do it) and faithfulness (God would do it). God had promised him a son in his old age and his faith was directed to the fulfilment of what God promised.

4:19-21

Question 3. What made Abraham’s faith strong?

Notes.

(1) Abraham’s view of God determined the character of his faith.

Verse 19 says, “Without weakening in his faith, Abraham considered that his own body was dead and the deadness of Sarah’s womb.” Instead of trying to ignore his circumstances, he deliberately faced his circumstances and was very much aware that both his own body as well as that of his wife Sarah were dead. Humanly speaking they were both much too old to have children (Genesis 17:17; 18:11).

But his circumstances did not weaken his faith! He remained strong in his faith, because he continued to fix his attention on the promise of God and gave no room to doubt God’s promise.

Verse 20-21 says that Abraham did not waver (or stagger) by entertaining doubting thoughts with reference to God’s promise, because he kept looking at God’s omnipotence and faithfulness. He was fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. The secret of his strong faith was based in *who* God was and *what* God had said.

(2) God’s repeated promises made Abraham’s faith strong.

Verse 20 says that Abraham “was strengthened in his faith” through God’s repeated confirmation of his promise. (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:4-6,18-21; 17:1-21). That gave him strength and made him strong.

(3) Giving glory to God made Abraham's faith strong.

Verse 20-21 says, "He was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." The power in Abraham's faith did not lie in Abraham's personality and also not in Abraham's deeds, but in God's character and God's promise. Giving glory to God is to remain convinced that God is able to do and will do what he has promised. This strengthened his faith.

4:22

Question 4. What is the exact meaning of the words "it (his faith) was reckoned (NIV: credited) to him as righteousness"?

Notes. Abraham's faith was "credited to his account" (NIV) as righteousness. The word "credited" must not be misunderstood as if Abraham's *faith itself* was regarded *as some kind of work* and that it was credited to his account *as his own righteous deed*. If this was the case, then Abraham would have been able to boast before God that he was justified by his own work (i.e his work of faith) (Romans 4:2).

Abraham's faith can never be regarded as some kind of righteous work, because "by grace his faith was credited to his account as righteousness" (Romans 4:16). His faith was credited to his account "as a gift from God" and never "as an obligation on the part of God" (Romans 4:4)! The word "to credit" does not have anything to do with compensation or a reward! The Greek word "logizó" is a legal technical (judicial) term meaning "to impute", "to ascribe", "to reckon" in the sense of "to regard and to treat". Therefore, lest we begin to regard the word "to credit" as referring to a compensation or a reward, it would be better to say that Abraham's "faith was imputed or ascribed to him as righteousness". It means that God's response to Abraham's faith was to declare him 100% righteous in his eyes and thereafter to regard and treat him as 100% righteous!

The words "it (his faith) was credited to him as righteousness" mean exactly the same as "to justify him by faith only". While "righteousness" is God's undeserved gift to believers in Jesus Christ, their "faith" is the instrument ("the empty hand") by which believers personally receive God's gift (namely, the 100% complete and perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ which he earned for us and in our place by his death and resurrection).

Moreover, it is not any kind of faith that justifies. Abraham's faith was not a general kind of faith in any "god" of any religion, but a very specific faith with a very specific content. His faith was directed to the God of the Bible and his promise of the coming Messiah (Jesus Christ), who by his death and resurrection would bless all the families (nations) of the earth (Genesis 12:3; Genesis 22:18). His faith was directed to God's omnipotence and faithfulness. And his faith aimed at bringing glory to God.

4:25

Question 5. Why is our justification dependent on both the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Notes. People are *justified by the grace* of God (Romans 3:24) and *justified by faith* (in Jesus Christ and his completed work of salvation)(Romans 3:22). That is why they are *justified by the death* of Jesus (his shed blood on the cross) (Romans 5:9) and *justified by the resurrection* of Jesus from the dead (Romans 4:24-25). Jesus Christ was delivered over to death in order to enable our justification, that is, to deal effectively with our sins, to atone for our sins so that God may justify us. And Jesus Christ was raised from the dead in order to guarantee our justification. Therefore, the death of Christ for our justification cannot have any effect apart from his resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead proves that God has accepted his sacrifice of atonement for sins! The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are inseparable! His death enables justification and his resurrection makes justification a reality.

A dead saviour has no effect! Prophets who still lie dead in their graves have no effect! Therefore, no other religion can justify a person! Jesus Christ is the only Saviour who *through his death* removes the sin of a believer (1 Peter 2:24) and reconciles him with God (1 Peter 3:18) and through his resurrection justifies him (Romans 4:24-25) and gives him the new life (Romans 6:4).

STEP 4. APPLY.

APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from Romans 4:17b-25.

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record. Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application.

(Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from Romans 4:17b-25.

- 4:17. God gives life to the dead and the half-dead. Allow God to give eternal life to your spirit by accepting Christ and his completed work of salvation into your heart and life. Allow God to give new strength and abilities to your physical body, so that you can do what you could never do before.
- 4:17. God calls things that are not (that has not yet come about) as though they were (as though they already have come about). Believe unwaveringly in God's promises, because God's promises are as good as their fulfilment.
- 4:11,18. Make the goal of the God of the Bible your own goal.
- 4:18. Believe in God's promises without giving up the hope or unswerving expectation of their fulfilment.
- 4:19-20. Do not allow your circumstances (however difficult) to dictate your faith. Allow God to strengthen your faith by meditating on his promises again and again.
- 4:20-21. Continually grow and get to know God's character better and better, because your view of God determines the character of your faith.
- 4:23-24. Continually remind yourself that God's words in the Old Testament are intended not only for the people living during the Old Testament period of time, but also for the people living during the New Testament period of time (thus, also for you)(2 Corinthians 1:20)!
- 4:25. Continually remind yourself that the death of Christ enables your justification and the resurrection of Christ guarantees your justification.

2. Examples of personal applications from Romans 4:17b-25.

I realise that the strength of my faith is determined by my view of God. Therefore, I want to hold on to the view that God is faithful and *will do* what he has promised, and to the view that God is all-powerful and *can do* what he has promised. I also realise that I can be empowered by my faith. I receive strength when I hold on to all the promises God has made to me in the Bible and continue to be convinced that God is able to do what he promised (Ephesians 3:20).

I realise that my faith has much similarities to Abraham's faith. I too believe in the living God. I too believe in the God who raises the dead. He raised Jesus Christ from the dead. And I too believe in God's promise to Abraham, that through Jesus Christ, who died and was resurrected, God is now already blessing all the families of the earth!

<u>STEP 5. PRAY.</u>	RESPONSE
LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in Romans 4:17-25. (Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)	

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[INTERCESSION] PRAY FOR OTHERS
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Continue to pray in groups of two's or three's. Pray for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. **Preach, teach or study** Romans 4:17-25 with another person or group of people.
3. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of Psalms 1, 2, 5 and 8 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. **Memorisation.** (5) The glory in the church: Ephesians 3:20-21. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. **Teaching.** Prepare the parable of "the lost sheep" in Luke 15:1-7 and the parable of "the lost son" in Luke 15:11-32. Make use of the six guidelines for interpreting parables.
6. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. **Update your notebook** on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your Bible study notes and this preparation.