

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Exegetical Paper: Theological Message of Genesis 15:6  
וְהָאֱמֹן בְּיָהוּהוּ וַיִּתְּשָׁבֶה לּוֹ צְדָקָה:

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by

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## **I. THE REFLECTION OF חָשַׁב châshab, khaw-shab'**

In consideration of the primitive root of חָשַׁב, one finds that Genesis 15:6 should be read from the primary idea of the business terms compute: —(make) account (of), with the words, reckoning, and imputing as key to correct interpretation. Though the Hebrew mental activity of thinking and considering is another basic understanding, one believes that a study of the concept behind the verbs in the passage helps as well. “To impute is to reckon to, or to lay to one’s account. So far as the meaning of the word is concerned, it makes no difference whether the thing imputed be sin or righteousness, whether it is our own personally, or the sin or righteousness of another.”<sup>1</sup>

Further understanding of this idea is the reading of both chapter and verse with the eschatological understanding of the apostle Paul’s perspective and thought of the doctrine of justification where the sins of the believer are imputed to Christ in exchange for his righteousness to the believer.

## **II. VIEW OF וְהֶאֱמַן בְּיָהוָה וַיִּחְשַׁבֶּהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה: IN RELATION TO COVENANTAL THEOLOGY**

The narrative in Genesis 15 is crucial in the knowledge of covenantal theology, where the existence of a unifying strand joins the Old Testament with itself and the Old Testament with the New Testament. From a canonical perspective, there is connection and continuity between Paul's Epistle of Galatians 3-4 and the Abrahamic and new covenants, though there are apparent differences. God is seen here as the Author and initiator of the covenant that he alone confirms and establishes its sanctions. God gives Abram more than the assurance of promise but initiates and performs a sacred rite that seals the relationship by making it clear that he was determined to follow through in making every aspect of it come to pass. In God’s

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 194.

ceremony, he swears to be faithful to the recipients, though there are curses and blessings associated with its treaty stipulations—whether the recipients respond in obedience or not.

The weight of Genesis 15:6 is very significant to New Testament theology—subsequently, Paul refers to the passage in both Galatians and Romans to communicate the principle of righteousness by faith. The verdict is the response of Abram to God’s enunciation in verses 4-5 that he will have a “seed” of countless individuals. How did God act in response to Abrams’ reaction? The computational rendering of אָמַן as a metaphor by the Scripture’s narrator declares that Abram’s faith counts as the moral quality of righteousness. “Note that Abram is responding to a special revelation of God to him at this juncture in the narrative. This is not blind faith but the response to a special revelation that assures Abram about progeny.”<sup>2</sup> Related to this intertextual effect of 15:6 is Habakkuk 2:4b “the righteous shall live by his faith” where אָמַן is rendered tsaddîyq, tsad-deek'; from H6663; just: —just, lawful, righteous (man) and Nehemiah 9:7-8.<sup>3</sup>

To reiterate, Abram's trust in God becomes the basis upon which God views him as righteous. This concept becomes an important biblical principle for how people are brought into a right relationship with God. Given the verb “believe in” or “trust in”, אָמַן does not refer to a doctrine, but rather Abram’s trust in God delivery on what he said. This righteousness, rendered אָמַן is Abram’s righteous standing with God in a relationship or moral character through belief and not an achievement. Abram’s belief in an heir is the basis of God's promise and not an exchange of righteousness between individuals.

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<sup>2</sup> Ben Witherington, *Torah Old and New* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 106.

<sup>3</sup> *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: A Reader's Edition* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 2014), 1105. Examination of Habakkuk 2:4 and Nehemiah 9:7-8 for comparison of אָמַן word study analysis.

### III. VIEW OF וְהָאָמֵן בִּיהִנֵּה וַיִּקְשָׁבֶה לּוֹ צִדְקָה: IN RELATION TO BIBLICAL CANON

In following God's covenant with Abram, "Deuteronomy is a covenant renewal document wherein Moses urges Israel to commit itself to, not only trust, but also obey God. In the Decalogue, Moses uses singular imperatives and prohibitions (5:6-21)."<sup>4</sup> However, in the previous hortatory sections, Moses pleads with the people to *not forget their covenant with the Lord*: "Take care then, not to forget the covenant that the Lord your God concluded with you, and not to make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness, against which the Lord your God has enjoined you. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, an impassioned God (4:23-24)."<sup>5</sup>

The canonical link between Genesis 15:6 in both Christian doctrine and theology is significant, where the apostle Paul cites the verse in the epistles of Romans (4:3, 18) and Galatians (3:6). "Ultimately all must be one in Christ through the new covenant, but there is an already and not yet dimension to the kingdom, the church, to the fulfillment of prophecy and promise in the OT, and so too to the interpretation of the OT."<sup>6</sup>

Luther's reading of Genesis 15:6, compared with the whole epistle of Romans, shaped his understanding of justification during the Protestant Reformation— "The just shall live by faith."<sup>7</sup> The belief amongst Christians advanced to one is saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

In further view of covenant theology and Genesis 15:6, the new covenant supersedes the old, yet in a way that the old retains and in fact increases its use as a prophetic witness to Christ (Rom.1:1–3; 3:21; 16:25–26; 2Cor.3:14; cf. Luke 1:70; 24:26–27, 44–47; John 5:39,

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel, Inc., 2008), 84.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in *The Jewish Study Bible*, Tanakh (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Ben Witherington, *Torah Old and New* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 325.

<sup>7</sup> M. Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Three Treatises* (ed. H. T. Lehmann; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988), 280.

46; Acts 26:22–23).<sup>8</sup> “In asserting this, Paul marks the lasting value of the Mosaic law-covenant this side of the cross and the fulfillment of Moses’ prediction that those inwardly transformed in the new covenant age would hear and heed all that he was speaking in Deuteronomy (Deut.30:6, 8; cf. Jer.12:16; 30:33; Ezek.36:27).”<sup>9</sup> “Consequently, according to the apostle, the “reckoning of righteousness” is a blessing that (re)creates life. It is the forgiveness of sins, which effects all the benefits that Ps. 32 describes.”<sup>10</sup>

In relation to Israel’s final redemption, there will be a gathering of the Jews out of all of the earth’s countries. Return to the Land in which God gave them will be in fulfillment of the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen.12:7; 13:15; 15:18, 19, 20, 21; 17:8) often restated by Moses and the prophets. “Circumcision of the heart” is God’s work within the individual, initiated by him and not obtained by the individual alone. This act of God is the salvation that grants one the will to obey God and replaces the former choice of spiritual insensitivity, rebellion, and stubbornness (Jer. 4:4; 9:25; Rom.2:28, 29).

Israel’s new heart will empower the people to genuinely love the Lord without strife, the essential feature of the New covenant. “Henceforth, community is the creation of God found outside our varied earthly identities in the promise of God fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Abraham is the father of us all (Rom.4:16), but this unity is a unity in difference (4:9-12). We meet one another solely in the mutual encouragement of faith (cf. Rom. 1:12; 15:5-6).”<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, **וְהַאֲמֵן בְּיְהוָה וַיִּתְּשָׁבֶה לּוֹ צְדָקָה:** articulates why Abraham was right with God and expresses the truth of divine accomplishment over human achievement. God attributes righteousness to Abram’s faith, not his obedience. “Paul follows the lead of Genesis

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<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson, “Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul’s Understanding of the Old and the New,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume 2—The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 393–436.

<sup>9</sup> Jason S. DeRouchie, “From Condemnation to Righteousness: A Christian Reading of Deuteronomy,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2014).

<sup>10</sup> G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 624.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 625.

insisting that Abraham was right with God by faith instead of by virtue of his works (Rom.4:1-25; Gal.3:1-9). The centrality of grace is again featured as the answer to human corruption.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas R. Thomas R., *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 17.

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