

Why did God tell Abraham to be circumcised? It is connected to God's purpose to make Abraham the father of all believers.

1. Abraham is the father of all believers

1. **God's way of doing things makes Abraham the father of all believers.** Verses 11b–12 tell us: *The purpose was that Abraham might be the father of all those who believe in order to have righteousness reckoned to them, but without being circumcised,¹² and the father of those circumcised people who not only are circumcised but also follow in the steps of the faith that Abraham our father had before he was circumcised.*

This is a long and complicated sentence. Its logic can be laid out like this:

• Father of two distinct groups of believers

1. Uncircumcised gentile believers

The purpose was that Abraham might be the father of
(1) all those who believe in order to have righteousness reckoned to them, but without being circumcised¹¹,
and the father of

(2) those circumcised people who not **only** are circumcised but **also** follow in the steps of the faith that Abraham our father had before he was circumcised.

2. Circumcised Jewish believers

But not 'Christian' or Jewish non-believers

In other words Abraham is the father of two types of believer. For there are two groups of believers. There are (1) gentile believers who have faith in Jesus but never were circumcised; and there are (2) Jewish believers who are circumcised but have come to faith. It does not mean that Abraham is the father of (1) Christians and of (2) Jewish people whether they believe or not! Rather Abraham is the father of all **believers**, gentile believers and Jewish believers. There was a stage in his story when he was a believer-but-uncircumcised. Then a little later there was a stage in his life when he was a believer-and-circumcised. So he is the father of both kinds of believer. But the important thing is faith. It does not matter whether you are in the faith-plus-circumcision group or in the faith-without-circumcision group. The important thing is faith. The one who saves is Jesus, and what links us to him and his salvation is faith.

2. There is only one people of God

• Who have the same faith as Abraham

2. **There is only one people of God.** Jewish Christian believers and gentile Christian believers are all in one spiritual family. They are all spiritually children of Abraham because they have the same faith as Abraham. Natural descent is not very important. Abraham is the spiritual model for every believer. Abraham is a model in that he was saved without the involvement of the law, without circumcision, without water-baptism, without being a Jew, without possessing the law of Moses. Abraham is a model for us in that he was justified through faith and through faith only.

3. Inheritance is the long-term result of being justified

3. **Inheritance is the long-term result of being justified; it does not come by the Mosaic law or Jewish nationality.** In Romans 4:13–16 there is a new turn of thought, for Paul introduces the idea of inheritance. Inheritance is the goal of salvation. We are given a free salvation in order to 'inherit'. When a father has a child, the **beginning** of the child's existence is life, membership of the family, equal sonship with every other child in the family. The **destiny** of the child is to inherit the blessings and possessions of the family.

• The goal of salvation

Paul's point in Romans 4:13–16 is to tell us that the way to inherit the blessings of God our heavenly Father is **by means of** justification

11 4:11b

salvation

(i) 'Justification' and 'inheritance' are distinct

• Justification is initial salvation whereas inheritance is the fruit of salvation

• Justification comes through first faith whereas inheritance comes by persistent faith

• Justification cannot be lost whereas inheritance can be lost

(ii) 'Justification' opens the way to the obtaining of inheritance

(iii) The inheritance is 'the world'

• Both now and in the future – for ever

by faith only. Paul says: ¹³For this promise to Abraham and his seed that he should inherit the world was not through the law but through the righteousness of faith. We may open up the matter in some major points. (i) **'Justification' and 'inheritance' are distinct.** Initial-salvation and inheritance are not the same. Getting to heaven is a sure and certain part of justification^{□1} but inheritance in glory is not. Justification is by faith-only. Inheritance is not a matter of faith-only. Justification and inheritance are quite different ideas (although Paul's point is that it is only through justifying faith that we ever get to our inheritance). 'Justification' is initial salvation; inheritance is the fruit of salvation. 'Justification' comes with our first faith; inheritance comes by persistent faith. The timing of justification and inheritance is different. Abraham was already justified by the time mentioned in Genesis 15:6. But he began to inherit at the point mentioned in Genesis 22:17. Justification cannot be lost; inheritance may be lost. Inheritance is conditional. In Romans 8 Paul says condemnation is impossible in Christ and that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. He does not put any 'if' in at that point. But in dealing with inheritance^{□2}, he says we are 'heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, provided that . . .'. There is no 'provided that' in connection with justification. But justification and inheritance are different. Justification relates to the promise of acceptance before God as righteous and to assurance of heaven; but inheritance relates to the promises of ministry and usefulness, experience of God's kingdom, achievement of God's will, honour and reward in heaven.

□1 5:2

□2 8:17

(ii) **'Justification' opens the way to the obtaining of inheritance.** The promise of inheritance comes 'through' the righteousness of faith. Paul says 'this promise . . . was . . . through the righteousness of faith'. Our righteous position before God makes it possible for us to press on to fellowship with God. Provided we continue in faith and patience (Hebrews 6:12), we shall 'inherit the promises'.

(iii) **The inheritance is 'the world'.** Paul surprises us by speaking of 'the world', because 'the world' is never mentioned in Genesis. However, Paul sees that the many promises to Abraham amount to being given 'the world'. As we persist in faith we enjoy God's world now; we conquer this world for God, and in the new heaven and new earth we literally have physical territory. Inheritance is reward now. By faith in Jesus we possess all things. And the inheritance becomes physical and lasts as our reward for ever.



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