

Inheritance continued

(iv) The heirs are 'Abraham and his seed'

• *Naturally and supernaturally*

• *Singly and collectively*

• *Abraham – Israel the nation – Jesus – the nations – the church – Israel the nation again*

(v) The inheritance is not gained through the law

• *As with Abraham it depends on persistent faith*

• *A total contrast to Mosaic legalistic obedience*

• *The goal of salvation*

• *Overview and summary of Romans 4*

By persistent faith – without Mosaic law – we reach our inheritance.

(iv) **The heirs are 'Abraham and his seed'**. Naturally and singularly, the 'seed of Abraham' is Isaac. Naturally and collectively, the 'seed of Abraham' is the nation of Israel. Supernaturally and singularly, the 'seed of Abraham' is Jesus^{□1}. Supernaturally and collectively the 'seed of Abraham' is the total number of Christians^{□2}. Abraham was promised something that involved his being given the earth. The promise was passed on to Isaac. It involved the coming into being of the nation of Israel. The promise was fulfilled through Jesus. The promise is inherited by those who are fellow-heirs with Christ.

All of this helps us to see what is the inheritance for the Christian. Paul will take this up in fuller detail in Romans 8:17: 'heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ'. The Christian is a child of Abraham. He is a fellow-heir with Jesus. Like Abraham he will inherit the nations, for the nations will come to Jesus through his people. Like Abraham, the Christian is personally blessed as he persists in faith and patience. Like Abraham he will have a name from God, he will receive honour and glory. Like Abraham he will have a calling and that calling will involve being a channel of blessing to others. The inheritance is 'for Abraham and his seed'. It began with Abraham. It involved God's using the nation of Israel. It revolves around Jesus who is the heir who will inherit the nations. It involves the church. And then it will involve the nation of Israel again, for 'all Israel will be saved'.

(v) **The inheritance is not gained through the law**. For Israel it was through the law. 'Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws . . . so that you may . . . inherit the land'^{□1}. Here in Romans 4:13 there is a deliberate contrast between the kind of obedience demanded from Abraham and the kind of obedience demanded under the law. The Christian is the seed of Abraham; he is not under the law. Abrahamic obedience did not require obedience to the Mosaic institutions, which did not yet exist. The equivalent to the law in the New Testament is the Holy Spirit. The starting-point of receiving inheritance is justification but what is required is persistent faith, rather than obedience to the Mosaic law. Romans 4 begins by emphasizing the starting-point (justification by faith, 4:1–12), then goes on to deal with how inheritance is attained (by persistent faith, 4:13–21). The 'reward consisting of inheritance'^{□2} is open to the person who has been justified by faith. What is needed for the inheritance to be reached is to stand before God, righteous by faith, and then persist in that faith! Then, as happened in the story of Abraham, the promises will be obtained. Paul thinks of the inheritance as something that is open to the Christian, but is dependent on persistent faith, not upon works of the law.

In Romans 4:13, 14 Paul widens the land-promises given to Abraham. He is deliberately repudiating the nationalistic-legalistic approach to inheritance within the Mosaic covenant, and pointing to faith-alone as the starting-point of an ongoing faith which will receive the inheritance. The promise in Romans 4:13 is not justification-and-heaven but it comes about **through** the righteousness-by-faith. It is in total contrast to the method of inheriting by **Mosaic** obedience.

Paul is dealing with the **goal** of salvation, the reward that salvation makes possible. It is not reached through law-keeping but is reached through this 'righteousness of faith' that he has referred to.

Paul is doing five things. He shows that this way of salvation that he has put before us was the way in which Abraham was justified^{□1}, and it was the way in which David was justified^{□2}. In other words Romans 4:1–8 confirms and backs up what Paul has already said in Romans 1:2 and 3:21. The gospel was predicted in the Old Testament. **Then** in Romans 4:9–12 Paul explains how this gospel relates to the law of circumcision that was given to Israel in the days of Moses. **Next** Paul argues that the goal of our salvation ('inheritance') is not reached through law-keeping but is reached through this 'righteousness of faith' that he has referred to. He puts this to us in a section that runs from

□1 see Galatians 3:16
□2 see Galatians 3:29

□1 Deuteronomy 4:1; see also 6:18

□2 Colossians 3:24

□1 4:1-5
□2 4:6-8

Romans 4:13 till about the middle of verse 17. **Then** in the middle of verse 17 Paul begins to describe what this faith was actually like as it worked out in Abraham's life and laid hold of the inheritance that God has promised to Abraham. He goes on in this line till the end of verse 21 and **then**, in the last lines of this section, explains that the faith which inherited blessing was the very same faith which brought Abraham's justification in the first place^{□3}. It is this kind of faith in a risen Jesus which brings our justification also^{□4}.

□3 4:22

□4 4:23-25

Reasons why the inheritance cannot be by the Mosaic law

(i) Pursuing inheritance by law would nullify faith

(ii) Among God's people law rouses anger

(iii) Faith makes inheritance certain for all believers

• Making our inheritance sure

• God's oath in response to persistent faith

The main assertion of Romans 4:13–17a is that inheriting the promises of God does not come by the law but comes 'through' being justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He gives several reasons why the inheritance cannot be by the Mosaic law.

(i) **Pursuing inheritance by law would nullify faith.** He says: ¹⁴*For if those of the law are heirs, faith is emptied and the promise is brought to nothing.* If 'those of the law' takes into account the tenth commandment, inheritance is altogether impossible. For no one has ever freed his heart from covetousness – a **desire** for sin – simply by means of the tenth commandment. If 'those of the law' considers the Jews and more superficial law keepers, then the point is it does not require faith to be under the law.

(ii) **In any relationship to God and among God's people law rouses anger.** ¹⁵*For the law works wrath, and where there is no law there is no transgression.* It can only arouse God's wrath. It can only arouse our wrath against God. Then the law rouses wrath and resentment in human relationships. And it rouses wrath and resentment towards ourselves. We become disgusted with our own failures.

(iii) **Attempting to relate to God by law makes inheritance uncertain, but faith makes it certain for all believers.** Paul says: ¹⁶*For this reason, that is, because law excludes faith and rouses wrath, the promise is by faith in order that it may be according to grace, in order that the promise might be sure to all the seed – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.*

Paul is speaking of inheritance, not justification or heaven. We notice that he does not say 'so that the promise is sure' (which is what he could have said if he had been referring to justification). Rather he says, 'in order that the promise [of inheritance] might be sure . . .'. In Romans 8:17 the word 'if' makes it clear that the promise of inheritance is not automatically sure, but it might be made sure by being pursued by faith and by God's grace. Abraham was already justified. The promise concerned the remainder of his life. What God wanted to give him was an inheritance. How certain can we be that we shall attain to the inheritance? In Genesis 15:8 Abraham expressed anxiety about the certainty of the inheritance. God's inheritance for Abraham was fixed once the oath of Genesis 22 was taken. The law is full of uncertainty but persistent faith eventually leads to the oath. God says: 'I swear by myself . . . I will surely bless you'. In response to persistent faith the oath is given and the promise is made sure. The faith that justifies is the faith that inherits.



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