When Was Abraham Justified?

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Timeline of Abraham

Paul in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 used the life of Abraham to reject the justification by works heresy of the Jewish legalists, so it is important for us to know and understand some of the basic facts of Abraham's life and their relationship to each other and their explanations in the scriptures to learn true doctrine.

Event	O.T. Verses	N.T. Verses	Explanation and Interpretation
Called out of Ur	Gen 11:27-32; 12:1-5; 15:7	Acts 7:2-4; Heb 11:8-16; Luke 13:28; James 2:23	By faith Abraham obeyed God to leave Ur and idolatry (Josh 24:2-3,14-15; Neh 9:7-8; Gen 31:53), which showed great faith long before the justifying text of Genesis 15:6, though Abraham understood the promises of the land to primarily refer to heaven and the kingdom of God. His relationship with God, which was great from the beginning, made him the friend of God (II Chron 20:7; Isaiah 41:8), though knowing Him only as God Almighty (Gen 17:1; Exodus 6:3).
God's promises	Gen 12:1-3	Acts 3:25; Gal 3:7-9; Rom 4:9-17; Mat 8:5-13	From the very beginning, God promised Abraham many natural and spiritual blessings before 15:6, including justification of Gentiles by the same system of faith that the Jews would need, so the Holy Spirit relates in the N.T. that Abraham had the gospel preached to him by God in this and related passages (Gen 17:1-8; Micah 7:14-20).
Worship at Bethel	Gen 12:7-8		Abraham feared Jehovah and believed God to worship Him like this.
Faith tried	Gen 12:10		With all the blessings God had promised Abraham, why would he encounter such a famine that he had to leave the land God had promised him for Egypt?
Weak faith	Gen 12:11-13		Abraham showed weak faith by lying with Sarah about her relationship to him, which should comfort the wise righteous that must admit their own fears at times.
Pharaoh stopped	Gen 12:14-20		God protected Sarah and him in spite of weak faith, punishing Pharaoh instead,and He prospered him abundantly by Pharaoh, as David would later record (Gen 13:1-2; I Chron 16:22; Psalm 105:15).
Worship at Bethel	Gen 13:1-4		In spite of the great wealth he acquired, Abraham feared Jehovah and believed God to worship Him like this. Riches destroy most men, but not Abraham.
Gracious godliness	Gen 13:5-13		Though being the uncle that walked with God, Abraham graciously gave Lot the choice of land, who greedily took the best and began his vexing compromise with Sodom to the destruction of his family. Abraham passed over the transgression, and God immediately confirmed him with a promise of the land, including Lot's!

Event	O.T. Verses	N.T. Verses	Explanation and Interpretation
God's promises	Gen 13:14-17	Heb 11:8-16	God promised Abraham many natural and spiritual blessings before 15:6, including the vastness of the land of Canaan, which in time Israel fully possessed, but which Abraham understood to refer to heaven (Neh 9:7-8; Isaiah 51:1-2).
Worship at Mamre	Gen 13:18		Abraham feared Jehovah and believed God to worship Him like this.
Faith in battle	Gen 14:1-16		Though he could have been discouraged that things were turning out poorly since leaving Ur, Abraham had faith to pursue four mighty kings with 318 servants. This hardly sounds like the man who lied to Pharaoh to save his own skin.
Melchisedek	Gen 14:18-20	Heb 7:1-10	Jehovah's priest Melchisedek blessed Abram as God's blessed man.
Paid tithes	Gen 14:20	Heb 7:1-10	Abraham feared Jehovah and believed God to worship Him with tithes.
God's promises	Gen 15:1		God declared Himself presently Abraham's God before his act of faith. He did not offer to become Abraham's exceeding great reward by means of a decision.
Promised Seed	Gen 15:2-6	Gal 3:14-18, 26-29; Heb 2:14-18; Mat 1:1-2,17	By the New Testament's light, we understand the seed of Abraham finds its ultimate and greatest fulfillment in Jesus Christ and those that are His, including Gentiles, first indicated by blessing on all nations (Gen 12:1-3; Gal 3:7-9).
Justifying faith	Gen 15:2-6	John 8:31-45; Rom 4:1-3,16-22; Gal 3:6; James 2:23	God declared Abraham a righteous man by virtue of the evidence of his faith in God's extraordinary promise and power to perform the impossible. He had much faith long before this event, but God singled this great event of faith out as justifying evidence. Jesus declared that many Jews did not have this character.
God's promises	Gen 15:7-21	Acts 7:6-7,17; Luke 1:54-55; Heb 11:8-16	God promised Abraham many natural and spiritual blessings in seed and land, including the boundaries of Canaan, which He in time perfectly fulfilled (for He is righteous!), though Abraham understood them of heaven (Neh 9:7-8; I Chron 16:15-22; Psalm 105:8-15,42-45; etc.).
Weak faith	Gen 16:1-16	Rom 9:6-8; Matt 3:9; Luke 3:8; John 8:31-45	Abraham showed very weak faith to obey his wife for marriage and sex with another woman to help gain him and Sarah a seed, in spite of the justifying faith he had in this matter (15:2-6)! But God's seed is to always be distinguished, as the physical descendants of Abraham are not his spiritual seed, the sons of God.
Name change	Gen 17:1-8	Rom 4:16-22	God violated ordinary verb rules to show His sovereign power to bring to pass a numerous seed from Abraham and Sarah, now well past reproductive years. From a name meaning father, God changed his name to mean father of many nations.
Circumcision	Gen 17:9-27	Acts 7:8; Rom 4:9-12	God declared Abraham righteous by his justifying faith long before He ordained circumcision for him and seed, proving circumcision had nothing to do with it.

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Weak faith	Gen 17:15-22		Abraham showed very weak faith to laugh at God and continue begging for Ishmael. Most know that Sarah laughed, but Abraham laughed first, and this came after the signal event in his life of justifying faith about the same matter (15:2-6)!
Great entertainer	Gen 18:1-8	Heb 13:2	Abraham entertained three men that were angels accompanying God visiting him.
Great wife	Gen 18:9-15	I Peter 3:5-6	While Sarah quickly prepared a meal for God's angels, she showed reverence for Abraham by calling him lord, though weak in faith at God's word, as indicated by her laughter; yet she made the Hall of Faith for this very event (Heb 11:11)!
Great father	Gen 18:16-19	Acts 3:25	Abraham illustrated a great father by God's own testimony of godly leadership.
Great intercession	Gen 18:16-33		Abraham boldly interceded for Lot and family, but he overestimated Lot as father.
Different from Lot	Gen 19:1-38		II Peter 2:6-9 Lot, though a righteous man, showed an entirely different level of conversion.
Weak faith	Gen 20:1-16		Abraham showed weak faith again, but God protected him and prospered him.
Great intercession	Gen 20:17-18		Abraham was God's man, so it was his prayer that brought mercy to Abimelech.
God fulfils promise	Gen 21:1-8		God kept his promise and the reproductively-dead couple had a son Isaac.
Casting out Ishmael	Gen 21:9-21	Galatians 4:21-31	God approved the rejection of Hagar and Ishmael at Isaac's weaning, and He used the event as an allegory for the rejection of earthly Jerusalem for the heavenly.
Abraham a stranger	Gen 21:22-34		Abraham showed prudent cooperation with the Philistines to preserve his livelihood, and God blessed the arrangement to Isaac (Gen 26:12-33).
Abraham's works	Gen 22:1-14	Heb 11:17-19; James 2:21-24	Abraham proved his justifying faith by works, which are greater evidence than faith alone, as James explained and others confirmed (I Thes 1:2-4; II Pet 1:5-11).
God's promises	Gen 22:15-19	Luke 1:68-75; John 8:51-58; Acts 3:25; Heb 6:13-15, 11:13; Mat 16:18	God reaffirmed His promises to Abraham based on his performance at Moriah, though the earlier promises were sure (Gen 12:1-3; 15:2-6) and Abraham's performance added nothing to them; and He confirmed them with an oath by swearing by Himself for great assurance. Jesus testified Abraham knew of Him, though darkly and afar off. [Note the use of "his" and not they for the seed in 22:17.]
Burial of Sarah	Gen 23:1-20	Acts 7:5,16	Abraham never possessed any land of Canaan other than this burial plot (showing the importance of burial), for he looked for a heavenly country rather than the sand of Canaan (Heb 11:8-16), which is called Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22). But even here take note – Abraham had to buy the land, for God did not give it to Him by inheritance. Jewish fables emphasize the land, but the Bible heaven.

Event	O.T. Verses	N.T. Verses	Explanation and Interpretation
A godly marriage	Gen 24:1-67		Abraham required an oath of his servant that Isaac would marry in the LORD.
Restorative power	Gen 25:1-6		Abraham took another wife and had six sons by her after Sarah's death, though far past such things (I Chron 1:32), for he was 137 at the time of this marriage!
A family reunion	Gen 25:7-10	Mat 22:23-33; Luke 16:19-31; Acts 7:16	Abraham's body was buried in Canaan beside Sarah, but his spirit went to heaven and met elect ancestors, therefore it is called his bosom (Heb 11:8-16; 12:22-24). Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, and Joseph (Gen 49:29-33; 50:12-14).

For Further Study:

1. The web document, "Who Is the Seed of Abraham?"
2. Galatians 3.
3. Galatians 4.
4. Eternal Justification, by John Brine.
5. Justification By Christ Alone, by Samuel Richardson.