

Biblical Theology and the Reformation: Is Justification by Faith Alone Taught Throughout the Bible?



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Another title:

A Tale of Two (Reformation) Cities: A
Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of
God (of revealing the need for faith)



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The First City: Wittenberg, ca.1517



Image from Concordia Publishing

Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk and professor of Bible

- Lectures on Psalms, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews (1513-1518)
- Lectures on Galatians (1516-1517) were expanded and published in 1519

Luther and the debate with Eck (1519)

- Jaroslav Pelikan on this debate, “Thus two methods of Biblical exegesis met head on: one subjected itself to tradition and ecclesiastical authority; the other struck at the meaning of the text, even though that meaning might have eluded many great saints in the past.” (*LW, Companion Volume*, p.111)

The Wittenberg Reformation



Throughout his comments on the New Testament, Luther taught that Christians are justified by faith alone. This thought is central to Luther's legacy in the Reformation. Moreover, Luther understands the NT authors arrived at the understanding of justification by faith through their reading of OT texts.

In Luther's *Preface to Romans* (1546; 1522), he writes:

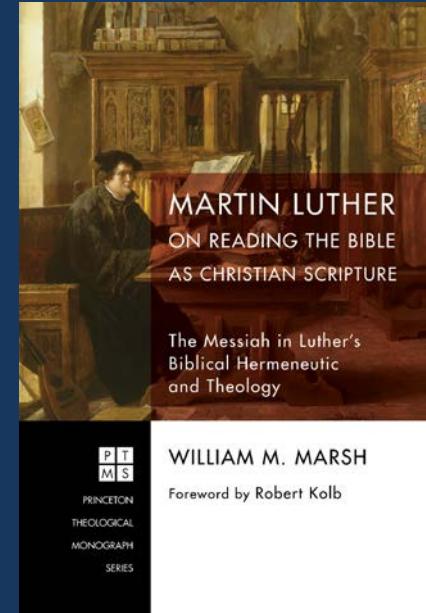
"He [Paul in Romans 4] concludes that Abraham was justified by faith alone, without any works, so much so that the Scriptures in Genesis 15 declare that he was justified by faith alone even before the work of circumcision... then surely no other good work will contribute anything to righteousness. Rather, as Abraham's circumcision was an external sign by which he showed the righteousness that was already his in faith..." (LW 35:374)

Luther continues that this point is driven home by Paul by also referring to Psalm 32. He concludes, "Therefore faith alone must obtain the grace promised to Abraham, for these examples too were written for our sakes [Rom. 15], that we too should believe."

Reading the OT with Luther

In his excellent work on Luther's Christological hermeneutic, Billy Marsh describes that Luther's understanding of the "literal sense" of the OT is the same as that of the NT, the messiah/ Christ. Marsh summarizes Luther's approach as:

"motivated by observance that the biblical text's primary objective is to promise and to make known Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God and Son of David, through whose person and work the serpent's head will be crushed, the curse of sin removed, and eternal life bestowed upon all who receive him by faith alone." (Marsh, p.174)



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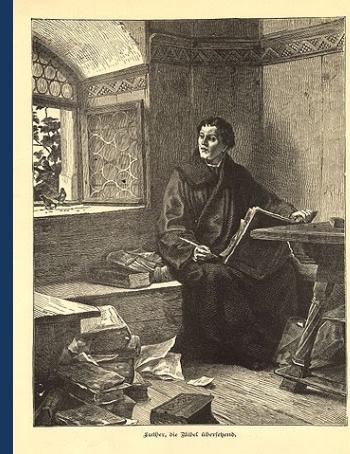
Reading the OT with Luther

The literal sense of the OT text being Christ is important to Luther's understanding of justification of faith being present throughout the Old and New Testaments.

In his first Galatians lectures, Luther demonstrates how the literal sense being Christ was picked up by Paul in his reading of Gen. 15. Luther writes, "Note how he teaches that the Offspring of Abraham means Christ... Therefore it was necessary to name one offspring to whom this blessing should be given."

In his second Galatians lectures, published in 1535, he criticizes Jewish interpretations that do not recognize the singular aspect of the collective noun "seed" in their reading of Gen. 12:6 and 15:3-4.

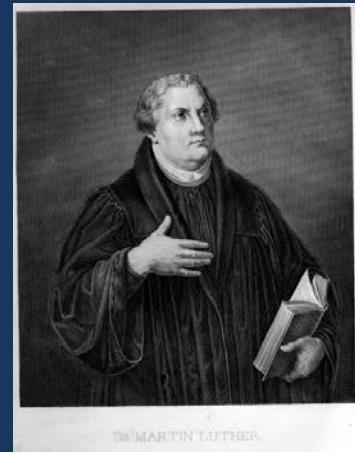
Because Christ "the seed" is promised in Gen. 12 and 15, the OT texts hold out the hope that the nations (Gentiles) will be saved through faith in the seed.



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Luther on Gal. 3 and Gen.12-15

In his *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), Luther comments on Gal. 3:9: “In short, all the prophecies concerning the kingdom of Christ and concerning the spreading of the Gospel have their origin in this passage, ‘In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.’ Therefore that the nations are blessed means that righteousness is granted to them, that they are reckoned as righteous, which does not happen except through the Gospel. For Abraham was not justified in any other way than by hearing the Word of promise, of blessing, and of grace. Therefore just as the imputation of righteousness reached Abraham through hearing with faith, so it reached all the nations and still does. For it is the Word of the same God- the Word which was addressed to Abraham first and later to all nations.”



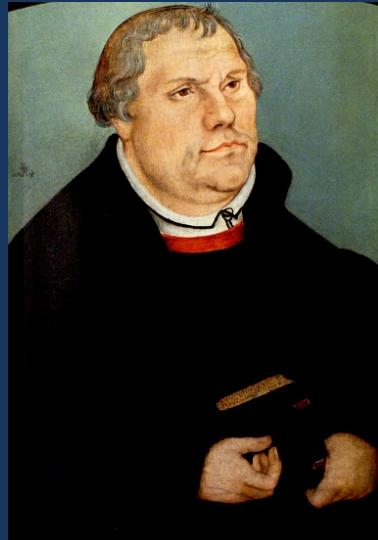
DR MARTIN LUTHER



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Luther on Gen.15:6

In his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther comments on Gen. 15:6:
“Therefore if you should ask whether Abraham was righteous before this time, my answer is: He was righteous because he believed God. But here the Holy Spirit wanted to attest this expressly, since the promise deals with a spiritual Seed. He did so in order that you might conclude on the basis of a correct inference that those who accept this Seed, or those who believe in Christ, are righteous.”



The Second City: Wake Forest, NC, ca.2000

5 new professors join Southeastern faculty by Byron McMillan, posted Friday, August 20, 1999 (Article excerpts)

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Five new professors are joining the faculty at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary this fall, bringing the total number of full- and part-time faculty positions to more than 70. Southeastern's newest faculty members, appointed to the faculty by seminary President Paige Patterson, are:

-- **Jason K. Lee**, a native of Mobile, Ala., assistant professor of church history, coming to Southeastern from Stonehaven Baptist Church in Stonehaven, Scotland, where he has pastored since 1997. Lee, 28, earned his doctorate in philosophy at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland....Lee and his wife, Kimberly, have a newborn daughter, McKayla.

-- **John H. Sailhamer**, professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, who formerly was Professor of Hebrew Scriptures at Western Seminary, Portland, Ore. Sailhamerhas taught Old Testament, Hebrew, Semitic languages and theology as associate professor at five theological institutions including Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.... Sailhamer earned a doctorate in philosophy in ancient Near East languages and literature (Northwest Semitics) from the University of California at Los Angeles. He also received his master of arts degree in Semitic languages from UCLA and a master of theology in Old Testament from Dallas Theological Seminary. A prolific author, Sailhamer has written nearly 20 books. Sailhamer said he looks forward to teaching students how to focus on the centrality of God's Word and the gospel by showing how the Bible fits together from Genesis to Revelation. "**The Old Testament is saying the same thing everywhere you look,"** he said. "**The identity of Christ as the Messiah promised beforehand in the Hebrew Scriptures is central to the gospel."**

Mind Blown: My Reformation Begins

Key elements of Biblical Theology that I learned from Sailhamer that sparked a “reformation” for me:

- Text instead of event
 - Pursuing authorial intention through observing textual features and noting compositional strategies
- Canonical instead of critical
 - Studying the final version of the text in association with other biblical texts rather than reconstructed, pre-canonical versions of the text (or presumed sources)
- Confessional instead of descriptive
 - Reading the scripture as one under its authority and as a direct recipient of authorial-intended meaning (divine and human)



John Sailhamer (ca.2011)



“Early Lee” Image on WWW

These elements are driven by an evangelical view of scripture as divinely-inspired, revelatory texts that have been collected into an authoritative Bible.

The Primary Example of Faith in the OT

Sailhamer's *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* gives further explanation of his earlier comments in *The Pentateuch as Narrative* of the central element of Abraham's faith to the main ideas of the Pentateuch and the entire Hebrew Bible.

In *Meaning*, Sailhamer focuses on Paul's exegetical use of Gen. 15 to his argument in Gal. 3. Paul's chief contention that it was Abraham's faith (3:6-8) that was "credited as righteousness" is supported by his argument about Christ being the singular "seed" of Abraham in 3:16 as his exegetical (biblical theological) warrant.

The Primary Example of Faith in the OT

Sailhamer's detailed, structural and verbal analysis of Gen. 15, leads him to present the author of Pentateuch as having the same view of saving faith as Paul in Galatians.

Through his work, Sailhamer demonstrates the author's emphasis in Gen.15 on the covenant blessings coming to the singular seed (15:3-4) and that same theme resonating with the similar theme in the major poetic texts in the Pentateuch which depict this promise in terms of a coming king (Gen. 49, Num. 24).

The Primary Example of Faith in the OT



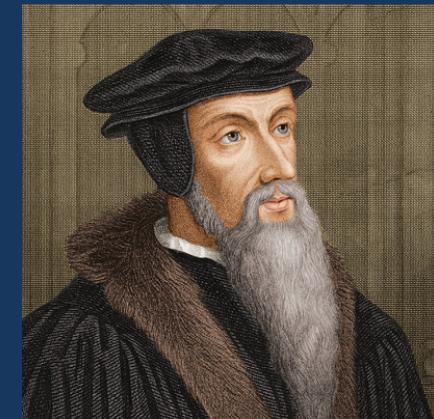
As Sailhamer is summarizing his argument, he draws on the work Hans-Christoph Schmitt and his recognition of a “faith theme” throughout the entire Pentateuch.

Sailhamer notes that faith is at the heart of a “textual strategy that spans the entire length of the Pentateuch. The fact that Genesis 15 is a part of this strategy suggests that the meaning reflected in its own compositional strategy (e.g., justification by faith [Gen 15:6]) plays a central role in the meaning of the Pentateuch. Two such elements of meaning stand out in Genesis 15. First... its focus on an individual ‘seed’ of Abraham, and second, its focus on faith as the means of being reckoned righteous.”

Sailhamer on Faith in the OT- With a little help from Calvin

In continuing his discussion on Paul’s exegesis in Gal. 3 of “the seed” in Gen. 15, Sailhamer draws on John Calvin. Sailhamer writes:

“[Although] Calvin was not entirely satisfied with Paul’s exegesis in the OT promise narratives, there is little doubt that he understood and fully appreciated Paul’s reason for identifying Christ as ‘the seed’ and its essential bearing on the biblical presentation of the gospel. To Calvin, Paul and Moses were in complete agreement on the identity of ‘the seed’ of Abraham as Christ.”



Sailhamer & Calvin on Faith in the OT

Paul's understanding of the needed faith in the Abrahamic covenant relates to his understanding that Christ is the "seed" of that covenant.

Sailhamer draws on Calvin's similar idea:

"Calvin's stress on the centrality of faith in the biblical covenant led him into a careful consideration of the role of faith in the OT and the old covenant. If there is only one covenant and Christ is its mediator, then the terms of every covenant in the OT are the same: faith in Christ. 'From the beginning of the world he had consequently been set before all the elect that they should look unto him and put their trust in him.'" (from *Institutes* 2.6.4)



Rembrandt's Jacob Blessing Joseph's Sons



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A Concluding Summary

It is through this understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant promised seed being Christ that leads Sailhamer, Calvin, Luther, and Paul to say that Genesis, the Pentateuch, indeed the whole Hebrew Bible teaches justification by faith alone.



Rembrandt's Abraham and Isaac



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