

Second Sunday in Lent

OLD TESTAMENT – Genesis 12:1-9

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”² “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”⁴ So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring^a I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.⁹ Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

12:1 LORD – It was the Savior-God who spoke to Abram. (PBC)

had said. God had spoken to Abram “while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran” (Ac 7:2). (CSB)

The way God dealt with Abram is typical of the way God deals with every sinner. It is important to note that if contact is to be established between God and the sinner, the initiative must start on God’s end, not ours. He also deals with us, as He dealt with Abram, not in terms of demand but primarily in terms of promise. (PBC)

Leave ... show you. † Abram must leave the settled world of the post-Babel nations and begin a pilgrimage with God to a world of God’s making (see 24:7). (CSB)

“Get thee out” (KJV), though entirely correct, sounds too sharply imperative in the English of our day; for *lekh-lekha* is a mild “go for thyself,” *lekha* being either a dative or merely an ethical dative, its force being like the English “do go.” This command is attributed to Yahweh, whose mercy controls all that He does in this connection in singling out an individual who is to become the ancestor of the Savior’s line. (Leupold)

Abraham and his family were to be separated from and separated to. Abraham was to “leave” and Abraham was to “go.” He was to be separated from the comforts and idolatry of both Ur and Haran. The moon-god was worshiped in both places. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

The Lord called Abram out of idolatry (Jsh. 24:2), in which he deserved nothing but condemnation and eternal death. This was not because Abram merited God’s favor.

Instead, God demonstrated His mercy and grace in calling an idolater, out of pagan surroundings and afflictions, setting him apart from the world of false belief to live by the promise of His grace. By choosing Abram, an idolater, God demonstrated that it is not by works but by grace that we are saved. (TLSB)

YOUR FATHER'S HOUSEHOLD – This indicates a larger complex of people who were part of the clan of Terah. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

Abram heard God say those words twice in his lifetime. This first time it was in Ur, in southern Mesopotamia when he, together with his father's and brother's families left their homes. Following established trade route of the day, they moved north to Haran. It was in Haran that Abram heard God speak those words a second time. Humanly speaking, it must have been more difficult for Abram to obey them the second time. (PBC)

Haran still offered too many dangers to this man whom God's grace singled out, so also did "relatives," those who were tied to him by blood and were exerting a more subtle and powerful influence than the individual usually realizes. (Leupold)

I WILL SHOW YOU – Though Abram did not know where he was going, he followed the direction provided by God provided by His Word. How the Word of God came to Abram is not specified, but Luther writes, "I am convinced that he was not called directly by God without the ministry" (AE 2:249). (TLSB)

12:2–3 God's promise to Abram has a sevenfold structure. (CSB)

The covenant number seven prevails here, even though there is no explicit covenant involved. (Leupold)

(1) "I will make you into a great nation,"

I WILL – The covenant God makes with Abraham is completely one-sided. God give seven promises and asks nothing in return. Abraham is not chosen for any virtues of his own. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

MAKE YOU A GREAT NATION – Abraham was seventy-five years old and did not have a son. Genesis 11:30 says that Sarah was barren. At this time she was sixty-five years old and seemingly past the childbearing age. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

God's promise was given to a man who was resigned to being childless (11:30). Here, God promises that from Abram will come not only the people of Israel but also the Church of Christ, which encompasses baptized disciples of Jesus from all nations (Mt. 28:19). (TLSB)

At the time of his call Abram had the reputation of being a well-to-do cattleman. But that isn't the reputation Abram has on the pages of the Scriptures. He is a man with whom God shared some of His sacred secrets. He is called the friend of God; he is the father of believers; he is the father of the Israelite nation; he is an ancestor of the Messiah. (PBC)

The word for "nation" is *goy*, usually used of the heathen nations, but here, as in 35:11 and Exodus 19:6, in reference to Israel, to signify that, as nations go, Israel shall be great. "Great nation," of course, implies more than great numbers. Since the greatness is of God's making, it involves true greatness in every sense. If ever there was a great nation, it was Israel. The force of this word must naturally be reckoned over against the fact that at the time when it was spoken Abram had no son. (Leupold)

(2) "I will bless you,"

I WILL BLESS YOU – Only God can bless. Man can only wish and ask for God's blessings on himself and others. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

God blessed Adam and Eve, telling them to be fruitful and multiply (1:28). God blessed Abram indicating that his descendants would fill the earth and that all nations would be blessed through him. (TLSB)

Bless – Hebrew *barak*, "to bestow ability for success" (from the greater person to the lesser) or "to praise a person's ability for success" (from the lesser person to the greater). Refers to bending the knees, perhaps to kneel and receive a pronouncement of inheritance with all its wealth (cf Gen. 27). "Bless the Lord" has the sense of "greet" and is common in the Psalms, expressing thanks and praise (34:1; 145:1, 10). In faith, praise is the greatest gift we can offer to our Lord. The blessing that came from the temple at Jerusalem now resonates through the Church, brought by pastors, missionaries, teachers, and other Christians who proclaim the Gospel of Christ's sacrifice. (TLSB p. 842)

A man is blessed when due to the gracious working of God all goes well with him (cf. 39:5); the things that he undertakes thrive; and true success crowns all his endeavors. This certainly is a promise that was realized in Abram's life. (Leupold)

(3) "I will make your name great,"

MAKE YOUR NAME GREAT – The name equals the person. Abraham is called "the father of a multitude" (17:5); "the man in God's confidence" (18:17-19); "a prophet" (20:7); "a prince of God" (23:6); God's servant (Ps. 105:6) (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

Even the heathen speak well of God's people Israel (Deut. 4:6-7) because of God's faithfulness in keeping His promise to them. St. Paul calls Christians the offspring of

Abraham (Gal. 3:29), indicating how widely God has extended the patriarch's name on account of the Gospel. (TLSB)

Abram personally became famous. The various names that are given to Abram display a part of this fame. He is called "the father of a multitude" (17:5); a prince of God (23:6); the man in God's confidence (18:17-19); a prophet (20:7); the servant of God (Ps. 105:6); and the friend of God (20:7). Even without such names he could still be famous. But this fame is not a personal achievement of his but a divinely wrought favor. (Leupold)

(4) "you will be a blessing,"

BE A BLESSING – The Hebrew form of the verb "be" is imperative (wehye). Abraham was not only to receive blessing but to become a blessing through the Spirit's work in his heart. He had a moral responsibility to live such a life so that thereby others would be blessed by it. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

Ultimately fulfilled in Christ, but also in various temporal ways, as when God blessed the Egyptians through Joseph, the Ninevites through Jonah, even the Babylonians during Israel's exile (cf Dan. 2:48; 6:28. (TLSB)

This is something that God does: God is the One, who in the last analysis makes Abram to be a true blessing unto others. But at the same time, a moral responsibility of Abram's is involved: he should do his part that he may become a blessing to others. Consequently the imperative, "be thou a blessing." He personally should aim to live such a life that others are blessed by it. (Leupold)

(5) "I will bless those who bless you,"

Abram would experience opposition as, for the last century of his life, he lived a nomad in lands belonging to others. But God promised him he would be so closely identified with the work of God that to curse him, to despise him, would be tantamount to opposing God. (PBC)

For this difference between God's blessing and man's blessing are the wishing of good, God's blessings the impartation of good. Besides, it should be noted that divine grace presupposes that there will be many that wish Abram well; therefore mebharekhe'kha, plural, "thy blessers." (Leupold)

The Lord promises that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His people (Mt. 16:18). No effort on Satan's part would undermine God's promise to redeem the world in the promised Savior. Thus, Pharaoh's threat was drowned in the Red Sea (Ex. 14:28), kings Sihon and Og were destroyed (Deut. 2:33; 3:3), even world powers such as Babylon, Greece, and Rome suffered defeat., while God faithfully upheld His people and the promise of the Gospel. On the other hand, those who befriended His people,

such as the midwives in Egypt (Ex. 1:20) and Rahab the harlot (Josh. 6:25), were blessed. (TLSB)

(6) “whoever curses you I will curse,”

The Hebrew uses two different verbs – ‘arar for God’s judicial cursing and galal for man’s injudicious or blasphemous cursing. Again divine grace presupposes that there will not be many that wish this friend of God ill: Therefore meqallekha, singular, “thy curser.” The deeper reason behind all this is that Abram will be closely identified with the good work of God, that to curse him comes to be almost the equivalent of cursing God. (Leupold)

(7) “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” God’s original blessing on all mankind (1:28) would be restored and fulfilled through Abram and his offspring. In various ways and degrees, these promises were reaffirmed to Abram (v. 7; 15:5–21; 17:4–8; 18:18–19; 22:17–18), to Isaac (26:2–4), to Jacob (28:13–15; 35:11–12; 46:3) and to Moses (Ex 3:6–8; 6:2–8). The seventh promise is quoted in Ac 3:25 with reference to Peter’s Jewish listeners (see Ac 3:12)—Abram’s physical descendants—and in Gal 3:8 with reference to Paul’s Gentile listeners—Abram’s spiritual descendants. (Leupold)

Not merely a promise of temporal blessing, but the promise of the Gospel that in Christ Jesus – Abraham’s Seed (Gal. 3:29) – people of all nations and times will have the eternal blessing of God’s forgiveness. There is no greater blessing than that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor. 5:19). (TLSB)

The unfaithfulness of the Shemites could threaten once again to plunge the whole race into spiritual darkness, but the love of God took the initiative to guarantee that would not happen. God promised Abram that a great Descendant would be born to his family who would bring blessings to every member of the human race. The way Abram was saved is the same way sinners are saved today. God didn’t have one way for people of the OT times to enter His family and a different way for us of the NT period. There has always been only one way: to trust God’s promises as these center in Jesus Christ. (PBC)

A blessing so great that its effect shall extend to “all the families of the earth” can be thought of only in connection with the promised Savior. This word, therefore, is definitely Messianic and determines that the Messiah is to emerge from the line of Abram. (Leupold)

12:4 *Abram left, as the LORD had told him.* See Heb 11:8. Prompt obedience grounded in faith characterized this patriarch throughout his life (see 17:23; 21:14; 22:3). (CSB)

Luther: “Promise and faith belong together” (AE 2:266). What God promised to Abram worked faith in him and caused him to act in faith. Cf. Rom. 10:17. (TLSB)

There are no complaints or hesitation, somewhat common among other called heroes of faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

In His marvelous conversation with Abram, God had really said all that there was to say. All Abram could do was to speak the “Amen” to what God had promised. The Bible calls this “faith.” Faith, then, is the hand which takes God’s promises and makes them our own. By contrast, unbelief closes its hand into a fist and makes it impossible for God to give us His blessings. (PBC)

Hebrews 11:8 “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”

Lot went with him. See 13:1, 5. Lot at first was little more than Abram’s ward. (CSB)

The pain of separation is eased in part by the coming along of Abram’s nephew Lot. God’s mercy is displayed in this fact, for He it was, not doubt, who disposed Lot’s heart to desire to accompany Abram. (Leupold)

seventy-five years old. Although advanced in age at the time of his call, Abram would live for another full century (see 25:7; see also note on 5:5). (CSB)

He is even according to the standards of that time a middle-aged man (Leupold)

12:5 *people they had acquired.* Wealthy people in that ancient world always had servants to help them with their flocks and herds (see 15:3; 24:2). Not all servants were slaves; many were voluntarily employed. (CSB)

Servants, laborers, and children and relatives of the same. Luther: “not simply his household but the true and holy church in which Abraham was the high priest” (AE 2:280). (TLSB)

LAND OF CANAAN – From this Abram realized he would not be able to homestead this land; it was already occupied. Before his descendants could live here as their home, they would have to dispossess the Canaanites. This had to be a sobering realization for Abram. God was training Abram to believe what God had said, first of all, about the Promised Land. (PBC)

No one can fully realize the greatness of the things promised to the posterity of Abram until he remembers that the land promised to the posterity of Abram was already occupied by the Canaanites. But Abram’s faith is not daunted by this seeming difficulty. (Leupold)

12:6 *site of the great tree of Moreh.* See perhaps 35:4; Jdg 9:6, 37. A famous sanctuary was located at Shechem in central Canaan, and a large tree was often a conspicuous

feature at such holy places. But Abram worshiped the Lord there, not the local deity. (CSB)

Once in Canaan, Abraham had an opportunity for idolatry. The tree mentioned here signals the usual tree or grove of trees accompanying a site of idol worship. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

CANAANITES WERE ALREADY IN THE LAND – Moses reminds us that God’s people, though called to be separate, are still in the world, surrounded by enemies against which the Lord protects His elect (John 15:18-19; 17:11-21). (TLSB)

12:7 *The LORD appeared.*† The Lord frequently appeared visibly to Abram and to others. (CSB)

No one can see God and still live (Ex. 33:20), and “no one has ever see God” (1 John 4:12; cf 1 Tim 6:16). Novatian: “It was not the Father who was seen...but the Son who has both been accustomed to descend, and to be seen because He has descended. For He is the image of the invisible God” (ANF 5:628; cf Col. 1:15). (TLSB)

Here God appears to renew his promise of offspring and land. Where Abraham might have worshiped an idol he instead builds his first of several altars at significant places of blessings. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

At this critical moment for Abram, the Lord, the Savior-God, appeared to him, to reaffirm and clarify his promise and to bolster Abram’s faith. He made it clear that Abram was not to try to take immediate possession of the land. It was only for Abram’s descendants that the land of Canaan would become a new homeland. Each new promise of God nourished and exercised Abram’s faith. (PBC)

1 Corinthians 10:13 “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

YOUR OFFSPRING I WILL GIVE THIS LAND – For the development of God’s purposes in the seed of Abram it is essential that a definite land be available within which this seed comes to its normal development. So the promise of the land as held in safekeeping by God for Abram’s sees it not a capricious promise but one that ties up definitely with the needs of the case. From this point on it will be seen that every new promise fits into the development of God’s purposes as into an organic whole which is going through a normal process of growth. (Leupold)

an altar. The first of several that Abram built at places where he had memorable spiritual experiences (see v. 8; 13:18; 22:9). He acknowledged that the land of Canaan belonged to the Lord in a special way (see Ex 20:24; Jos 22:19). (CSB)

Abram established an altar there because the Lord appeared to him. Abram does this throughout his life. (TLSB)

Now look at Abram's response to the Lord's appearance. In a land full of Canaanites and Canaanite religion, he built an altar to the Lord, the true God, the God who had appeared to him and restated His promise. To the heathen Canaanites, as well as to the men and women of his own household, Abram's worship announced: "I don't know whom you're going to worship, but I want you to know that the only God deserving of your worship is the God who has appeared to me with all His grace and His favor. (PBC)

A word from God requires a response on the part of man. Abram felt himself impelled to give personal public testimony to God's mercy displayed in this appearance. (Leupold)

12:8 Bethel. Just north of Jerusalem, it was an important town in the religious history of God's ancient people (see, e.g., 28:10–22; 35:1–8; 1Ki 12:26–29). Only Jerusalem is mentioned more often in the OT. (CSB)

Remember that Moses originally wrote the book of Genesis for the ancient people of Israel, who at the time had not yet entered the land. Can you imagine how mentioning the names of cities which they would one day inhabit would awaken anticipation for their new home? Each of the historic spots Abram visited and where he worships would have special meaning for his descendants when they one day occupied the homeland God had picked out for them. (PBC)

AI – This is common noun meaning "heap of stones." (Leupold)

CALLED ON THE NAME OF THE LORD – This is a public invocation of Yahweh's name, an act which could hardly be performed without proclaiming the works and the character of Yahweh – a fact which leads Luther to translate: "he preached concerning the name of the Lord." This expression specifically means "to use the name of the Lord in worship." (Leupold)

"(Prayer) includes the entire ministry" (AE 2:287. Hebrew allows the translation "H proclaimed in the name of the Lord." Luther proposed that Abram may have learned of the Lord more fully through the ministry established by the patriarch Shem. (TLSB)

12:9 SET OUT AND CONTINUED – Nasa' actually means "to pull up stakes," a natural expression in nomadic days. To convey the idea that this kept on for quite a while the absolute infinitive (nasoa') is joined to the finite verb, as well as the absolute infinitive of the verb "to go" (halokh) which almost equals our adverb "continually." (Leupold)

Negev. The dry wasteland stretching southward from Beersheba. The same Hebrew word is translated "south" in 13:14. (CSB)

This lies south of Hebron. It is an arid region in parts of which isolated flocks may be tended, at least down as far south as Beersheba. It may have been less desiccated in patriarchal day. (Leupold)

12:1–9 God calls an idolater to faith, giving him a promise that God Himself would fulfill for all people. God's Spirit works faith, when and where He pleases, through the Word. He is faithful to do as He has said. He made Abram into a great nation, blessing all the world through the Son. As Abram's offspring by faith, we have the blessing of God's forgiveness and life without end. • Heavenly Father, call us to trust the Word of God in the water of Holy Baptism, to cling to everything You command, and to live by the blessing of Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Romans 5:1-8, 13-17

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” ⁴ Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.” ¹³ It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—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. ¹⁷ As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Luther: “After the first three chapters, in which sin is revealed and faith's way to righteousness is taught, St. Paul begins in chapter 4 to meet certain remonstrances and objections. First he takes up the one that all men commonly make when they hear that faith justifies without works. They say, ‘Are we, then, to do no good works?’ Therefore he himself takes up the case of Abraham, and asks, ‘What did Abraham accomplish, then, with his good works? Were they all in vain? Were his works of no use?’ He concludes that Abraham was justified by faith alone, without any works, so much so that the Scriptures in Genesis 15[:6] declare that he was justified by faith alone even before the work of circumcision. But if the work of circumcision contributed nothing to his righteousness, though God had commanded it and it was a good work of obedience, 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, so all good works are only external signs which follow out of faith; like good fruit, they demonstrate that a person is already inwardly righteous before God. (TLSB)

“With this powerful illustration from the Scriptures, St. Paul confirms the doctrine of faith which he had set forth in chapter 3. He cites also another witness, David, who says in Psalm 32[:1–2] that a man is justified without works—although he does not remain without works when he has been justified. Then he gives the illustration a broader application, setting it over against all other works of the law. He concludes that the Jews cannot be Abraham’s heirs merely because of their blood, still less because of the works of the law; they must inherit Abraham’s faith, if they would be true heirs. For before the law—before the law of Moses and the law of circumcision—Abraham was justified by faith and called the father of all believers. Moreover the law brings about wrath rather than grace, because no one keeps the law out of love for it and pleasure in it. What comes by the works of the law is thus disfavor rather than grace. Therefore faith alone must obtain the grace promised to Abraham, for these examples too were written for our sakes [Rom. 15:4], that we too should believe” (AE 35:373–74). (TLSB)

4:1 Having shown that circumcision does not merit salvation, Paul now applies this to Abraham, the first to receive God’s covenant of circumcision (Gn 17:10–14). (TLSB)

Abraham, our forefather.† The great patriarch of the Jewish nation, the true example of a justified person (see Jas 2:21–23). The Jews of Jesus’ time used Abraham as an example of justification by works, but Paul holds him up as a shining example of righteousness through faith (see Gal 3:6–9). (CSB)

The key example Paul chooses is Abraham. The term “forefather” (προπάτωρ) occurs only here in the NT. The referent of “our” is most interesting. Initially, as indicated by the phrase “according to flesh,” “our” has the obvious meaning of Paul and his fellow Jews. They are Abraham’s children according to physical lineage. This is reflected in how Scripture describes Israel as “the seed of Abraham” (Ps 105:6; Is 41:8; see Rom 9:7–8). Here “flesh” need not have any negative sense (a nuance of “flesh” present thus far in Romans only in 2:28). Instead, “according to flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα) has the same meaning as when applied to the sinless Christ in 1:3 and 9:5. (CC)

“Our forefather according to the flesh.” If one receives something by the flesh, he receives it by works of his own deeds and efforts. The apostle also thinks of the good works that Abraham did after he was converted, after he became a servant of the living God, of all his glorious virtues for which Scriptures praise Abraham. The works of the converted, though done in the power of God, are still the deeds of man. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

While the primary focus of “our forefather according to flesh” is, at least initially, the Jewish people collectively, it is not necessary to restrict this description as a return to the second person singular “you” used to interact directly with a Jewish person in 2:17–27. The question-and-answer format is able to dialog with all who are listening (as in 3:1–8). This is particularly evident in how the application of “our” expands as the chapter progresses. Father Abraham has children beyond these (see 4:12, 16). (CC)

4:2 Hypothetical point. Many rabbis assumed that Abraham was justified by keeping the Law perfectly. If this were true, Abraham had reason to boast. But he could not boast before God, who knew that Abraham was not justified by works but by faith. (TLSB)

The engaging diatribe format continues in 4:2 with a non-committal conditional. It expresses, at least initially, the possibility that perhaps “Abraham was declared righteous from works” (ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη). If so, the verse continues, then “he has a boast” (ἔχει καύχημα). Dunn points out that an affirmative response to this conditional is “the normal or at least widely accepted way of thinking about Abraham among his fellow Jews.” Indeed, Matera articulates this in even more exclusive terms by stating: “Although Jewish tradition recognized the importance of Abraham’s faith, it never argued that Abraham was justified by faith. Jewish tradition was more inclined to view Abraham as righteous because he was obedient to God.” (CC)

Although Paul does not directly diminish the character of Abraham in any way in Romans 4, the most challenging reply to all these assertions comes from Scripture itself. First of all, Luther points out: “If you should ask what Abraham was before he was called by a merciful God, Joshua (24:2) answers that he was an idolater, that is, that he deserved death and eternal damnation.” In that passage, Joshua reminds Israel, “Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, ‘Across the River [the Euphrates] your fathers lived long ago, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods’ ” (Josh 24:2). Second, the narrative of Genesis itself hardly depicts Abraham as perfect after Yahweh’s call. Twice he lies about the fact that Sarah is his wife (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–18). His conduct in regard to Hagar and Ishmael is also far from exemplary (Gen 16:4–6). (CC)

4:3 Elderly Abraham believed God’s promise that he would be the father of a great nation (Gn 15:1–6). His faith is noted, not his works. (TLSB)

The reference is to Ge 15:6, where nothing is mentioned about works. (CSB)

credited. Abraham had kept no law, rendered no service and performed no ritual that earned credit to his account before God. His belief in God, who had made promises to him, was credited to him as righteousness. (CSB)

Abraham did not act righteously; God declared him righteous because of his faith. “Faith itself is credited for righteousness. Faith is the thing God declares to be righteousness. Paul adds that righteousness is credited freely” (Ap IV 89). (TLSB)

Paul counters that Abraham’s righteousness before God was not based upon works. Later in 4:9–11, Paul will use the chronology of the narrative account to deal with the matter of circumcision as a supposed basis of, or requirement for, righteousness. In 4:3, however, his evidence is provided by a direct quotation from the authoritative “Scripture” (γραφή; see γραφαῖς in 1:2): “for what is the Scripture saying?” Note the present tense of the verb “*is saying*” (λέγει). It conveys that God’s Word continues to speak, as stated regarding the Law in 3:20. It also reinforces that when a perfect tense is used, the emphasis is on the present impact. (CC)

elogistha auto “was reckoned to him.” The passive construction highlights the passive role of the believer in the doctrine of justification. God is the active agent; he is the one

who justifies. The believer is the passive one who is acted upon. The believer does nothing, contributes nothing. He receives the promise in faith, but even this is not his doing, because faith is worked in him by God's promise. Paul takes this from Genesis 15 which is still two chapters before the requirement of circumcision. Abraham was justified by faith before any works of law were asked of him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

4:4-5 Including works in salvation destroys grace. If we save ourselves, then God is not our Savior! God justifies sinners who cannot deserve His grace. (TLSB)

Before proceeding there, Paul provides an everyday illustration, as true today as it was then. While 4:4 has terms loaded with theological nuances, it is best to read the verse simply as it stands: “now to the one who works, the payment is not credited as a favor, but according to what is owed.” The noun “works” (ἔργα, as in 4:2, 6) is typically suspect in Paul and the phrase “works of the Law” (e.g., 3:20, 28) is always negative. However, Paul does use the verb “to work” (ἐργάζομαι in 4:5) in positive expressions elsewhere (Rom 2:10; 1 Cor 16:10; Gal 6:10; Col 3:23). The sense here is more neutral. It reflects the secular working world, where a person's “wages” or “payment” (ὁ μισθός) is not credited by the employer as a gracious favor (κατὰ χάριν) or even as a gift. Instead, “payment” denotes the sum the employer is obligated to pay the worker, “according to what is owed” (κατὰ ὀφείλημα). If unpaid, this might become a debt, but that is not the sense in 4:4. (CC)

4:4 HIS WAGES – misthos means “pay, earnings” and stands in opposition to faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

AN OBLIGATION – opheilama is a debt owed and is the opposite of grace. Apology IV, 89, Tappert 120 says: “Therefore he excludes even the merit of works according to the moral law; for if by these we earned justification before God, faith would not be accounted for righteousness without works. Romans 4:4-5.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

4:5 who does not work. “But to the one who is not working, but believing on the One who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is being credited for righteousness” (4:5). This brief expression encapsulates Paul's Good News in a manner reminiscent of 3:28. In so doing, Paul retrieves the key terms of Gen 15:6 in a manner which he will utilize throughout the rest of the chapter. Rom 4:4–5 also enables us to define “believe” (πιστεύω) most simply. To work is to be owed (4:4). To believe is to not work (τῷ δὲ μὴ ἐργαζομένῳ πιστεύοντι δέ, 4:5). Thus faith is the opposite of works (as in Rom 3:28; Gal 2:16; 3:2). In relationship with God, there is *either* the “works” approach *or* there is faith. (CC)

But what about those who believe in both faith *and* works (synergism)? Paul does not even bring up that alternative. “It is faith, therefore, that God declares to be righteousness; he [Paul] adds that it is accounted freely and denies that it could be accounted freely if it were a reward for works” (Ap IV 89). Thus righteousness is credited “to the one who is not working, but believing” (Rom 4:5). (CC)

Herein lies Paul's fundamental charge against human thinking about God, thinking which has all too often influenced Jewish and Christian attitudes. Our dominant worldly view generally wants to follow the employment metaphor in desiring to receive what is owed or fair from God based upon works (4:4). Paul has endeavored to explode that type of thinking in 1:18–3:20. He continues to do so in Romans 4 by proving such was never the case, even with our forefather Abraham (4:1). The scriptural account of Abraham declares that what was in his account before God was not there from his working, but rather because righteousness was credited to him by God himself. (CC)

Ungodly. The grenade Paul tosses right in the midst of “believe” (πιστεύω), “declare righteous” (δικαιώω), “credit” (λογίζομαι), “faith” (πίστις), and “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) is the word “ungodly” (ἀσεβής). Dunn understates the case in suggesting that this term “would be distinctly more provocative.” In 1:18, Paul asserts: “indeed, [the] wrath of God is being revealed from heaven upon every ungodliness [ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ἀσέβειαν] and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” “Ungodliness” (ἀσέβεια) is a powerful, derogatory word which depicts an absolute rejection of the existence of God with a corresponding dishonorable lifestyle. Now Paul asserts that these are exactly the kind of people whom God credits as righteous! More precisely, righteousness is credited to the one “believing on the One who declares the ungodly righteous” (πιστεύοντι ... ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιῶντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ, 4:5). Paul's primary assertion, once again, then, ultimately is not about people, but about God. God is the one who “declares righteous” (an active participle of δικαιώω in 4:5, as in 3:26); by him is a person “credited” (a divine passive of λογίζομαι in 4:5, as in 4:3) with righteousness. (CC)

Thus Jesus himself exemplifies what Paul here says about the God who declares the ungodly righteous. Jesus fulfills the prophecy that “the righteous one, my Servant, shall declare many to be righteous,” and he does this not for those who are already righteous, but for “transgressors” laden with “iniquities” (Is 53:11–12). The problem with the Pharisees and others who scorned and derided Jesus for associating with “sinners” was their refusal to acknowledge their own ungodliness. Jesus, however, does not avoid the topic in his scathing accusations against the Pharisees (e.g., Lk 11:37–52; 16:14–15), something Paul similarly reinforces in Rom 2:17–29 and 3:9–20. (CC)

4:6-8 Paul cites further evidence for believing on the God who declares the ungodly righteous from Psalm 32. As in the quote from another psalm of David, Psalm 51 in Rom 3:4, one could delve into the narrative of David's life for examples which affirm his personal experience as illustrative of the truth. But in Romans 4, it also seems best to simply regard David as the author of the words which corroborate the theological reality Paul is expounding: “just as David also pronounces the blessing of the person ...” (4:6). Though David is long dead, the words God inspired him to sing are also cited with the present tense Greek verb λέγει, “is saying,” as in 4:3 (although translated differently here because of the context; see the second textual note on 4:6). David still speaks of real blessedness or, more accurately, continues to actually pronounce the blessing to a person through the words of Psalm 32. (CC)

4:6 imony of Genesis regarding the relationship between righteousness and faith and works. Here again God is at work. God is in charge; man is the recipient. (Franzmann)

apart from works. “For the holy apostle Paul writes, ‘Of grace,’ ‘without merit,’ ‘without Law,’ ‘without works,’ ‘not of works.’ All these words together mean that we are justified and saved through faith alone in Christ” (FC Ep III 10). (TLSB)

Saints under the OT were saved in the same way as saints under the NT: not on account of their own works, but on account of Christ, and through faith in Him. (CB)

4:7-8 Ps 32:1 shows how the OT teaches justification through faith. The confession reveals that David was not relying on his works, but on grace. Although we are sinners, God forgives us and covers us with His righteousness. (TLSB)

To introduce the quotation in Rom 4:7–8, Paul first announces that this blessing rests on the person who is like Abraham, the person “to whom God is crediting righteousness apart from works” (4:6). It is, therefore, intriguing that the psalmist does not actually use the vocabulary of “righteousness” or “works,” but of the forgiveness of sins. However, it is his emphatic use of the accounting term λογίζομαι, “to charge; credit,” which drives Paul to the LXX version of MT Ps 32:1–2. While the presence of this same verb connects the passage with LXX Gen 15:6 and Romans 4, “Paul’s argument is not merely verbal but substantial.” (CC)

Paul’s quotation of this flows nicely out of what he asserted in 4:5. The faith which is credited *for* righteousness is one which believes on the God who declares the ungodly righteous. Stated positively, 4:7–8 asserts that such a person’s blessedness lies in that fact that his lawless acts “were forgiven” (ἀφέθησαν) or, in Hebrew, “lifted up, taken away” (רָפוּ) by God. Furthermore, their sins “were covered over” by God (ἐπεκαλύφθησαν is another divine passive). These verbs bring to mind the OT picture of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, the blood applied to the mercy seat or covering placed over the ark that day, and sacrificial blood in general (Leviticus 16). This reinforces the association of OT roots for “redemption” (ἀπολύτρωσις) in Rom 3:24, as well as “atoning sacrifice” or “mercy seat” (ἱλαστήριον) and “in his blood” (ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι) in 3:25. Finally, the psalmist speaks emphatically about the Lord not crediting or, better, *not* charging sin against a person (“whose sin the Lord will in no way charge [to his account].” Thus λογίζομαι now expresses *both* the sense of credit *and* debit (charge). The faith of the ungodly in God is *credited for* a declaration of righteous in 4:5. Now, on the basis of the psalmist’s words, Paul says blessing resides in sin *not being debited against* a man. (CC)

4:7 WHOSE SINS ARE COVERED – Not punished but forgiven. (CB)

4:8 BLESSED IS THE MAN – The quotation is from Psalm 32. A repentant King David is speaking as he recalls his own sorry past. Initially stubborn and unrepentant, David tried to minimize and ignore his sin, but that didn’t work. He now admits: (PBC)

“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.” (Psalm 32:3,4)

Brought to his knees, David resorted to the only thing that works: looking in faith to the God who justifies the ungodly. David had no good works to bring, only ungodliness to confess. And he does just that: (PBC)

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”— and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” (Psalm 32:5)

God forgave the guilt of David’s sin. This free forgiveness through faith without the addition of any works or merit is precisely the same pattern that Abraham had experienced. And it forms the basis for David’s cry of joy and relief (Psalm 32:1,2), which Paul quotes almost word for word. (PBC)

4:13 If Paul wants to speak about the Gospel in the OT, he typically uses “promise” (ἐπαγγελία). Prior to the second century BC, however, that Greek word simply meant any type of “announcement” (literally, “a message upon”), and thus it rarely occurs in the LXX. But since ἐπαγγελία had later developed the notion of “promise” or “pledge,” it is a favorite term for Paul. It occurs particularly as an expression of God’s Word of future blessing to the patriarchs or “fathers.” (E.g., Rom 4:13, 14, 16, 20; 9:4, 8, 9; 15:8; 2 Cor 1:20; 7:1; Gal 3:14–29; 4:23, 28; Eph 2:12; 3:6; see also Acts 13:32; 26:6) (CC)

In Jewish circles, “what is striking is the way in which when the concept ‘promise’ emerges it is subordinated to or its effects seen as mediated through the law.” A couple of examples, which also include the notion of inheritance, illustrate the point. Psalms of Solomon 12 contrasts the deeds of the wicked with the devout who refrain from doing evil. It concludes with this plea: “and let the pious of the Lord inherit the promises of the Lord” (καὶ ὅσοι κυρίου κληρονομήσασαν ἐπαγγελίας κυρίου, Ps Sol 12:6). Prior to the purification of the temple by the Maccabees, 2 Macc 2:17–18 states: “it is God who has saved all his people, and has returned the inheritance [τὴν κληρονομίαν] to all, and the kingship and the priesthood and the consecration, as he promised through the law [καθὼς ἐπηγγείλατο διὰ τοῦ νόμου]” (NRSV). (CC)

Whether Paul was aware of the Maccabees text or not, the clause which opens 4:13 marks a striking contrast: “indeed, *not* through the Law was the promise” (οὐ γὰρ διὰ νόμου ἢ ἐπαγγελία). Paul then affirms the positive alternative at the end of the verse: the promise is, rather, “through the righteousness of faith” (διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως). This expression has, of course, been expounded in regard to Abraham throughout the first half of Romans 4. But the “Law versus faith” dichotomy reaches back to 3:19–22, 27, 28, 31. In all cases, righteousness is related to faith and apart from works of the Law. (CC)

Now this is also shown to be true in regard to the promise to Abraham. The addition “and to his seed” is rooted in numerous OT expressions of the promise.^c Here it opens the door to all those for whom Abraham is father as just articulated in 4:11–12, and also hints toward the “our/us” (ἡμᾶς) of 4:24. Paul expands on this idea in Gal 3:16, where he points out that Abraham’s seed is ultimately one, Christ, which points ahead to Rom 4:24–25. But here in Romans 4 the more expansive application, which Paul proceeds to make in Gal 3:29, is more pronounced. This is particularly true in light of 4:16, where the promise is “to *every* seed” and Abraham is “father of *all* of us.” (CC)

The specific element associated with the promise in 4:13 is that Abraham is “the heir of the world.” While that exact phrase may not be used in the OT, Cranfield goes too far when he asserts that “nowhere in the OT is the promise to Abraham couched in terms at all close to τὸ κληρονόμον αὐτὸν εἶναι κόσμου.” The notion of inheritance (usually expressed with a verb for “inherit” or “possess” rather than a noun such as “heir”) is pervasive in regard to those who would receive the promises to Abraham (e.g., Gen 15:3, 4, 7, 8; 21:10) and in reference to the promised land of Canaan (e.g., Num 26:53–56; 32:18–19; 33:53–54; Deut 1:8, 21, 38–39). Furthermore, the notion that Abraham, and his seed, would inherit the world: (CC)

succinctly summarizes the three key provisions of the promise as it unfolds in Genesis: that Abraham would have an immense number of descendants, embracing “many nations” (Gen. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:4–6, 16–20; 22:17), that he would possess “the land” (Gen. 13:15–17; 15:12–21; 17:8), and that he would be the medium of blessing to “all the peoples of the earth” (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). Particularly noteworthy is the promise in Gen. 22:17b that Abraham’s seed would “possess the gates of their enemies.” (CC)

Thus, rather than being an illegitimate expansion, Paul’s phrasing encompasses the implications of the overall promise. Indeed, the OT itself speaks repeatedly of God’s people inheriting the “land/world” (יְרֵאָה, e.g., Pss 25:13; 37:9, 11, 22; Is 57:13; 60:21). Sirach 44:21 similarly extends the implications of the promise: (CC)

Therefore with an oath he [the Lord] assured him [Abraham] that the nations would be blessed in his offspring, that he would multiply him as the dust of the earth, and that as the stars he would exalt his offspring, and that he would give them an inheritance from sea to sea and from the River to the end of the earth. (CC)

The initial point Paul makes in Rom 4:13 is that the Abrahamic promise was not received “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου). The referent of νόμος must surely be the revealed Torah, and not merely a “principle” or “system.” It is interesting to notice that Paul just utilized a chronological argument in rejecting a relationship between Abraham’s righteousness and circumcision in 4:9–11. It is interesting to ponder why he does not employ the same type of temporal argument regarding the Law here, especially since he does utilize it in Gal 3:15–18. The most plausible reason is that whereas Galatians was focused more narrowly upon the Mosaic Law, in Romans Paul expands the reach of νόμος beyond those who have received it in revealed form. Despite Jewish assertions to the contrary (see the commentary on 4:2), there is no scriptural warrant for presuming Abraham knew the commands of the revealed Law. He fits among those between Adam and Moses who lived apart from the revealed Law (2:12; 5:13–14). Thus the description of Rom 2:15, where Paul asserts that “the work of the Law [is] written in their hearts,” more appropriately characterizes Abraham’s awareness of the Law, both when uncircumcised and circumcised. If the point, then, is not temporal, on what basis does Paul exclude one’s receiving of the promise “through the Law” (4:13)? (CC)

not through law. Not on the condition that the promise be merited by works of the law. (CSB)

Paul is thoroughly Jewish in his language, and yet his thought is worlds apart from that of Judaism. He describes the promise given to Abraham and his descendants in a phrase that the Jewish rabbis used: “That they should inherit the world,” and at the same time he brushes aside the Judaic interpretation which made the promise given to

Abraham God's reward to Abraham for his keeping of the Law, his good works.
(Franzmann)

The way of salvation through faith in Christ is suited to all classes and conditions of men. None are so good that they can be saved in any other way; and none are so bad that they cannot be saved in this. (CB)

his offspring. All those of whom Abraham is said to be father (vv. 11–12). – This means all believers throughout history. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2) (CSB)

RECEIVED THE PROMISE – God promised to multiply Abraham's descendants (Gn 15:5) and to bless all nations through him. This was a prophecy about Jesus. (TLSB)

heir of the world.† “World” here refers to the creation, as in 1:20. No express mention of this heirship is made in the Genesis account of Abraham. He is promised “offspring like the dust of the earth” (Ge 13:16) and possession of the land of Canaan (Ge 12:7; 13:14–15; 15:7, 18–21; 17:8), and that all the peoples on earth will be blessed through him (Ge 12:3; 18:18) or his offspring (Ge 22:18). But since, as Genesis already makes clear, God purposed through Abraham and his offspring to work out the destiny of the whole world, it was implicit in the promises to Abraham that he and his offspring would “inherit the earth” (see Ps 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34; Mt 5:5). (CSB)

As Abraham became the father of many nations, the world would, in a sense, belong to him. (TLSB)

The point he's making is that an heir doesn't have to do anything for the stipulation of the will to go into effect. (PBC)

4:14 The form of the conditional in 4:14 is again non-committal (see 4:2). For the sake of argument, Paul proposes, “For if those from the Law [οἱ ἐκ νόμου] are heirs, ...” Dunn suggests the phrase “those from the Law” might describe “those who quite naturally saw their participation in the inheritance promised to Abraham as identical with their membership [in] the covenant people, the people of the law.” However, the presence of “from” (ἐκ) brings out a more specific possibility, which Dunn also acknowledges, that “the phrase is thus also an abbreviated form of the fuller phrase οἱ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου [‘those from works of the Law’].” This is more consistent with Paul's use of variations of that formula, particularly in 3:20 and 4:2 (see also Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10 and the excursus “The Background of ‘Works of the Law’” following the commentary on 3:9–20). Cranfield suggests that the phrase depicts those who contend that they “have a claim to the inheritance on the basis of their fulfilment of the law.” He concludes this is “confirmed by the parallel protasis in Gal 3:18 (εἰ ... ἐκ νόμου ἢ κληρονομία [‘if the inheritance (comes) from the Law’]).” If so, “the apostle shows that there is something wicked in hoping for an inheritance by the law.”²⁸ However, in light of the identical phrase stated in the singular in 4:16, Moo's paraphrase is likely the best understanding: “If those who have only the law are heirs ...” The point is that the definition of who is an heir is not simply equivalent with one's ethnicity or possession of the revealed Law. As 4:16 reveals, the referent of Paul's supposition

encompasses those who are “from the Law *only*” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου μόνον), but who are *not also* “from the faith of Abraham” (ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ). (CC)

If, for the sake of argument, those from the Law are heirs, then, 4:14 contends that faith is like a cup which has been poured out and remains empty (κεκένωται); God’s promise is similarly rendered null and void (κατήργηται). These are probably not divine passives. Instead, those who are of the Law alone, that is, who pursue righteousness from works and apart from faith, have themselves emptied what comes “through the righteousness of faith” (διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως), as expressed in 4:13. The promise is similarly made ineffective, not because humans can nullify God’s promise, but because they can seek to attain it “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου), an avenue which Paul has just excluded (4:13; see also 3:27; 9:30–10:5). (CC)

Here Paul does not explicitly state why the promise is not through the Law, but it is certainly evident from his previous statements (e.g., 2:21–27; 3:9–20), as well as in what follows. Here in Romans 4 the case of Abraham simply illustrates that “from the Law” (ἐκ νόμου, 4:14) is not the way it is with the promise of God. It is not about anything which proceeds from Abraham, or us, toward God “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου, 4:13). The promise comes by God crediting it to Abraham and his offspring through the righteousness of faith. “Hence to ask more than the faith of Gen 15:6 is to nullify the promise of Gen 15:5.” Why this is so is expressed in Rom 4:16. (CC)

those who live by law. Those whose claim to the inheritance is based on the fulfillment of the law. (CSB)

promise. See note on v. 13. (CSB)

oi ek nomou means “those who base their relationship on works.” The best example is that found in John 8:39 where the Jews claim Abraham as father but Jesus immediately denies it. They were not children of Abraham because they based everything on physical descent and on human works and worthiness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

The promise is God at work. (Franzmann)

the heirs. Those receiving the blessings promised to Abraham. (TLSB)

4:15 But first, yet another “for” (γάρ) explains that, instead of being a vehicle for receiving the promised inheritance, “the Law brings about wrath” (4:15). Earlier, Paul summarizes how the Law’s continued speaking leaves every mouth silent, holds all the world accountable, and is a means by which humans become fully cognizant of sin (3:19–20). There the phrase “from works of the Law” (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, 3:20) depicts human works done in accordance with the Law with an aim toward righteousness. Now, instead of merely silencing or giving awareness, “the Law” (νόμος) also actively accomplishes something: it works “wrath” (ὀργή). The reappearance of “wrath” recalls 1:18, where the “wrath of God is being revealed from heaven upon every ungodliness and unrighteousness of people” (see also 2:5, 8). But to contend that “the Law” itself accomplishes “wrath” is shocking, particularly to those who “rely upon the Law and ... boast in God” (2:17). Thus this brief thought regarding the Law, as well as those in 5:20 and 6:14, must be explained further. And so they will be, particularly in Romans 7. At this point, Ambrosiaster

makes an important distinction: “The law itself is not wrath, but it brings wrath, i.e., punishment, to the sinner, for wrath is born from sin.” (CC)

Before returning to the faith side of the equation, Paul shoots off one more seemingly tangential phrase: “but where the Law is not, neither is there transgression [of the Law]” (4:15). For Paul the absence of transgression does not equate to the absence of sin. Rom 2:12 has already asserted that one can sin, and perish as a result, apart from transgressing the revealed Law. Thus “while every ‘transgression’ is also a ‘sin,’ not every ‘sin’ is a ‘transgression.’” Paul will elaborate further in 5:13–14. At this point, Rom 4:15 hearkens back to 2:23, where those who boast in the Law are charged with dishonoring God “through the transgression of the Law” (διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως τοῦ νόμου). “Transgression” (παράβασις) describes “sin in its relation to law, i.e., to a requirement or obligation which is legally valid or has legal force.” Paul now implies that the Law brings about wrath by the judgment it pronounces upon those who transgress its commands. The Law thereby turns “their sin into conscious transgression and so render[s] it more exceeding sinful.”³⁵ Thus, rather than leading to the promised inheritance, the Law actually makes things worse (see 5:20; 7:7–13). (CC)

Humans inevitably violate God’s Law and are condemned by it. “The Law always accuses and terrifies consciences” (Ap IV 38). (TLSB)

law brings wrath. The law, because it reveals sin and even stimulates it (see 7:7–11), produces wrath, not promise. (CSB)

It does so not because the Law is evil, but because the nature of man is fallen. Apology IV, 38, Tappert: “Paul does not say that by the law men merit the forgiveness of sins. For the law always accuses and terrifies consciences. It does not justify, because a conscience terrified by the law flees before God’s judgment.” Apology IV, 270, Tappert 147: “But without Christ this law is not kept. It always accuses the conscience, which does not satisfy the law and therefore flees in terror before the judgment and punishment of the law.” Apology XII, 88 Tappert 195: “The law will always accuse us because we never satisfy the law of God.” God dealt with Abraham not through law, not on the basis of the law, but on the basis of a promise. Abraham, of course, was sinful. But that did not destroy God’s promise. The promise was not conditioned by fulfillment of the law, it was altogether independent of the law. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

transgression. Overstepping a clearly defined line. Where there is no law there is still sin, but it does not have the character of transgression. (CSB)

The Law stands as a boundary. Without such a boundary, there can be no violation. (TLSB)

But where the promise of God, the grace of God, the Christ of God determine that relationship, there is no transgression either. There the promise given to God’s people through Micah is fulfilled for all people. (Franzmann)

¹⁸ Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show

mercy. ¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19)

There will be men who, believing in the God who justifies the ungodly, will in the beggary of faith turn to God their gracious King (Matthew 5:3) and in meek dependence of faith will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5) (Franzmann)

4:16 The reason(s) why the promise is “through the righteousness of faith” (διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως) and not “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου, 4:13) is a question which has been lingering. Paul profoundly articulates his answer in 4:16. This verse also introduces the thoughts he runs with all the way to the climactic end of the chapter. However, Cranfield observes: “The first part of the verse is strikingly elliptic.” The expression “on account of this” (διὰ τοῦτο) usually draws a conclusion from what precedes. But here it primarily points ahead (see the textual note), as Paul goes on to express the reason why the promise is “from faith” (ἐκ πίστεως). This shorthand prepositional phrase occurs twice in the thematic verse 1:17, as well as in 3:26 and, specifically in reference to the circumcised, in 3:30. Additionally, the same thought is encapsulated by “through faith” (διὰ πίστεως) repeatedly (3:22, 25, 30, 31) and “by faith” (πίστει) in 3:28. In essence, Paul “says that only faith can accept the promise. He therefore correlates and connects promise and faith” (Ap IV 50, after citing Rom 4:16). (CC)

In the middle portion of 4:16, Paul specifies two reasons why the promise is received “from faith.” The first expresses purpose: “in order that [it is] in accordance with grace” (ἵνα κατὰ χάριν). Based upon the clause to follow, where “the promise” is the subject, one is intended to assume that “the promise” is the subject (“it”) here as well. Thus “the promise” is “from faith” in order that “the promise” be “in accordance with grace.” In 4:4, “in accordance with grace” (κατὰ χάριν) was excluded when a worker simply received what was owed. Instead, 4:5, by implication, expresses what is “in accordance with grace”: “not working, but believing” is grace. Believing upon a God who declares the ungodly righteous (τὸν δικαιῶντα τὸν ἄσεβῆ) is a further expression of grace, for “his faith is being credited for righteousness” (λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην, 4:5). On the basis of 4:4–5, Dunn concludes: (CC)

The interlocking correlatives are ἐκ πίστεως [“from faith”] and κατὰ χάριν [“in accordance with grace”]: God’s gracious outreach to man is of such a character that it can only be received in unconditional openness. Whatever restricts or obscures that openness, and the character of faith as sheer receptivity and dependence on God, denies and restricts that grace. (CC)

The force of the second reason, “so that the promise is certain to every seed” (εἰς τὸ εἶναι βεβαίαν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν παντὶ τῷ σπέρματι, 4:16), is debated. Käsemann contends that “it is consecutive, offering the conclusion.” Dunn suggests that, as with the previous phrase, “the construction is again final and not merely consecutive.”⁴⁰ His use of “merely” brings up an important point in regard to such categories. Moule points out that “the Semitic mind was notoriously unwilling to draw a sharp dividing-line between purpose and consequence.” Wallace expounds: “In other words, the NT writers employ the language to reflect their theology: what God purposes is what happens and, consequently, ἵνα [‘so that’] is used to express both the divine purpose and the result” (cf. 3:8). Thus this clause, utilizing the comparable “so that ... is” (εἰς τὸ εἶναι), expresses *both why* God does it all “in accordance with grace” (κατὰ χάριν), *as well as his intended result*. Thereby it is God’s gracious intention that his promise be “certain” (βεβαίαν), that is, solid, certain, and guaranteed to every one of Abraham’s offspring. As with

Abraham (4:2–3), the fact that the action all goes from God toward us excludes any notion of our works. “If the promise were conditional on our works, it would not be guaranteed” (Ap XX 10, after citing Rom 4:16). (CC)

Paul refers to Abraham’s “seed” in 4:13 and here in 4:16. He now provides his definition of “every seed” (παντι τῷ σπέρματι). In so doing, he uses the exact same phrasing “not only, but also” (οὐ ... μόνον ἀλλὰ καί) as he did in 4:12 when expressing a similar thought. It is, therefore, most likely that the combination is to be understood in the same manner here, as well as in 4:23–24. In 4:12 Paul speaks of one and the same group; Abraham is the father of “not ... only, but ... also ...” He does so here as well, though in singular or individual terms. The promise is secure to “every seed, not to the one from the Law only, but to the one who is also from the faith of Abraham, who is father of all of us” (4:16). This definition both expands and narrows what was the prevalent Jewish understanding of those to whom the phrase in 4:1, “Abraham, our forefather,” applies. (CC)

Moo speaks of Paul’s definition as “a ‘qualified’ universalism.” The universal aspect is encompassed by the expression that he “is father of all of us” at the end of 4:16. But it is also present in “*every* [παντί] seed” earlier in the verse; the promise is certain to *every offspring*. The narrowing or qualification is that the promise is not simply or automatically to the seed who are “from the Law” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου). In 4:12, the phrase was “to those not from circumcision only” (τοῖς οὐκ ἐκ περιτομῆς μόνον). Here it is “not to the one from the Law only” (οὐ τῷ ἐκ τοῦ νόμου μόνον). In both places, “not only” (οὐ ... μόνον) is immediately followed by “but also” (ἀλλὰ καί). Being “from circumcision” (4:12) and/or “from the Law” (4:16) are not, in and of themselves, determinative of membership in Abraham’s family. This was explained in regard to circumcision in 2:25–29. Now there is a “but also” for “from the Law” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου) as well. It is “*but* to the one who is *also* from the faith of Abraham” (ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ, 4:16). Being his seed does not depend on being circumcised (4:9–12); neither does it “rely upon the Law” (2:17). As 4:14 similarly asserts, the promised inheritance is not in any sense “from the Law” (ἐκ νόμου). Indeed, “the Law” (νόμος) works wrath instead (4:15). As a result, as Paul proceeds to speak of faith in the promise, “the Law” (νόμος) disappears from sight through the end of the chapter and all the way until 5:13. (CC)

At the same time, Paul’s phrasing also means that being circumcised and/or of the Law are not exclusionary. The definitive element, in both places, is being of the faith of Abraham. In 4:12 the “but also” was expressed as “*but* to those who *also* follow [in] the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham which [he had while he was] in [the state of] uncircumcision.” Here, Paul simply writes, “But to the one who is also from the faith of Abraham” (ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ). Abraham had this faith while uncircumcised, *and* he had this faith while circumcised. Thus one can have this faith while being “from the Law” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου, 4:16). And one can have this faith while being “without the Law” (ἀνόμως, 2:12). The definitive element for all is being “from the faith of Abraham” (ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ, 4:16). (CC)

it. Salvation. “If the promise were to depend upon our works, it would not be sure.... When would we know that we had received it?” (Ap XX 87) (TLSB)

† COMES BY FAITH...MAY BE BY GRACE – The grace of God is the efficient cause. Faith is the receiving cause. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

Faith, promise, grace – these three constitute an indivisible trinity. (Franzmann)

Ephesians 2:8-9, “⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”

A summary of the thought of vv. 11–12. For the close correlation between faith and grace see 3:24–25; Eph 2:8–9. (CSB)

those who are of the law. Jewish Christians. (CSB)

those who are of the faith of Abraham.† Gentile Christians who share Abraham’s faith but who do not possess the law. (CSB)

All who share Abraham’s faith. (TLSB)

4:17 Rom 4:17 points out how Abraham’s faith was in God’s Word of promise. The promise stated that he would not be father of one nation only. Instead, “just as it stands written: ‘I have placed you, and so you are, father of many nations’ ” (4:17). Paul does not quote the first part of Gen 17:5 in which God alters his original name, Abram (“exalted father”), to Abraham (“father of multitudes”), since Paul always refers to the patriarch as Abraham. (CC)

But what does “from the faith of Abraham” (ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ) mean? The remainder of 4:17 introduces Paul’s exposition of that all-important phrase. Thus 4:17 functions as a hinge which “not only” wraps up 4:13–16, “but also” drives ahead to define Abraham’s faith. (CC)

In the remainder of Romans 4, numerous references to God’s Word and his spoken promise convey the basis or grounding of Abraham’s faith. These include “just as it stands written” (καθὼς γέγραπται, 4:17), “according to that which was spoken and now stands in effect” (κατὰ τὸ εἰρημένον, 4:18), “the promise of God” (τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:20), “what was promised [by God] and still in effect, he [God] is powerful also to do” (ὁ ἐπήγγελται δυνατός ἐστιν καὶ ποιῆσαι, 4:21), and “written on his account” (ἐγράφη δὲ δι’ αὐτόν, 4:23). Yet, as in 4:5, Abraham’s faith was not only in *what* God spoke, but also in the God *who* spoke. This emphasis begins immediately after the quotation of Gen 17:5 in the second half of 4:17: “before whom he believed God, the one who makes the dead alive and calls the things not being so that [they] are being.” (CC)

Earlier, Paul described the faith which is being credited for righteousness as “on the One who declares the ungodly righteous” (4:5). In 4:17 Abraham “believed God,” and the content of his faith is also expressed. God is further defined with two phrases connected by one distributive article, “the one” (τοῦ). The first phrase, “the one who makes the dead alive” (τοῦ ζωοποιούντος τοὺς νεκρούς), is affirmed elsewhere. For example, in LXX Deut 32:39 God declares, “I will kill and I will make alive” (ἐγὼ ἀποκτενῶ καὶ ζῆν ποιήσω). LXX Ps 70:20 (MT/ET 71:20) has the psalmist affirming to God, “You have made me alive” (ἐζωοποίησάς με). Similar is 1 Sam 2:6. At the end of this chapter, Paul will assert that this life-giving characteristic of God is exemplified by the resurrection of Jesus (4:24–25). He also extends God’s power over death to give life to all believers; see further the commentary on 8:11 (see also, e.g., 1 Cor 15:22, 36, 45).

Here, however, Paul is speaking of what Abraham believed, and he applies this reference specifically to God's life-giving power over the deadness. (CC)

AS IT IS WRITTEN – Paul quotes Genesis 17:5 to affirm the universality of grace. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

I have made you. God's promise, spoken before Abraham's son Isaac was born, was so certain that it is in the past tense: I have done this. (TLSB)

in the sight of God. God considers Abraham the father of Jews and believing Gentiles alike, no matter how others (especially the Jews) may see him. (CSB)

God personally spoke this promise to Abraham. It did not come through another person. (TLSB)

Paul gives a sort of case history of faith, which is more vivid and more revealing than a definition. (Franzmann)

the God who gives life to the dead. The main reference is to the birth of Isaac through Abraham and Sarah, both of whom were far past the age of childbearing (see Ge 18:11). Secondarily Paul alludes also to the resurrection of Christ (see vv. 24–25). (CSB)

God's power is seen in His gift of life and in creation. (TLSB)

calls things that are not. God has the ability to create out of nothing, as he demonstrated in the birth of Isaac. (CSB)

GOSPEL – John 3:1-17

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." ³ In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." ⁴ "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" ⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." ⁹ "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰ "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be

lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

3:1-21 John 3:1-21 comprises the well-known conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. It has rightly been said that John 3:1-21 contains the whole of Christ's teaching. If we had nothing except these twenty one verses, we would know the way of salvation. Ylvisaker divides these verses thus: In verses 1-10 we have a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. Verses 11-21, beginning with "verily, verily" (the second in this Gospel, the first at 1:51), we have a discourse by Jesus: (Buls)

1. Verses 11-13, Who Jesus is;
2. Verses 14-17, What He has come to accomplish;
3. Verses 18-21, What the result of His coming will be to men.

Note that the Nestle/Aland Greek text begins verse 14 as a subparagraph. They do this because there are those who consider verses 14-21 an exposition by the Evangelist John, not the words of Jesus spoken to Nicodemus. We do not agree with this idea. With Ylvisaker, Stoeckhardt, Kretzmann, Hendriksen and Lenski we maintain that Jesus spoke the words, recorded in verses 14-21, to Nicodemus. (Buls)

Nicodemus is again mentioned at John 7:50-52 and 19:39-42. His bold actions on both occasions are a reflection of John 3:21, an argument in favor of considering verses 14-21 as the words of Jesus to Nicodemus on this occasion. Did Nicodemus become a child of God on this occasion? (Buls)

Fahling says: Nicodemus came seeking and left believing. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: As one born again, as a believing disciple of Jesus, Nicodemus leaves. Where we find him again in the Gospel accounts, he appears as a disciple of the Lord. (Buls)

Lenski: What did Nicodemus say or think? John is not making this a story about this man but a report of the testimony of Jesus to himself. . . We may well say, however, that Jesus' words must have made an indelible impression upon the old Pharisee and must have shaken him profoundly. In due time he came to faith. (Buls)

Bengel: Even Nicodemus subsequently acted more openly. (Buls)

Evidently he is referring to John 7:50-52 and 19:39-42, and is implying that Nicodemus became a child of God. (Buls)

3:1-17 Read carefully John 1–2, giving special attention to 1:9–14, which describes the new birth of faith in Christ that makes us children of God. John 4 offers a specific example of the Good News coming to an individual in the non-Israelite world. The

Samaritan woman, in turn, told the Good News, and many others believed (Jn 4:39). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

John's chronology isn't linear, making it difficult to determine when this meeting took place. A fair bit of evidence must have accumulated, since Nicodemus spoke glowingly of Jesus doing "these signs," while evidently he'd discussed the events with others, since he told the Lord, "We know that you are a teacher come from God" (v 2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:1 *a man of the Pharisees*. See notes on Mt 3:7; Mk 2:16; Lk 5:17. (CSB)

Although both the Pharisees and "the Jews" are frequent antagonists and often targets of Jesus' barbs, here we meet one of the rulers—a member of the Sanhedrin—whom John presents in a more favorable light. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

"Now" has been explained in two ways: (Buls)

1. Nicodemus is an example of the people mentioned in 2:23-25, people with a weak, milk-faith;
2. Nicodemus is different from those people.

If the former is correct "now" means "now" in the narrative sense. If the latter is correct, it means "but." Both explanations have been suggested by eminent exegetes. We shall not try to solve this, nor need we. But it is very clear that Nicodemus is not yet a Christian. (Buls)

"Of" occurs approximately 160 times in John's Gospel and has a variety of meanings. Here it tells us that he was a member of the Pharisaic party. (Buls)

"Nicodemus" is a Greek name. During the Hellenistic period many Jews were given Greek names. (Buls)

The Jewish ruling council is also called the Sanhedrin. (Buls)

Nicodemus is mentioned only here and again in John 7:50 and John 19:39. The last reference clearly indicates that he became a Christian. (Buls)

Verses 1-10 constitute a dialog. Verses 11-21 constitute a monolog. John gives us eleven conversations of Jesus in full detail. (Buls)

Their general view was that prophets were rare or had vanished. (TLSB)

For more on Nicodemus see Jn 7:50–52; 19:39–41. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

John's use of "Jews" is not racial but theological. It refers to those who are opposed to Jesus' Gospel. Nicodemus is an exception. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

As a Pharisee and ruler, he undoubtedly knew the OT well. (PBC)

Nicodemus, a ruler. Member of the Council who later spoke on Jesus' behalf and participated in providing Jesus an honorable burial. (TLSB)

Nicodemus was a good Pharisee and that he in common with all Pharisees relied upon himself. He practiced righteousness outwardly and believed that his own achievements were in themselves a sufficiency. (Yilvisaker)

Luke 18:18-30, ¹⁸ "A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" ²¹ "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." ²⁸ Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" ²⁹ "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰ will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

3:2 *at night.* Perhaps Nicodemus was afraid to come by day. Or he may have wanted a long talk, which would have been difficult in the daytime with the crowds around Jesus. (CSB)

So that his colleagues would not know. John's presentation of this encounter may symbolize those in the world who come out of evil darkness to Jesus, the light of the world (cf.3:19-21). (TLSB)

We do not know precisely at what time this happened. Why did he come at night? His secret visit was probably because he feared he would be exposed to the ridicule and hatred of his fellows, or because he thought himself too eminent a person to compromise his dignity by making this visit in public. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: He was ashamed of this visit to Jesus before his colleagues. (Buls)

Hendriksen: We just do not know. (Buls)

Opinions vary as to why Nicodemus comes “by night.” Is it the only time both are free? Is it fear of the council? Could John be drawing attention back to the previous light and dark comparisons (1:1–18)? The simplest explanation is probably best, but perhaps John also points out the darkness to note subtly that while Nicodemus believes in much that Jesus is doing, he isn’t a believer in Jesus as Messiah. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Therefore, we have no idea of the sincerity of Nicodemus’s greeting or whom he considers like-minded in this assessment of Jesus. In most other instances in the Gospels, when Jewish leaders said, “We know,” it preceded a challenge to his authority or teaching, sometimes done with flattery, sometimes antagonism. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Others came to Jesus with similar words in apparent attempts to flatter him into letting down his guard (Lk 20:19). In contrast, Nicodemus seems sincere. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

RABBI – This was an official title of honor and a Jewish term for teacher. At this point Nicodemus may have been like many people today who recognize Jesus as someone really great but miss the point that He is the Son of God and the only Savior from sin.

Hendriksen: We just do not know. (Buls)

Nicodemus does not see Jesus as Savior, but merely as teacher. He bases this belief on the signs. For “these signs” see 2:23. There are many unrecorded signs in John’s Gospel. Nicodemus implies that God not only accompanied the signs, but was the source of help and power. Nicodemus is not confessing Jesus’ divinity in this verse. He thinks of Him as a prophet. Similar to Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament who performed miracles also, but only with the help of God. (Buls)

“Rabbi” was the Jewish term for “teacher” (1:38). “We know”: he speaks for himself and his associates. Read Ezra 7:1–10 for an example of one among many who fit the description of “a teacher who has come from God.” “Miraculous signs,” *sēmeia*: see 2:11, 23; 4:48; 6:2; etc. Martin Franzmann (*Concordia Bible with Notes: New Testament* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1971] 171) comments, “Believing is more than seeing signs and being somehow drawn to him who performs them. . . . the stance of the sympathetic spectator is not the stance of faith (2:23–25). Believing is more than a good man’s sincere religious interest in Jesus . . . Jesus’ brusque disregard of Nicodemus’ compliment makes that plain.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

TEACHER – didaskalos – A master teacher like one possessing a doctor degree.

As an interested and conscientious teacher, Nicodemus wanted the latest and best information available about God. Jesus appeared to be the one who had it. (PBC)

no one can do these signs. Cf 2:23. For Nicodemus, these signs were legitimate indications of God's presence. (TLSB)

3:3-6 Nicodemus probably was in agreement with the Jews who saw themselves as children of Abraham and therefore part of God's kingdom simply because they were biologically descended from Abraham. To the contrary, Jesus says, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:3-4 Note just how incongruent Jesus' reply is compared to v 2. The Lord appears to have heard something completely different from what Nicodemus said. Nicodemus praises him as teacher and doer of signs; Jesus replies by speaking of being born into the kingdom of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Nicodemus, a son of Abraham, born and circumcised into God's covenant people, must assume that his place in the kingdom is secure. Now this charismatic rabbi is telling him that he must be "born again." Or is Jesus intentionally talking past Nicodemus by using *anōthen*, which can mean either "again" or "from above"? Nicodemus obviously hangs on the former interpretation, and we can practically hear the incredulity—if not outright sarcasm—in his response. Note, too, how "a man" is the principal actor in Nicodemus's idea of new birth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:3 I TELL YOU THE TRUTH – Literally, "truly, truly" or "amen, amen." (PBC)

Jesus is neither flattered nor does He "talk down" to Nicodemus. Three times Jesus says "I tell you the truth." (3,5,11) Two times Nicodemus says "how." (4,9) And Jesus adds another "how" in 12. Nicodemus' questions clearly show his utter lack of faith. Jesus' answers clearly show the utter necessity and truth of conversion, a work of God in man. (Buls)

"Again" has caused much discussion. It is found in John 3:3; John 3:31; John 19:11 and John 19:23. In the last three instances it must mean "from above." But does it mean that here? Eminent exegetes translate "from above." But the word as it is used in verse 4, clearly shows that the meaning is "again." Thus in most of our translations. (Buls)

SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD – Like most Jews of his time, Nicodemus thought of the kingdom of God in political terms. He expected that one day God would send a revolutionary leader, who would inspire the Jews to throw out the Roman army of occupation. (LL)

"Can see" means "to experience." (Buls)

"The Kingdom of God" here means the invisible church. The *Una Sancta*. Repentance is required for entrance into this kingdom (though the Gospel of John does not use this word). Lenski has a beautiful discussion at this point.

Note that we have negatives in both protasis and apodosis. If both be dropped it means: "If ever anyone is born again he is able to see the Kingdom of God. We make this observation to bring out the point that "anyone" is universal, not restrictive, "anyone, no matter who." (Buls)

In John, this expression is used only here and in v. 5. Refers to the reign of God that came in the person of Jesus, on whom John focuses throughout. (TLSB)

"The kingdom of God" is used in John only in this text and 18:36; it deserves special attention. See also Rev 11:15;12:10. Events in the kingdom of God proceed, not by human will or decision, but by God's will, in his way. The Gospel, received by faith, gives assurance that his will is gracious. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

born again.† The Greek also may mean "born from above" (see NIV text note). Both meanings are consistent with Jesus' redeeming work, and no doubt both meanings are implied here and at v. 7 (see note on 1:5). (CSB)

Born. Metaphor of salvation, favored by John. (TLSB)

again. Gk *anōthen*, "from above." Nicodemus either misunderstood Jesus' words, assuming human birth and effort, or began to play a word game by taking Jesus as literally as possible. But Jesus meant a spiritual rebirth that only God can effect from above. (TLSB)

Jesus use of grammar indicates there are no exceptions to what He is saying. (Buls)

Depending on the context, *anōthen* can signify "from above" (James 1:17), "from the beginning" (Lk 1:3), "for a long time" (Acts 26:5), or "again" (Gal4:9). Translators differ. Vulgate: *denuo*; Luther: *von neuem*; KJV, TEV, NIV, GWN: "again." NEB: "over again." Beck (1976), JB, NRSV: "from above." Note that "again" here does not denote mere repetition, as Nicodemus mistakenly understood (v5). The new birth is another kind of event, different from natural and sin-corrupted generation (v 6). It can only be "from God," by his grace alone (1:13; 6:44; 12:12–32; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

3:4 ENTER A SECOND TIME INTO HIS MOTHER'S WOMB – To Nicodemus, Jesus was talking in riddles. He could hardly mean that a person must undergo a second physical birth. Nicodemus seemed to have sensed a deeper meaning, but what was it? (PBC)

Though Nicodemus is not yet a Christian he is not ashamed to ask questions. "Man" means "human being." Nicodemus uses the Greek word for physical rebirth, showing

that is what he is thinking Jesus means. Jesus responds, in verse 5, with the same word. But Nicodemus uses "to be born" sequentially in verse 4, whereas Jesus inverts the order of the verbs but does not make them sequential. Both of Nicodemus' questions in verse 4 are preposterous. These questions show us how ridiculous conversion appears to human reason, left to its own resources. (Buls)

3:5-6 Jesus moves Nicodemus to see beyond earthly birth—even rebirth. He parallels v 3, substituting “born of water and the Spirit” for “born again/from above.” He wants Nicodemus to start seeing God as the author of salvation and starts developing his theme in what we might term “Third Article language.” Rebirth is birth from above; birth from above involves water and the Word. Flesh (*sarx*) generates fleshly things; the Spirit generates spiritual things. Therefore, no man can regenerate himself and become right before God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:5 *kingdom of God.* See note on Mt 3:2... (*the kingdom of heaven.* A phrase found only in Matthew, where it occurs 33 times. See Introduction: Recipients. Mark and Luke refer to “the kingdom of God,” a term Matthew uses only four times (see note on Mk 11:30). The kingdom of heaven is the rule of God and is both a present reality and a future hope. The idea of God’s kingdom is central to Jesus’ teaching and is mentioned 50 times in Matthew alone.) (CSB)

To be born of God, from on high, is to be born of the Holy Spirit through God’s means: “by water and the Spirit.” Luther writes, “Here Christ also speaks of the Holy Spirit and teaches us to regard Baptism as a spiritual, yes, a Spirit-filled water, in which the Holy Spirit is present and active; in fact, the entire Holy Trinity is there. And thus the person who has been baptized is said to be born anew” (Luther’s Works 22:283–86). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

born of water and the Spirit.† A phrase understood in various ways: 1. It means much the same as “born of the Spirit” (v. 8; cf. Tit 3:5). 2. Water refers to baptism—that of Jesus and his disciples (v. 22; 4:1–2). (CSB)

Again Jesus speaks of a universal truth, no exceptions. When He says "I tell you the truth" it denotes Jesus' divine authority, attributed to His human nature. (Buls)

"Born of water and the Spirit." We note first of all: the preposition is not repeated after "and." Therefore "water and Spirit" are one indivisible unit. The water in baptism is not a mere symbol. Secondly, the only baptism known at this point in Jesus' earthly life was that of the Baptist. The Holy Spirit was bestowed in John's baptism. There is only one baptism, Titus 3:5. Thirdly, the effects of John's baptism and the baptism after Pentecost were the same. (Buls)

What were the differences? First, John's baptism was for Israel only, see John 1:31. Secondly, John's baptism was given at the end of the Old Covenant. The apostolic baptism (Matthew 28:19) was given at the beginning of the New Covenant and is for all nations. Thirdly, there are those who say that the words "of water" are not important

because Jesus does not use them at the end of verse 8. Dropping the word "water and" in verse 5 is supported by no Greek Manuscript evidence. (Buls)

The commentaries will demonstrate the opposing views of the Reformed and Lutheran on the efficacy of water-baptism. (Buls)

Who can understand conversion? That's what Jesus will say in verse 8. (Buls)

This is an elaboration on v. 3. The preposition "of" (Greek *ek*) governs both nouns. "Water" and "Spirit" therefore belong together and point to Christian baptism. Augustine: "We are born spiritually then, and in spirit we are born by the word and sacrament" (NPNF1 7:82). "IN the first place, we take up Baptism, by which we are first received into the Christian Church" (LC IV 2). "Reason and free will are able to live an outwardly decent life to a certain extent. But only the Holy Spirit causes a person to be born anew (John 3:5) and to have inwardly another heart, mind, and natural desire" (FC SD II 26). (TLSB)

3:6 FLESH – On *sarx* in John see 1:13,14; 6:63; 8:15. Luther: "With reference to this, Christ says that the physical birth remains physical and produces physical life and nothing more, and that in and of himself man is nothing but flesh" (Luther's Works 22:268). cf. Mt 3:9. Keep in mind, though, that physical birth, too, is from God (Ps 139:13; Luther's explanation of the First Article in the Small Catechism). But sin and death, piggy-backing on natural generation as the deadly AIDS virus does on healthy cells, "spread to all men" (Rom 5:12; Ps 51:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

Human nature as it derives from natural, physical birth (cf 1:13). (TLSB)

Notice the beautiful symmetry in this compound sentence. "Gives birth to" is common to both parts. In Greek the perfect participles are used as nouns and denote existing state. (Buls)

The first sentence denotes physical birth, "of the flesh." The word "flesh" denotes fallen human nature, totally devoid of goodness or righteousness. The two occurrences of "flesh" are identical in meaning. (Buls)

"But" or "and likewise." (Buls)

Spirit is spirit. Spiritual life comes only by the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

The two occurrences of "spirit" are not identical in meaning. The first means "Holy Spirit" but the second means simply "spirit." (Buls)

Baptism, a means of grace, causes a person to be spiritual, forgiven, reconciled to God, a member of the *Una Sancta* through Jesus Christ. (Buls)

All of us alike come into this world outside of God's kingdom. Contrary to what some teach, infants begin their lives under sin's condemnation. As Job once said of our physical birth, "Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!" (14:4). And Paul's years later said, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature [flesh]" (Romans 7:18). We can only conclude with David, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). (PBC)

3:7-8 Jesus comes back to that sticking point of *anōthen*, pointing out that the work of the Holy Spirit in creating saving faith happens where God pleases, without the invitation or consent of man. These verses, together with vv 11–12, tie nicely with Article V of the Augsburg Confession, wherein we confess that "through the Word and Sacraments, . . . the Holy Ghost is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news" (AC V 2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:7-8 A birth never happens apart from other people. In physical birth there is always at least a mother giving birth and a child being born. Usually there is also a father or family, a community of people in town, at work, at church. There is also a nation of which the child is a citizen. The newborn belongs to the family, the community, and the nation into which he is born. In spiritual birth there is a congregation, the whole Body of Christ, and the triune God. The newly baptized belongs in that congregation, belongs to the Body of Christ, belongs to God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:7 *You*. See NIV text note. This assertion applies to everyone, not just Nicodemus. (CSB)

must. There are no exceptions. (CSB)

The participle beginning this verse in Greek introduces a prohibition. Again, Jesus is saying something that pertains at all times to all human beings. Note that Jesus speaks forthrightly but lovingly without the niceties of such words as "please." (Buls)

"You must" here and in verse 14, does not denote compulsion, but necessity in the sense that God wills conversion and also that man is totally unable to help himself. The "born" is passive in verse 6. But physical birth and conversion are passive experiences. "You" is plural, it refers not only to the Jews but also to all people. Here "again" means "again." (Buls)

This *dei* is not the "must" of moralistic, didactic admonition, but the Gospel-motivated "it is necessary" of Jn 9:4. There is no other way into the kingdom. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

born again. See note on v. 3. – Jesus made one imperceptible change in His words here. When He said, "You must be born again," He use the Greek plural "you." Clearly He was not speaking only about Nicodemus. "You" in the plural fits all people. (PBC) (CSB)

3:8 *wind*. No human being can understand, govern, or control the wind's movement. Jesus urged Nicodemus to discard his narrowly naturalistic view of human beings, as well as any presumption that they produce new birth. The new birth is an act of God (cf 1:13). (TLSB)

† The work of the Holy Spirit is beyond human comprehension (v. 9). He works as he pleases in the rebirth of believers. (CSB)

The first part of this verse is an axiom. All people understand it. We can observe the fact that there is wind, that it blows and that it makes a sound. This is inherent knowledge. (Buls)

Jesus is pointedly telling Nicodemus: "You're an educated man but cannot explain this physical phenomenon." Of course, it's true of all men, even the most educated meteorologist. They observe the movements of clouds and winds but what Jesus says here is still true and will be so until the end of time. (Buls)

"In the same way." In what same way? Grammar requires that we say that Jesus is not speaking on the Holy Spirit himself, but the *person* who is born of the Spirit. Regeneration yields observable evidence. It shows in the life of the converted person. But regeneration itself is a deep mystery. It is God's work in its entirety, including faith. (Buls)

Here the Reformed exegetes make a point that "water" is omitted here in some manuscripts. But there is more manuscript evidence for including "water" than for eliminating it. They say it is only the Spirit that is important. In this way the Reformed attempt to deny that baptism is a true means of grace. Compare what Luther says in the Small Catechism. (Buls)

Like *anōthen* (v 3) and many other words in John, *pneuma* is capable of different meanings in different contexts. Here it refers first to "wind," then to "the Spirit." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

We can understand the working of God's Spirit as little as we can predict the wind blowing on us. We know when it blows, and it affects us. But we can't see it. We can't be certain when or from what angle it will come. (PBC)

3:9-13 Jesus makes the point that one cannot teach what one does not know. Jesus knows because of what he has seen. His worldview is not confined to an earthly point of view. His worldview is from the heavenly point of view, which sees the kingdom of God for what it is and knows how we can enter it. His word is to be trusted. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:9 HOW CAN THIS BE? – The reason that natural man cannot comprehend this is answered in 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot

understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

Nicodemus' question truly reveals his spiritual ignorance, but let us not be fast to condemn him. Must we not admit that we often ask the same and similar questions? Nicodemus was a Pharisee, but a friendly and honest one. But friendliness and honesty cannot convert anyone. (Buls)

The old expression “You can teach them but you can't learn them” comes to mind here. Stanza 2 of the hymn “These Things Did Thomas Count as Real” (LSB 472) parallels the situation the Lord faces with Nicodemus, whose own skepticism blinds him to the truth of Jesus' words. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

This new query reveals not only that Nicodemus has as yet experienced no effect of the Spirit in his own heart, but likewise that he has no understanding concerning the many passages in Scripture which deal with is matter. The deplorable fault in Nicodemus was that he must satisfy his reason in all things and he desires an answer to every “why.” (Yilvisaker)

3:10 Nicodemus professed to know—surprisingly—what he did not grasp. (TLSB)

TEACHER – Same word used for teacher in verse 2. – Jesus was increasingly emphatic as He responded to Nicodemus' bewilderment and skepticism. In effect, Jesus said, “Nicodemus, you ought to be able to grasp this. A lot of what you have learned in Scripture points to this. I am telling it to you straight. I am not making this up. I bring it to you from heaven, from God Himself. Believe Me, this is the way it really is!” (LL)

The words imply that Nicodemus was a well known teacher. These words are not to be taken as a reproach, or as irony, but rather as an expression of sincere sadness over this sorrowful state of ignorance. (Buls)

Kretzmann: The subject of regeneration is treated so often in the Psalms and in the visions of the prophets that a teacher of the people should have been thoroughly familiar with its full import. See Psalm 51:12; Ezekiel 11:19. (Buls)

Here the dialog ends. Verses 11-21 are discourse, a monolog spoken by Jesus. (Buls)

Jesus takes Nicodemus to task for presuming to teach Israel without rightly knowing Israel's God. While not the focal point of this particular outline, pastors and teachers in Christ's Church do well to remember that our preaching and teaching begin and end in the Word of God, especially in the Gospel of his Son. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Definite article “the” suggests that Nicodemus was a recognized teacher among his contemporaries. (TLSB)

Hebrews 5:12, “In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!”

3:11-12 Jesus then returns to the heart of his message. Evidently Nicodemus has heard the testimony and holds it intellectually while denying it spiritually. Perhaps he is like many today who treat Jesus as a great moral teacher but cannot release themselves from attempts to merit favor and earn righteousness through works. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

This is also a good time to connect the verbal Gospel with the Sacraments. Christ takes “earthly things”—water, bread, wine, and flesh and blood people—and makes them instruments and means of his grace. He blesses his Church with the “heavenly things” through the voice of Holy Absolution, the water of Holy Baptism, and the bread and wine of Holy Communion. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:11 *we*. The plural associates others, perhaps the disciples, with Jesus. The words are true of Christians as well as of Christ. (CSB)

Again a divine asseveration as in verses 3 and 5. Nicodemus began by saying "we know." Now Jesus begins His monolog with "we know." Who are "we?" Jesus and John the Baptist? Jesus and the Holy Spirit? "We" might be a literary plural, which means Jesus is speaking only of Himself. It might be Jesus and the Father. (Buls)

In any case, they know and have seen. And so they speak and give testimony. (Buls)

"You people" is the Covenant people of God. (Buls)

Here we have an excellent example of personal evangelism. Jesus is courteous but does not soften the stark reality of Nicodemus' ignorance. (Buls)

In the pronoun “we” Jesus very likely includes the circle of his disciples (down to the present), whom he has drawn to himself and who affirm his testimony. It could also refer to the Trinity, since the Father (Jn 8:18) and the Spirit (Jn 16:5–16) also testify to Christ. “You” (plural in Greek) includes all who, having heard Christ’s words, stand outside the circle of faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

Christ speaks for the OT prophets (He is “the Prophet”; cf.4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17) and the new Christian community, the Church. Nicodemus and the entire community he represented were blind to this testimony. (TLSB)

testimony. See note on 1:7. (CSB)

3:12 SPOKEN TO YOU OF EARTHLY THINGS – Jesus taught Nicodemus and his peers through illustrations, parables, and signs of God’s “earthly things,” e.g. water,

wind, natural birth. Yet even though they were “teachers of Israel,” they did not believe. Would they then believe if He told them heavenly truth in heaven’s own language. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

Nicodemus struggled to understand the need for spiritual birth on earth. How then would he ever understand the heavenly nature and powers behind such a spiritual birth produced by the Holy Spirit? Jesus’ sayings were often enigmatic to His hearers. (TLSB)

This verse is a compound-complex sentence made up of two conditional sentences, the first a fact condition and the second, in the form of the question, future more vivid. The whole verse is really a lesser to greater argument. In the first conditional sentence the protasis is a past tense and the apodosis present tense. In the second conditional sentence both verbs are future. (Buls)

What is meant by "earthly" and "heavenly" things? (Buls)

Ylvisaker: Regeneration takes place on this earth in the hearts of men, even though it is a creative act of God. With the heavenly things He alludes to the atonement, the act resolved upon in the bosom of the heavenly and eternal Love, and executed on the earth, not IN us, but FOR us who are of the earth, by the humiliated and exalted Son of Man, who is in heaven. (Buls)

Fahling: The spiritual regeneration, while a wonderful work of God, yet is an earthly things in this respect, that it takes place on earth, in the hearts of men . . . What if Christ will touch upon things wholly in the unseen? . . . He speaks of the mysteries concerning His own person and of the gracious counsel and purposes of God. (Buls)

Kretzmann: What would be the result if Christ should begin to teach of matters not open to human observation and experience, things wholly in the unseen, the essence and purposes of God? (Buls)

3:13-15 The Son of Man, the royal king who receives heaven’s glory from the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:13–14, is to be “exalted and lifted up” (Is 52:13–53:12), but on a cross! This event was typified by Moses’ bronze serpent and its healing effects (Num 21:4–9). “Must,” as in v 7, states that this is God’s Gospel way of salvation, and there is no other. Note the frequency (and importance) of the verb “believe” in the text: 3:12,15,16,18. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

3:13 *the Son of Man*. Jesus’ favorite self-designation (see notes on Mk 8:31; Lk 6:5; 19:10). (CSB)

Luther: “[Jesus] calls Himself the Son of Man who has His existence both on earth and in heaven [simultaneously]” (AE 22:321). (TLSB)

In the next two verses, Jesus emphasizes a vertical understanding of *anōthen* in two different contexts. He first professes that he is “from above,” since he “descended from heaven.” Yet in the divine economy of the Trinity, the Son is in constant ascension to his Father while, as the Word made flesh, his prayers continually ascend on high. This verse may then remind the Gospel’s reader of Jesus’ earlier words to Nathanael, “You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (1:51). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Since Nicodemus has already praised Jesus for the God-given signs he does (v 2), the Lord appears to be urging him to “connect the dots” and realize that as these signs have their source from above, so also the birth of which he speaks comes from above. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Jesus had the knowledge and authority to tell Nicodemus of heavenly things because He alone came from heaven. He was the Word, who was with God when the plan of salvation was determined. And He had become a perfect human being, the Son of Man, to execute the plan. (PBC)

The first example of heavenly things is found in verse 13. The second example begins in verse 14. Among human beings there is only one human who is heavenly and that is Jesus. (Buls)

"The One who is in heaven" is a variant reading, not found in all the manuscripts. Lutheran exegetes are unanimous in including the words. Lutherans say: "The amazing thing is that the incarnate Christ is in heaven also according to His human nature." The Reformed say: "His divine nature is in heaven, but only His human nature can be on earth in the state of humiliation." Lutherans insist that in the state of exaltation Jesus' human nature is everywhere. The Reformed deny this. We are dealing with a fundamental difference in theology here. Of our translations, only KJV and NKJV include these words. (Buls)

For two reasons we must include these words: (Buls)

1. A difficult reading would hardly have been added;
2. The diversity of variant readings shows an attempt to clarify these fathomless words.

While Jesus was on earth He could say: "I came from heaven and am in heaven." (Buls)

3:14-21 Jesus is sharing these words with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council. Nicodemus approaches Jesus at night, most likely for fear of being seen talking with the one he calls “Rabbi.” He recognizes that Jesus is the one who has come from God because of the miraculous signs he is doing. Jesus shares with Nicodemus that he must be born again through water and the Spirit. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

It is often observed that John's description of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus is a kind of theology in a circle—a coming down, followed by an upward return to the Father. Raymond Brown makes the fascinating observation that there are three statements concerning the lifting up of the Son of Man in John's Gospel and that these correspond to the three Passion predictions in the Synoptics. Further, says Brown, “‘being lifted up’ refers to one continuous action of ascent” that embraces the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension (*The Gospel According to John* [Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1966], 146). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

The text (especially v 16) is so well-known that we tend to forget the immediate context. Jesus is in dialogue with a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a well-intentioned but theologically inadequate seeker for whom the love of God must have been an astonishing surprise. Max Lucado (*He Still Moves Stones* [Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993], 126–32) does a masterful job capturing the impact the Gospel of God's love must have made on this legalist. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:14-15 Refers to the Old Testament Reading from Num 21:4–9. Throughout the Gospels, “lifted up” is used as a metaphor for crucifixion. It does not mean “lifted up in praise,” as is often thought in our day. Our praise is not what draws persons to Christ. It is his perfect sacrifice for our sins. Our response is then praise. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

While most translations begin a new sentence, the *kai* at the beginning certainly allows us to treat vv 13–15 as one complete thought: the Son of Man came down from heaven in order to be lifted up above the heads of sinful men and thereby to bring salvation to mankind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Again, human effort is completely discounted. The bronze serpent sat in Israel's encampment for all to see. No one cured himself of his snakebite; God effected the cure. So also, when we look upon the One who was pierced (cf. Jn 19:37), who has now ascended into heaven, we are healed of sin-sickness and eternal death. By “looking to Jesus” (Heb 12:2), we are blessed with eternal life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

From the heavenly point of view, the deliverance from snakes in the wilderness (Num 21:4–9) was not merely for the benefit of the people at that time. As wonderful as the miracle was for the individual people who recovered from snakebites, it was also a miracle that kept the people of Israel alive. Since that was the nation from which Jesus would be born, the salvation of the world depended on Israel staying alive. In addition, it has become a lasting picture of God's deliverance for all people from *the* serpent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:14 JUST AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SNAKE IN THE DESERT – Jesus draws a comparison between the lifted up bronze serpent and the lifted up Son of Man. This

comparison is developed throughout the pericope. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

In Num 21:4–9, the Israelites complained about their redemption from Egypt and the “miserable food” God supplied them from heaven. (Similarly, in Jn 6:25–71 many complained when the redeeming Christ said he would feed them with the real food of his body and blood, given for the life of the world.) God sent deadly serpents which bit the children of Israel, and many died (cf. 1 Cor 11:30). This was a physical manifestation of the old spiritual plague brought by Satan, “that ancient serpent” (Rev 20:2). The serpents brought death by biting their victims and injecting poison. Even so, the serpentine devil brought death to Adam and Eve, and the entire human race, by deceiving them and injecting the poison of original sin (Genesis 3). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

According to God’s command and promise, however, Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. Note the play on the similar Hebrew words *nechash-nechushet* “snake of bronze” in Num 21: 9, leading to its name *nechushtan* “Nehushtan” in 2 Kings 18:4 (which says the serpent was preserved and revered as a “holy relic” until godly King Hezekiah ended the idolatry about 800 years later). All those who were bitten and looked up at it lived. The serpent is a type of the Son of Man; Christ is similar, but greater, in the following ways: (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The lifted-up serpent looked like a deadly serpent, but was without poison. The lifted-up Son of Man looked like a sinner, but was only in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8:3); he was crucified as a criminal, but was without sin (Is 53:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The bronze serpent was lifted up to make sport of the deadly serpents, as if it were a slain trophy. The Son was lifted up to make a public spectacle of the enemy, as if the defeated devil were on the cross (Col 2:15 NIV, KJV; cf. RSV footnote). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

God made the elevated bronze serpent the source of life (Num 21:8). The elevated Son of Man is God’s source of eternal life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Whoever looked up to the bronze snake was healed. They did not need to do any good works first, only behold the “savior” God provided, and God fulfilled his objective promise. Likewise, “everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life” (Jn 6:40). No good works are necessary first (Epistle Lesson). God fulfills his objective promise in Christ without any merit on our part. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

All who looked to the serpent were healed. God’s promise was for the entire people. Similarly, but in a greater way, God’s salvation in Christ is for the entire world, Jew and

Gentile alike. Note the emphatic cal “all” in Num 21:8 (NIV: “anyone”), and pas, “all,” in Jn 3:15, 16. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The lifting up of the Son refers not only to his crucifixion, but also to his resurrection and exaltation to glory in heaven. The verb hupsoō, “lift up,” is also in the “exalted” of Phil 2:9. Jesus speaks of the hour of his crucifixion as the hour of his glorification in John 17. cf. anabebēken, “gone up,” in Jn 3:13, which suggests that the lifting up of Christ on the cross is also his exaltation back to heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

To help Nicodemus link Christ with the Scripture he already knew. It also point to the fact that there is only way to be saved. The serpent is a type of the Son of Man; Christ is similar, but greater, in the flowing ways: (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

Some versions begin a new section at this point, others that a new section begins at verse 16. In either case they attribute these words (from here to verse 21) to the Evangelist John. But we note that Jesus is still speaking in verses 16 and 17. (Buls)

Jesus is explaining. Verse 12 denotes what is observable: the results of regeneration. Verse 13 denotes what is not observable: the eternal counsel of God for man and the marvel of the person of the incarnate Christ. Verse 14 introduces the second unobservable truth: The salvation of mankind. Verses 15 to 21 are like the opening of the flower with beautiful petals. Jesus moves from the unobservable to the observable in verse 21, the good works of a Christian. In other words, Jesus is the speaker to the end of verse 21. (Buls)

Back to verse 14. (Buls)

Kretzmann: There are three points of similarity between type and antitype in this story. The brazen serpent of Moses had the form and appearance of the poisonous reptile after which it was modeled, just as Jesus was revealed in the form of our sinful flesh, had the needs and ways of an ordinary human being, was finally punished as a criminal. Just as the brazen serpent, however, had no poison, was altogether harmless, so Jesus, though in appearance like unto sinful men, was without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled. A strange curse was resting upon Him, He hung upon the cross. And finally, just as he that looked at the brazen serpent in faith remained alive, so also every sinner that has been poisoned by sin in its various forms, but now looks up to Jesus the Savior, in simple, trusting faith, shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Buls)

"Must be" is impersonal and does not denote compulsion or fate. The necessity is caused by the will of God and the dire and awful condition of mankind. (Buls)

"Lifted up" are correlative adverbs of manner, indicating a precise comparison. What they have in common is the verb "lift." The Old Testament account is found at Numbers

21:8ff. This verse reminds us immediately of John 12:32-34 where the same verb is found. (Buls)

Bengel: Where there was no other remedy. (Buls)

True. What he is implying is that there is no remedy except in the uplifted Son of man. The impersonal verb does not denote compulsion or fate but the necessary willing obedience of the Son of man. For it was for this purpose that He became incarnate. Lenski insists that the point of comparison should not be pressed beyond the idea of "being lifted up." After due consideration we prefer the interpretation of Kretzmann: (Buls)

The act of Moses in the wilderness, in erecting the brazen serpent before the eyes of the stricken people, was typical, symbolical, Numbers 21: 1-9. . . Jesus is the antitype of the brazen serpent. . . There are three points of similarity between type and antitype in this story. 1) The brazen serpent of Moses had the form and appearance of the poisonous reptiles after which it was modeled, just as Jesus was revealed in the form of our sinful flesh, had the needs and ways of an ordinary human being, was finally punished as a criminal; 2) Just as the brazen serpent, however, had no poison, was altogether harmless, so Jesus, though in appearance like unto sinful men, was without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled. A strange curse was resting upon Him, He hung upon the cross; 3) And finally, just as he that looked at the brazen serpent in faith remained alive, so also every sinner that has been poisoned by sin in its various forms, but now looks up to Jesus the Savior, in simple, trusting faith, shall not perish, shall not be punished with everlasting destruction, but have eternal life. (Buls)

Hendriksen has a good exposition of type and anti type at this point, but ruins it completely when he adds:

Though Christ is lifted up in the sight of all, he does not save all. (Buls)

He believes in a limited atonement and his interpretations are very often synergistic. More on this later. (Buls)

Lenski: The Book of Wisdom 16:6 calls this serpent the symbol of salvation, and in church decorations it is constantly used to picture Jesus. (Buls)

the Son of Man must be lifted up. See notes on 12:31–32. (CSB)

“Lifted up” (*hupsōsen*) is an obvious reference to the story of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21. It may also suggest the glorification of the Suffering Servant in Is 52:13: “He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.” Later in John’s Gospel (12:32–33), Jesus uses this word to signal the kind of death he was to die. And the same word is used again in Acts 2:33 and 5:31 as a reference to the ascension of our Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:15-16 Jesus makes clear that salvation is a gift, for the Son of God is himself a gift that God gave. No restrictions are placed upon the recipients, for “whoever believes” lives. The Son of God come down at Christmas finally fulfilled his mission on Good Friday. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Luther here emphasizes the personal union in Christ. He notes that while earlier Jesus spoke of the Son of Man, he now shows that “God’s Son and Mary’s Son is only one Person. He appropriates both natures for the work of salvation and redemption from eternal death” (LW 22:351). It is not a mere man who saves us, nor is it God exercising his unbridled power. Instead, the God-man Jesus Christ conquers through surrender and saves his people from sin, death, and devil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:15 EVERYONE – All the "that" clauses in this section (15,16,17,20,21) denote purpose. In this instance the word "that" hangs on "eternal life." By the way, the passive infinitive denotes what was done to Jesus, what He suffered on the cross. There is no such thing as faith in Christ unless it be in the crucified Christ. Compare Galatians 2:20. The Son of God loved me by giving Himself in my stead. That is the only way in which the love of God is revealed to us. (Buls)

That word "everyone" does not denote limitation but open invitation. Just as the serpent was lifted up for all on the occasion, so Jesus was lifted up for all. Furthermore, "who believes" does not mean that man must do something first to make the atonement an actuality but rather that God Himself causes the hearers to believe in what has already been done for all. (Buls)

believes. See note on 1:7. (CSB)

That is the whole point of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in verses 1-10. Faith in Christ is always the God-given *modus* of salvation, not the man-generated *causa* of salvation. (Buls)

Note that both participle and verb, are in the present tense. Being in possession of life eternal is a present reality for the believer. For him there is no such thing as judgment. (Buls)

The promise belongs to everyone who believes. It is universal. No one who believes is excluded. At the same time the promise belongs to each one who believes. It is personal. God knows our names, and each of us has eternal life. (PBC)

eternal life. An infinitely high quality of life in living fellowship with God—both now and forever. (CSB)

Bengel: The cross is the ladder to heaven. Eternal death, because of the poison of sin. Eternal life, by regeneration and faith. This mention of eternal life is made at the earliest

opportunity in each instance in the discourses of the Savior, and occurs in this passage first (in the Gospel of John). (Buls)

Note that Bengel considered the words "should not perish" textual. They are found in the Koine text and therefore in KJV and NKJV. This difference should not be passed over lightly. By the way, the term "everlasting life" occurs seventeen times in the Gospel of John and six times in 1 John. (Buls)

The dying Israelites who looked at the bronze serpent lived. Now everyone who looks in faith at the Son of Man will live forever. The typology and the textual variants support taking the words "in him" with "believes," not "have," though both make sense. Echēi, "have," is present subjunctive, indicating that the believer has eternal life both now, in the midst of deadly snakes, and forever in heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

"so that" (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this "lifting up" of the Son of Man is that every believer may not "perish" (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have "life eternal." In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins "believing" with "life." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:1–15 Nicodemus, though "the teacher of Israel," shows that he cannot comprehend the Spirit's miraculous work of new birth through Baptism. Human reason, darkened by sin, cannot accept that God can grant spiritual rebirth through ordinary water used with His Word. But such a great promise has come from none other than the Son of Man, lifted up on the cross for our salvation!

- O Holy Spirit, I praise You that You have given me new birth to a living hope through Christ's resurrection. Amen. (TLSB)

3:16-17 V 16 is referred to by many Christians as the Gospel in a nutshell. Since Baptism is a Means of Grace that conveys the gifts of the Gospel, and since the water of Baptism is sometimes administered by way of a scallop shell, Baptism might be referred to as the Gospel in a scallop shell. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:16 *God so loved the world.* The great truth that motivated God's plan of salvation (cf. 1Jn 4:9–10). (CSB)

Very likely the best known verse in the Bible. Verses 16-18 explain verses 14-15.(Buls)

"World" is the Greek word "kosmos." It must denote all human beings. Not just people who have been chosen, or "elected" to believe. (Buls)

"So that" denotes actual result. (Buls)

"One and only" is translated in KJV, NASB, AAT and NKJV as "only-begotten." Others translate it "only" in the sense of unique. The Nicene Creed and our Lutheran fathers understood this word in the sense of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. (Buls)

The verse clearly shows that Jesus is God's gift to all human beings of all time. (Buls)

The love referred to is the aorist of agape; the "one and only" notes a uniqueness, only one of its kind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

Greek agapao, used repeatedly in John; God's sacrificial and faithful love for the entire world alienated from God, that is, all humankind. (TLSB)

God values, cherishes, and esteems mankind on the basis of God's own being; from eternity he is love (1 In 4:8). He loved the whole world, all people (vv 17–18 preclude a limited love or atonement). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Perhaps the best-known verse in the Bible. In verse 14 "so" meant "thus" in the sense of "in the same way." But here in verse 16 it means "to such an extent." "For" is an explanatory particle, used here to elucidate verses 14-15 further. This example is the clearest in the New Testament as to what God's love means. It does not say that God "liked" the world. He did not. But He loved the whole world in all its misery and sin, loved it to redeem it. (Buls)

"The world" must mean the entire world of people. The Reformed limit it to the elect from every nation. Compare Lenski and Hendriksen on this point. Parallel passages here are John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 5:12-21. More could be mentioned but these are sufficient. (Buls)

Again and again the Scriptures stress the fact that IN CHRIST, in His suffering, death and resurrection, the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, redemption, justification, eternal salvation FOR ALL MEN is an accomplished fact. Because of their twin false teaching of a limited atonement and synergism, the Reformed (and those like them) teach that forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, justification are merely potential, merely making it possible for all to be saved. Read Article IV of the *Apology* and Article II of the *Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration)* where again and again reconciliation, justification, forgiveness, redemption are used synonymously and interchangeably as accomplished facts for all men, posited in the means of grace for all. (Buls)

Even some Lutherans claim that although John 3:16 is universal, 2 Corinthians 5:19 and Romans 4:25 are merely potential. That won't do. To deny the universality of the justification of all men, in Christ, at Romans 4:25 or the universality of reconciliation of all men, in Christ, at 2 Corinthians 5:19, means to deny the universal atonement *per se*. (Buls)

Back to verse 16: "so that" with the indicative, to denote actual result, is found only here and at Galatians 2:13. (It can be used with the infinitive to denote actual result). Note

that "so much-so that" are correlative. The first "His" is relational denoting the divinity of Jesus. "One and only" makes that even clearer. KJV, NKJV, NASB, and AAT (2nd ed.) translate "only-begotten" denoting the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. All other translations have "only" which is surely wrong. (Buls)

By the way, some commentators feel that verses 14-21 are the words of the Evangelist not those of Jesus, for only in this passage Jesus calls Himself by this term. But if Jesus gave the word John at 1:18, why couldn't He use it of Himself? It is powerful in the mouth of Jesus. He knew that He proceeded from all eternity from the Father and yet He was willing to become man to die for us. (Buls)

world. All people on earth—or perhaps all creation (see note on 1:9). (CSB)

kosmos – This refers to everything in the world but in this case especially that portion of the population that is hostile to the God. This word is used 75 times in John.

that he gave. See Isa 9:6. (CSB)

God gives, gives, gives. That's the story of the Gospel. "That" introduces another purpose clause, repeating and amplifying the one in verse 15. There it was stressed from the point of view of the Father sending and giving His eternal Son. "Whoever believes," not restrictive but invitational, for all. "Not perish," death and destruction, for the believer, are gone, abolished. For him death is not dying but the beginning of eternal life. "But" following a negative is very strong: "quite to the contrary." We know nothing quite so antithetical as eternal death and eternal life. (Buls)

God not only sent His Son, but also offered Him to the world. He became our atoning sacrifice. (TLSB)

This verse brings together several of John's most important and frequent theological words: *theos*, "God," *huios*, "Son," *monogenēs*, "only-begotten," *agapaō*, "love" (about 40 occurrences, including the noun *agapē*), *kosmos*, "world" (75), *pisteuō*, "believe" (90), and *zōē* "life" (35, of which 17 are with *aiōnios*, "eternal"). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

The conjunction *hōste* (NIV: "that") followed by the indicative emphasizes that the result actually happened (M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, pp. 121–22, para. 350). The Father actually gave up his Son to death, only to receive him back in glory, fulfilling the typology of Abraham, a human father who also did not spare his only son and received him back alive (Gen 22:16; cf. Rom 8:32). The adjective *monogenēs* may mean "one and only, unique," or "only-begotten" (see *Holy Bible: New Testament—New Evangelical Translation*, 2d ed. [Cleveland, NET Publishing, 1992] appendix 2. c. 6., pp. 542–44). The *hina* clause indicates purpose: God sacrificed his Son in order to save. This reasserts the bronze serpent typology of vv 14–15. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

“so that” (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this “lifting up” of the Son of Man is that every believer may not “perish” (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have “life eternal.” In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins “believing” with “life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

God’s love brought results. He offered the ultimate sacrifice for the world He loved. (PBC)

one and only Son. See 1:14, 18; cf. Ge 22:2, 16; Ro 8:32. Although believers are also called “sons of God” (2Co 6:18; Rev 21:7), Jesus is uniquely God’s Son. (CSB)

monogene - Sole or only born. – auios A child or son. In this case the son was not adopted like we are.

BELIEVES – pisteuo - To have faith in God. Found 90 times in John.

“Whoever believes in (the Son of God, be it with a strong or with a weak faith,) may have eternal life (John 3:15) Worthiness does not depend on the greatness or smallness, the weakness or strength of faith. Instead, it depends on Christ’s merit” (FC SD VII 70-71). Luther: “Look at the words, I beseech you, to determine how and of whom He is speaking... No one is here excluded. God’s Son was given for all. All should believe, and all who do believe should not perish, etc. Take hold of your own nose, I beseech you, to determine whether you are not a human being (that is, part of the world) and like any other man, (you) belong to the number of those comprised in the word “all” (WLS 1859). (TLSB)

NOT PERISH – apollumi To be destroyed, in this case eternally. To die.

Eternal separation from God. Cf. Is. 66:24; Mk. 9:48. “Out of His immense goodness and mercy, God provides for the public preaching of His divine eternal Law and His wonderful plan for our redemption, that of the holy, only saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

ETERNAL – Adjectives like perpetual, for ever, everlasting are used to describe eternal.

LIFE – Life like a lifetime.

3:17-18 Jesus was sent to earth as an authoritative representative of the Father. A contrast should be noted between the judging/condemning and the saving act of his mission of salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

3:17 DID NOT - "so that" (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this "lifting up" of the Son of Man is that every believer may not "perish" (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have "life eternal." In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins "believing" with "life." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

As noted above, verses 14-17 tell us what Christ accomplished for us. This verse is the last in this section. "For" is explanatory, emphatically elucidating verse 16. It tells us why God DID NOT and why He DID send His Son. Mankind has a bad conscience because of sinfulness and sin. According to his flesh he is always listening to Satan who pictures God as enemy, not as friend. Even Christians, insofar as they still have a flesh, all too often think of God as enemy and judge rather than as Savior and Friend in Christ. (Buls)

Jesus says: "God did NOT send His Son into the world in order to judge (condemn) the world, but, quite to the contrary, in order through Him (Christ) the world be saved." Compare John 12:47 and then His words to His enemies at 5:34. (Buls)

SEND SON – apostello The one who was set apart and sent specifically for this cause.

JUDGE – krino Someone who makes a decision and judges right from wrong. The trial in our case left to defend ourselves would result in being condemned, punished and sentenced to eternal damnation.

The Church of Rome, because of its works righteousness, was constantly presenting God as Judge. Over and over Luther said that the Gospel presents God as Savior, not as Judge. Compare Galatians 4:4.5 and Galatians 3:13.14. The "so that" clauses in Galatians 4:5 and 3:14 (two sets of them) respectively denote what we call objective and subjective justification. In Christ, the blessing of Abraham (justification) became effective for all nations. Christ redeemed all the condemned, all human beings. And in Galatians 4:5 we are told that Christ came to redeem the condemned, all human beings. The Gospel portrays Christ as Savior, not as Judge. (Buls)

We know that Christ will return in judgment, but at this time, Jesus doesn't mention God's alien work of condemning and crushing through the Law. Instead, he focuses completely on the unmerited favor God shows the world. While not explicit in this verse, *anōthen* remains implicit, for God sent Jesus from above into his creation, "in order that the world might be saved through him." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

SAVE – The following adjectives say it well: Deliver, protect, heal, preserve or make whole.

"Sent with a commission." Note that "all people -- the world" is used thrice in this verse: to denote Christ's incarnation, becoming a man, for all; again, for all people; and again, all people. Christ came to condemn no one, not even Judas. That should never be forgotten. Mix no Law into the Gospel. (Buls)

The two *hina* clauses show purpose from two different perspectives. In the first, the active voice asserts that God's purpose was not to condemn. In the second, John goes against the natural flow of language and switches to the passive *sōthēi*, "be saved," to emphasize the Son as the agent who does not carry out his saving work independently of the Father, but humbly serves the Father's purpose. The NIV obliterates the difference between the two *hina* clauses; the KJV, NKJV, RSV and NET have it right. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Another explanation. The obvious reason for which this verse is added is that people (even Christians) think of God merely as a judge. This verse has two more purpose clauses. The first tells us why God did NOT send His Son, and the second tells us why He DID send Him. Christians need to listen to this verse. Christians, too, often slip into the false idea that Jesus is merely a Judge. (Buls)

Note that "world" occurs three times in this verse. The first instance, in a prepositional phrase, denotes the incarnation. The second and third instances denote all mankind. (Buls)

By the way, if "kosmos" (according to the Reformed theology) in verse 16 means only the elect, the conclusion of verse 17 is difficult to understand. "Kosmos" simply must mean "all people." (Buls)

Note: Pentecost I is the same day as Trinity Sunday. John 3:1-17 clearly speaks of the Trinity. The Triune God is the saving God. One cannot be saved without faith in the Trinity. It is suggested that on this day the Athanasian Creed be used rather than the Apostles' or Nicene Creed because the Athanasian Creed is so very clear on the doctrine of the Trinity. Many sects deny the Trinity. They are not Christian. Therefore, we must stress the Trinity in our teaching and preaching. (Buls)