

## THE HOLISTIC *PISTIS* AND ABRAHAM'S FAITH (GALATIANS 3)

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Paul the Apostle inherited his faith terminology from his predecessors and set it forward from his own perspective. In the final analysis, he derived from the Hebrews (Εβραῖοι) in the earliest Jerusalem church two fundamental ideas.<sup>1</sup> (1) The first is the Greek word πίστις used technically in the absolute state (Acts 3:16; 6:7; Gal 1:23; 3:2, 5, 7-9, 11-12, 14, 23-26; 5:5, 6; 6:10; Rom 1:5, 17; 3:25, 27-31; etc.). It had become a term or name to refer to God's eschatological economy to save human beings that has now been developed in the coming and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. This economy involves God himself, his Son Christ Jesus, Christ's gospel preached by his missionaries, believers living in history or the repeated occurrences of faith in Christ and God created by the word of the gospel in them, and the Spirit bestowed on them. (2) The other is the notion of the faithfulness of Christ's name (Acts 3:16), which led to the Pauline idiom πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ and others in similar forms (Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16, 16, 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9). It means the *faithfulness of Jesus Christ toward humanity* in the sense of his being steadfast, truthful, and trustworthy as God's Christ. Since this economy of God takes the form of a holistic eschatological faith phenomenon, we are required to grasp the meanings of the noun πίστις, the verb πιστεύω, the adjective πιστός, and the idiom πίστις Χριστοῦ, which are used in various forms in his letters, from a holistic perspective. The aim of this paper, which is a sequel to my previous essays,<sup>2</sup> is to shed light on the foundational nature of Abraham's faith discussed in Chapter 3 of Galatians, thereby making a case for the value of a holistic understanding of the Pauline pistis.

### I. *Paul's Purpose in Galatians 3*

In Galatians 1:23, Paul employs the term πίστις from the religious vocabulary of "the churches of Judea that are in Christ" (v. 22). The term is used in the absolute state as a *name*

<sup>1</sup> Shuji Ota, "Pistis in Acts as Background of Paul's Faith Terminology," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences* 56 (2015) 1-12. The genitive case in the πίστις Χριστοῦ formulation has recently been construed as "Christ's own faith or faithfulness to God" by an increasing number of scholars in the English-speaking world. Their theories ("subjective interpretation A" in my term) differ from mine ("subjective interpretation B"), which can be applied even to such a difficult verse as Acts 3:16. My version may be classified as a so-called "third view" in the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate, but it differs from any previous attempt to "move beyond the subjective-objective dichotomy" by one interpretation or another of the Greek genitive itself. Rather, I maintain both that the πίστις in the absolute state (typically in Gal 1:23; 3:23-26) has an "eschatological-event" nature, and that the genitive case in question is beyond doubt "subjective" (the *faithfulness of Jesus Christ toward humanity*). For the "third view," see Benjamin Schliesser, "'Christ-Faith' as an Eschatological Event (Galatians 3.23-26): A 'Third View' on Πίστις Χριστοῦ," *JSNT* 38 (2016) 277-300; and Preston Sprinkle, "Πίστις Χριστοῦ as an Eschatological Event," in Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle (eds.), *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010) 165-84.

<sup>2</sup> Shuji Ota, "Absolute Use of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ and ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ in Paul," *AJBI* 23 (1997) 64-82; "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ: Christ's Faithfulness to Whom?," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences* 55 (2014) 15-26; and "Pistis in Acts as Background of Paul's Faith Terminology."

to refer to God's eschatological economy to save human beings through Jesus Christ, the *Pistis*. This terminology originated from the preaching activities, in the earliest days of the Jerusalem church, of the Hebrews led by Peter and the other Apostles, and shortly thereafter it was copied by the leaders of the Hellenists (Act 6:1ff.). Inheriting this term with its initial meaning and usage, Paul uses it to explain the fundamentals of the gospel to his readers in the Galatian churches (Gal 1:2).

Paul's direct quotation of a report among the Judean churches on Paul's conversion (Gal 1:23) is certainly purposeful in his discussions in this letter. Quoting the term πίστις to refer to God's eschatological saving economy, Paul lays the foundations for explaining the "truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:5, 14), that is, the truth that "those [who are] of the *Pistis*, these are the sons of Abraham" (3:7, οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, οὗτοι υἱοὶ εἰσὶν Ἀβραάμ. See also 3:8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 24, 26; 5:5). The instances of πίστις in these verses cannot be taken as meaning "human faith" or "Christ's faith." Paul uses the term as having the same meaning as that in Galatians 1:23. The Greek proposition ἐκ denotes origin, without any connotation of separation in this case. So we can paraphrase Galatians 3:7 thus: "Those who have their origin of life in God's saving economy, the *Pistis*, are the children of Abraham." Needless to say, such people have faith in God and Jesus Christ, but personal faith in the sense of "believing" is not the primary meaning of the Pauline phrase ἐκ πίστεως (*contra* the NRSV). Rather, it has holistic force; those who believe by hearing the gospel message have indeed joined God's saving economy.

In Galatians 3:2, Paul enters into a full discussion using the term πίστις in the absolute state that was introduced in 1:23. What is his purpose in mentioning Abraham's faith and justification in Galatians 3:6? If it were a mere comparison of Christians' justification by faith with Abraham's justification, or the drawing of an analogy between these two cases, he would not have felt any need to go on to address Abraham's "seed" (3:16). If this were his purpose, the section from 3:15 to 20 would be an insignificant aside. Since, however, this pericope contains, besides "seed," such important words as "promise[s]" (vv. 16-19) and "covenant" (v. 17; cf. 4:24), it cannot be explained away as a mere aside. We should try to elucidate Paul's purpose in this whole chapter paying due attention to Galatians 3:15-20. A holistic understanding of the *Pistis* as mentioned above gives us a sound answer in this regard. What occupied Paul's mind was how to make his readers understand that God's eschatological saving economy, the *Pistis*, has its *origin in Abraham*, in other words, how God laid the foundations of this system in electing, calling, and giving promises to Abraham, who, believing God, entered and remained in a relationship of faith with God.

## II. *Christ's Atonement and Redemption*

For God's eschatological saving economy to come to fruition, it is necessary that God himself acts on his own initiative. Paul states in Galatians 4:4 as follows: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον). This Son of God is none other than "the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal 1:3-4, κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέλῃται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ

πατρός ἡμῶν).

Note that the subject of this latter sentence is not “God” but “the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is Christ who “gave himself for our sins.” Certainly, he acted “according to the will of God,” in perfect obedience to his will. We may even assume this to be his faithfulness or faith to God. This sentence, however, has “Christ” as its subject, as in Galatians 2:20 (cf. Gal 3:13; 1 Cor 15:3). In Galatians 2:20, Paul states that “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by *the faithfulness of the Son of God*, who loved me and gave himself up for me” (ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ). He also states in Galatians 3:13a that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Χριστὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξηγόρασεν ἐκ τῆς κατάρας τοῦ νόμου γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα). His “becoming a curse for us” obviously denotes his death on the cross (Gal 3:13b; Deut 21:23; 27:26). We should note the expressions “for our sins,” “for me,” and “for us” in these three verses. In spite of slight differences in nuance, all of them denote the atoning or redemptive death of Christ himself.

I interpret Galatians 2:20, one of the seven occurrences of the *πίστις* Χριστοῦ formulation in Paul, from the standpoint of “subjective interpretation B” (see *supra* note 1). The phrase *πίστις τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ* does not mean “[my] faith in the Son of God” nor “the faith(fulness) of the Son of God to the Father,” but “the faithfulness of the Son of God *toward humanity*” in the sense of Christ’s being steadfast, truthful, and trustworthy as God’s Christ. We should pay careful attention to the wording “who loved me and gave himself up for me.” Because it refers to Christ’s own deed stemming from his love *for me*, not exactly for God, it is unlikely that ἐν πίστει τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ means “by the faith(fulness) of the Son of God to the Father.”

This *πίστις* undoubtedly points to Christ’s death on the cross (Gal 2:21; 3:13b).<sup>3</sup> Objectively, it is nothing more than the tragic or pitiful death of a man named Jesus, but for Paul and other believers, who had faith in him, it was his self-giving, atoning death stemming from love “for their sins to set them free from the present evil age.” This means that when Paul refers to the death of Christ using the phrase *πίστις Χριστοῦ*, what he means is not the objective fact of his death on the cross nor his deed seen as faithfulness to God, but the *faithworth*, for believers, of Christ’s death referred to using the same phrase in this context. Having faith in Christ within the economy of the *Pistis*, into which he is brought by the grace of God, Paul sees the deeds of Christ culminating in his death as totally trustworthy and truthful. Note the framing structure created by Galatians 2:16 (the faithfulness of Jesus Christ) and 2:20 (the faithfulness of the Son of God). So the Pauline phrase *πίστις Χριστοῦ*, which literally means “Christ’s faithfulness,” denotes the *faithworth* of his specific deeds—especially his death on the cross—for believers; it is a *correlative of faith in Christ* particularly in terms of his death.

God’s task of creating an eschatological economy to save human beings from “the present evil age” (Gal 1:4), the *Pistis*, was accomplished by a series of decisive actions taken by both God and Christ. When the “fullness of time had come, God sent his Son” Christ, “born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal 4:4); Christ “gave himself for our sins,” thus effecting atonement and redemption for believers (Gal 1:4; 2:20; 3:13a; 4:5); God “raised him up from

<sup>3</sup> Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary* (NTL. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011) 150, 192, 193, 239, etc.

the dead" (Gal 1:1); God and/or Christ sent Paul and other missionaries to preach the gospel of Christ (Gal 1:1, 7-9, 11-12; 2:2, 7; 4:13); and now God bestows the Spirit on those who hear and believe within the *Pistis* (Gal 3:2, 3, 5, 14; 4:6; 5:5, 16-18, 25; 6:8). This is an outline of how God's economy of salvation was created. It thus involves God and his Son Christ, the word of the gospel preached by Christ's missionaries, human persons who hear and believe, and the Spirit.

### III. *Meaning of ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως in Galatians 3:2 and 5*

The absolute use of πίστις introduced in Galatians 1:23 reappears in 3:2 and 5. We must not mistake its absence in Chapter 2. In fact, it is not that Paul moved away from this idea; rather, to explain the structure of God's saving economy now revealed (3:23, ἀποκαλυφθῆναι), he focuses on its central element, that is, Jesus Christ and his redemptive deed (the "faithfulness of Christ," Gal 2:16, 16, 20). In addition, he does refer to faith or believing on the part of human persons (Gal 2:16, "we also came to believe in Christ Jesus" καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεῦσαμεν), because faith in Christ is essential for anyone to enter this system. Following these explanations, Paul can now, in Galatians 3, address another important subject: the origin of the *Pistis*. His point is that God laid the foundations of the eschatological saving economy in electing, calling, and giving promises to Abraham, who, on his part, "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gal 3:6; Gen 15:6).

The phrase ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως in Galatians 3:2 and 5 needs to be interpreted in connection with the quotation of Genesis 15:6 in Galatians 3:16. Since the πίστις in Galatians 3:2 and 5 means God's saving economy as a whole, understanding it solely in the sense of "human faith" or "Christ's faith(fulness)" is out of question. The Greek word ἀκοή here can mean "what is heard" in the sense of "the message" or "(the act of) hearing." In Galatians 3:1, Paul implies his previous preaching of the gospel to the Galatian people: "Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified" (οἷς κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἐσταυρωμένος). His aim in using visual imagery seems to be to emphasize the mind-shaking power of Christ's gospel that was so strong as to create an image of the crucified Christ in the minds of its recipients. In any case, it is obvious that the Galatian people *heard* the gospel preached and *believed* in Jesus Christ (cf. Gal 2:16). Hence, considerations based on any sharp dichotomy between "what is heard" and "hearing" are not convincing. The text of Genesis 12:6 quoted in Galatians 3:16 also warns that such a dichotomy does not work. When and before Abraham "believed God," he certainly heard the word of God who spoke and gave promises to him (Gen 12:1-3; 15:1, "the word of the Lord" [ῥῆμα κυρίου], 15:4, "the voice of the Lord" [φωνὴ κυρίου]).

Douglas Moo argues that there is little in the context to suggest that the gospel creates faith,<sup>4</sup> but his view is affected, like those of many others, by the presupposition that the πίστις in Galatians 3:2 and 5 means human faith. From a holistic standpoint, the phrase ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως can be translated as: "from the message heard of the *Pistis*."<sup>5</sup> God's saving economy,

<sup>4</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians* (BECNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013) 183.

<sup>5</sup> In Romans 10:16-17, Paul states: "But not all have obeyed the gospel; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' So the *Pistis* [is] by means of what is heard, and what is heard through the word of Christ" (Ἀλλ' οὐ πάντες

the *Pistis*, uses the gospel message or the preached word of God as its own instrument to move human beings.

#### IV. *Abraham's Faith and the Pistis*

In Galatians 3:2, Paul asks: "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or from the message heard of the *Pistis*?" (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου τὸ πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως;). Needless to say, he expects them to answer: "We received the Spirit from the message heard of the *Pistis*." In Galatians 3:5, Paul poses a similar question using the same phrases: "Well then, does the one [i.e., God] who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you [do so] by the works of the law, or from the message heard of the *Pistis*?" (ὁ οὖν ἐπιχορηγῶν ὑμῖν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις ἐν ὑμῖν, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως;). To this, the expected answer is "the one who provides us with the Spirit and works miracles among us does so from the message heard of the *Pistis*."

Whether Galatians 3:6 should be connected to verses 1-5 or to what follows is an apparently difficult question to determine. Although the introductory *καθώς* at the beginning of 3:6 can be assumed to be an abbreviation of *καθώς γέγραπται* ("as it is written"; so Matt 26:24; Mark 1:2; Luke 2:23; Acts 15:15; Rom 1:17; 2:24; 3:10; 4:17; 8:36; *passim*), it would be more appropriate to read the word in its usual comparative sense ("just as") and view it as linked to the preceding section.<sup>6</sup> If these interpretations are correct, we can paraphrase Galatians 3:6, with some information supplemented from the verses preceding it:

(A) *We* received the Spirit from the message heard of the *Pistis*, and (B) *God* provides us with the Spirit and works miracles among us from the message heard of the *Pistis*, (C) just as *Abraham* "believed *God*, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

As this paraphrase shows, Paul does not simply work using an analogy between the Galatian believers' faith and the faith of Abraham. Rather, he argues on the basis of an *analogy of God's economy of salvation*. Even Abraham's "justification by faith" occurred within a certain salvific system, which is similar or even identical to the eschatological economy now accomplished by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. God's economy prepared for Abraham was still of primordial form (see below). It was created when God singled out Abraham from among humanity, spoke to him with promises of blessing, and Abraham departed in obedience to his word (Gen 12:1ff.).

We should note the changes in subject of the three sentences A to C. The first sentence (A), derived from Galatians 3:2, takes human beings ("we") as the subject, and the second sentence (B), coming from Galatians 3:5, "God." If, then, *καθώς* ("just as") really functions in making an analogy to God's economy, the third sentence (C), having a man ("Abraham") as its subject, must have much richer content than our simple reading that, by believing God, Abraham was reckoned righteous by God. Note that the roles of God and human beings are *intertwined* in all these sentences. (A) While it is *we* who receive the Spirit, this cannot take

ὑπήκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ. Ἡσαΐας γὰρ λέγει· κύριε, τίς ἐπίστευσεν τῇ ἀκοῇ ἡμῶν; ἄρα ἡ πίστις ἐξ ἀκοῆς, ἢ δὲ ἀκοὴ διὰ ῥήματος Χριστοῦ). Cf. 1 Thess 2:13, "the word of the message of God" (λόγον ἀκοῆς τοῦ θεοῦ).

<sup>6</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 187.

place unless *God* intends to give the Spirit to us. (B) It is certainly *God* who provides us with the Spirit, but the presupposition is that the message is heard and believed by *us*. (C) It is *Abraham* who believed God, but it was *God* who chose and spoke to him in the first place and counted his faith as righteous.

Therefore, a mere analogy between Christians' faith and Abraham's is hardly what Paul means when he quotes Genesis 15:6. Rather, he has the clear intention of explicating *what God did for Abraham when and before he "believed God."* In other words, what God was the God that Abraham came to believe and how he acted for Abraham by calling him were Paul's main concerns, which he thought necessary in explaining to his readers. Only by doing so can he lead them to a correct understanding of what God prepared for Abraham as the foundations of the eschatological saving economy, the *Pistis*, which is now enjoyed by the Galatian Christians.

### V. Paul's Quotations from Genesis

What Paul has to say about the foundations of the eschatological saving economy laid by God through the life of Abraham can be inferred from his explicit and implicit quotations in Galatians 3:7-18 (consisting of three paragraphs: vv. 7-9, 10-14, and 15-18). He quotes explicitly from the story of Abraham in Genesis (Gal 3:8 and 16).

Galatians 3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God justifies the Gentiles from the *Pistis*, proclaimed the gospel beforehand to Abraham: "All the nations<sup>7</sup> shall be blessed in you."  
 προῖδοῦσα δὲ ἡ γραφή ὅτι ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοῖ τὰ ἔθνη ὁ θεός, προευηγγελίσσατο τῷ Ἀβραάμ ὅτι ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.

Galatians 3:16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed; it does not say, "and to the seeds," as toward many; but it says, "and to your seed," as toward one person, who is Christ.  
 τῷ δὲ Ἀβραάμ ἐρρέθησαν αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ. οὐ λέγει· καὶ τοῖς σπέρμασιν, ὡς ἐπὶ πολλῶν ἀλλ' ὡς ἐφ' ἑνός· καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου, ὅς ἐστιν Χριστός.

The quotation "All the nations shall be blessed in you" in Galatians 3:8 is a combination from Genesis 12:3 ("And in you shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed" [καὶ ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς]) and from 18:18 ("But surely Abraham shall become a great and populous nation, and in him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" [Ἀβραάμ δὲ γινόμενος ἔσται εἰς ἔθνος μέγα καὶ πολὺ, καὶ ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν αὐτῷ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς]). In Galatians 3:16, "and to your seed" (καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου) is taken from Genesis 13:15, 17:8, and 24:7.<sup>8</sup> Akin to this, the phrase "to your seed" (without "and") appears in Genesis 12:7 and 15:18 (cf. Gen 13:16; 15:5; 17:7; 21:12; 22:17-18).

While all the quoted and related verses are meaningful, let us focus our attention on Genesis 12:3 (Gal 3:8) and 24:7 (Gal 3:16). The former comprises part of God's initial words (calling and promising) spoken to Abraham when he *was still* in Haran. Hearing and obeying the call of God, he moved from his country for whichever land God would show him. Genesis

<sup>7</sup> τὰ ἔθνη, which means "the nations" in LXX, is used in the sense of "the Gentiles" in Paul's texts.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 24:7 LXX differs from the Hebrew bible in several respects. Among others, the Greek text reads "God of the earth" and "to you," which are lacking in the Hebrew text.



24:7, comprising Abraham's words to his servant, smacks of a confession: "The Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth" (κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ὁ θεὸς τῆς γῆς, ὃς ἔλαβέν με ἐκ τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ πατρός μου καὶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς, ἧς ἐγενήθην. cf. 15:7). As a blessed old man (24:1), he is now recalling how God called and took him from his birthplace at the outset of their relationship. In the story of Abraham in Genesis, his "justification by faith" (Gen 15:6) comes in the period framed by these two epochs. This means that we should understand Paul's aim of quoting Genesis 15:6 in Galatians 3:6 to be in close relation to Genesis 12:1-3 and 24:7 quoted—if not entirely—in other places in Galatians 3.

In Galatians 3:8, Paul interprets God's promise to Abraham, "all the nations shall be blessed in you" (Gen 12:3; 18:18), as a warranty of the eschatological truth that God justifies the Gentiles from the *Pistis*. In so doing, he uses a rare word προεὐαγγελίζομαι ("to proclaim the gospel beforehand"). This does not mean "to proclaim a preliminary form of the gospel." According to Paul, the promise given to Abraham differs in no respect from the content of the gospel Paul and others are now preaching. The "gospel" told beforehand to Abraham was an assurance that God would justify the Gentiles from the *Pistis* (v. 8a). Since it was the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, Abraham's seed (Gal 3:16), which made come true this eschatological saving economy of God, the "gospel proclaimed beforehand to Abraham" is nothing other than the "gospel of Christ" (Gal 1:7-9, 11; 2:2) or the "gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David [hence from Abraham] according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:3-4, NRSV).

Strictly speaking, the formula "from the *Pistis*" (Gal 3:7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 24; 5:5) pertains to Christians "in the last days" (Acts 2:17), and not directly to Abraham. Galatians 3:7 reads as follows: "Know therefore that those [who are] of the *Pistis*, these are the sons of Abraham" (γινώσκετε ἄρα ὅτι οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, οὗτοι υἱοὶ εἰσιν Ἀβραάμ). Paul's conclusion (signaled by "therefore") is drawn from what he discussed in the preceding section (Gal 3:1-6), *not just* from 3:6 (as is suggested by the paragraph division and punctuation of the NA<sup>28</sup>). Paul is taking pains to prove the authenticity of his gospel originating from the *Pistis*, and to that end, he explains in Galatians 3:7-18 how God laid the foundations of the eschatological economy, quoting from the story of Abraham in Genesis.

In Galatians 3:9, Paul concludes the section (vv. 7-9) with the following statement: "For this reason, those [who are] of the *Pistis* are blessed with the *pistos* Abraham" (ὥστε οἱ ἐκ πίστεως εὐλογοῦνται σὺν τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραάμ). This verse does not contain any explicit quotation from the story of Abraham, but we would be justified in recognizing here an allusion to Genesis 22:17-18:

<sup>17</sup>... and your seed shall inherit the cities of their enemies. <sup>18</sup>And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because *you have obeyed my voice*.

<sup>17</sup>... καὶ κληρονομήσει τὸ σπέρμα σου τὰς πόλεις τῶν ὑπεναντίων· <sup>18</sup>καὶ ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν τῷ σπέρματι σου πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς, ἀνθ' ὧν ὑπήκουσας τῆς ἐμῆς φωνῆς (בְּרַעְיָא תִּשְׁמַע בְּרַעְיָא).

The content of these verses is similar to that of Genesis 12:2-3 and 18:18. We can hear clear resonances of God's promises when he called and took him out, although Genesis 22:18 has "in your seed" instead of "in you" (Gen 12:2-3; 18:18).

What does Paul's expression "*pistos* Abraham" mean? It is usually construed as referring to his belief or faith (so the NRSV says, "Abraham who believed" and the NIV, "Abraham, the man of faith"). In the context of Genesis 22, however, the adjective πιστός can naturally be taken in the sense of "faithful." Two documents in the Second Temple period, earlier than Paul's time, interpret Genesis 22:18 in terms of Abraham's faithfulness.

Ben Sira 44:19-21 <sup>19</sup>Abraham [was] a great father of many nations [Gen 17:5], and no one was found like him in glory; <sup>20</sup>Who kept the law of the Most High, and entered into a covenant with him: he established the covenant in his flesh [Gen 17:24, 26], and in trial he was found *faithful* [Gen 22, esp. v. 18]. <sup>21</sup>Therefore he assured him with an oath, that the nations would be blessed in his seed [Gen 22:18] ...

<sup>19</sup>Αβρααμ μέγας πατήρ πλήθους ἐθνῶν, καὶ οὐχ εὐρέθη ὁμοιος ἐν τῇ δόξῃ. <sup>20</sup>ὃς συνετήρησεν νόμον ὑψίστου καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν διαθήκῃ μετ' αὐτοῦ· ἐν σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ ἔστησεν διαθήκην καὶ ἐν πειρασμῷ εὐρέθη πιστός. <sup>21</sup>διὰ τοῦτο ἐν ὄρκῳ ἔστησεν αὐτῷ ἐνευλογηθῆναι ἔθνη ἐν σπέρματι αὐτοῦ ...

1 Maccabees 2:52 Was not Abraham found *faithful* in trial [Gen 22], and it was reckoned to him as righteousness [Gen 15:6]?

Αβρααμ οὐχὶ ἐν πειρασμῷ εὐρέθη πιστός, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην;

The author of the Wisdom of Ben Sira interpreted Genesis 22:17-18 in close linkage with Genesis 17:9-14, where God's covenant by circumcision is prescribed. The extant Greek text is a translation by the author's grandson. The original אשר שמר מצות עליי ("Who kept the commandments of the Most High") he translated thus: "Who kept the law of the Most High." God's commandments are not necessarily identical to the Mosaic law (Torah), but the translator takes the word in this sense. In fact, the existence of the law in the days of Abraham came to be believed widely among the rabbis (e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 56.11; *b. Yoma* 28b). The original author summarized the whole story of Genesis 22 using the expression ובניסוי נמצא נאמן, and the grandson translated it correctly: "and in trial he was found faithful." On the other hand, the Septuagint translates the Hebrew text of Genesis 22:18b almost verbatim: ἀνθ' ὧν ὑπήκουσας τῆς ἐμῆς φωνῆς ("because you have obeyed my voice").

## VI. *The Meaning of "Pistos Abraham" in the Pauline Context*

Paul must have known Ben Sira and 1 Maccabees and their interpretations of Genesis 22. He would not have agreed, however, with the former regarding the existence of the law in the days of Abraham (Gal 3:17, on which see below) and would have certainly protested against the latter concerning its view connecting one's faithfulness in trial with God's reckoning of righteousness (cf. Jam 2:21-24). Yet, Genesis 22:17-18 certainly had an important meaning for Paul, because here are repeated God's initial promises: the blessing of Abraham (Gen 12:2-3; 18:18), the multiplication of his descendants (13:16; 15:5; 17:2, 6), and the blessing of the nations in his seed (cf. 12:3; 18:18). Moreover, Genesis 22:18b, "because you have obeyed my voice," employs the verb ὑπακούω ("to obey" or "to be subject to"), which is fundamental in Paul's theology.

This verb is used to refer to the obedient death of Christ in Philippians 2:8 ("he humbled



himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” [ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ]). In Romans 5:19 he says something similar using the corresponding noun ὑπακοή (“obedience”): “For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (ὥσπερ γὰρ διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ πολλοί, οὕτως καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί). Significantly, Paul’s discussion in Romans is framed by the formula “for the obedience of the *Pistis*” (εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως) in 1:5 and 16:26. In our holistic interpretation, it means the type of obedience originating from the *Pistis*. A similar expression by means of the verb appears in Acts 6:7: “[T]he word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the *Pistis*” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἠύξανεν καὶ ἐπληθύνετο ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν μαθητῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ σφόδρα, πολὺς τε ὄχλος τῶν ἱερέων ὑπήκουον τῇ πίστει).

This type of obedience to God is not the same as “keeping the law of the Most High” as stressed in the Wisdom of Ben Sira. It originates from, and is nurtured in, the *Pistis*, God’s saving economy, into which one is incorporated by believing the gospel. Abraham’s obedience narrated in Genesis 22 has nothing to do with keeping the law. It resembles the obedience of the *Pistis*, because it sprung from, and was nurtured in, his faith relation with God. It began when God called him with promises and Abraham responded obediently. It is probable that this is part of the meaning of the adjective πιστός in Galatians 3:9: “For this reason, those [who are] of the *Pistis* are blessed with the *pistos* Abraham.” Since, however, Galatians 3:9 is the conclusion of verses 7-9, its full meaning should be determined from the context. It certainly bears undertones of believing or faith. We can read in Paul’s use of the adjective here the meaning of both “obedient” and “having faith” (or “believing”). It cannot be translated using any single English word; it would be better to use “pistos” having both senses as a loanword from Greek.

It is true that Paul rarely uses πιστός in the sense of “faithful” in his letters. However, in 1 Corinthians 4:2, he says that “it is required of servant managers that each one should be found faithful” (ζητεῖται ἐν τοῖς οἰκονόμοις, ἵνα πιστός τις εὑρεθῇ). Here, he does not discuss the faithfulness of believers or servants in general, but that required of “servant managers” (cf. 1 Cor 4:17; Col 1:7; 4:7, 9). In Paul’s eyes, Abraham had a mission far more important, because given the promise that “all the nations shall be blessed in you” (Gen 12:3; 18:18), he had to face a nonunderstandable trial by God to order him to offer his only son Isaac (Gen 22:2). Throughout the trial he obeyed God, followed by a renewal of the promise: “And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

## VII. *Covenant and 430 Years*

Many scholars opine that by the word “covenant” (διαθήκη) in Galatians 3:17, Paul means “the promises” (v. 16, αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι) God gave to Abraham (cf. 3:17, 18, 19 [verb], 21, 22, 29; 4:23, 28; sing. except in 3:16 and 21). However, the concept of a covenant is not the same as that of a promise and, even in this context, they do not seem to be synonymous. In the story of Genesis, God enters into a covenant with Abraham, first in 15:7-21 and again in 17:23-27. The former event occurred apparently soon after Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to

him as righteousness” (15:6). The latter is closely coupled with a command to circumcise (17:9-14).

Genesis 15:18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram (διέθετο κύριος τῷ Ἀβραμ διαθήκην), saying, “To your seed (Τῷ σπέρματι σου) I will give this land ...”

Genesis 17:10, 23 <sup>10</sup>And this is the covenant, which you shall fully keep, between me and you [pl.], and between [me and] your seed after you (καὶ αὕτη ἡ διαθήκη, ἣν διατηρήσεις, ἀνὰ μέσον ἐμοῦ καὶ ὑμῶν καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ σπέρματός σου μετὰ σέ) for their generations; every male of you shall be circumcised. <sup>23</sup>And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all his home-born servants ... and he circumcised their foreskins in the time of that day, according as God had spoken to him.

There is another section where God speaks of his covenantal will to Abraham: Genesis 17:1-8. Interestingly, while here are retold God’s previous promises to Abraham and his seed (Gen 12:2, 7; 13:15-17; 15:7, 18), there is no mention of circumcision in this section.

Genesis 17:2, 4, 7 <sup>2</sup>And I will make my covenant between me and you (καὶ θήσομαι τὴν διαθήκην μου ἀνὰ μέσον ἐμοῦ καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον σοῦ), and I will multiply you exceedingly.

<sup>4</sup>And I—Look! my covenant [is] with you (ἡ διαθήκη μου μετὰ σοῦ), and you shall be a father of a multitude of nations. <sup>7</sup>And I will establish my covenant (καὶ στήσω τὴν διαθήκην μου) between me and you, and between [me and] your seed after you, to their generations, for an everlasting covenant (εἰς διαθήκην αἰώνιον), to be your God and the God of your seed after you.

It is unclear whether or not Genesis 17:1-8 goes with 17:9ff. The NRSV treats them under the same heading “The Sign of the Covenant,” while the ISV separates Genesis 17:1-8 from 17:9-14. In any case, we can safely conclude that, at the level of Paul’s discussion in Galatians 3:17, the “covenant” pertains not only to Genesis 15:7-21 but also to 17:1-8 that comprises a retelling of God’s promises. The question is whether Paul can ignore Genesis 17:23-27 in his explanation in Galatians 3. Space limitation does not allow me to address this question, but it is probable, in my view, that Paul includes even the circumcision-involving covenant when he refers to “the covenant previously ratified by God” in Galatians 3:17. In conclusion, I maintain that Paul uses the word “covenant” as an *umbrella term* to cover the content of the covenant-related texts of Genesis (15:7-21; 17:1-8; and probably 17:9-14, 23-27) in connection to God’s promises to Abraham.

In Galatians 3:17, Paul stresses that “the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul the covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise” (διαθήκην προκεκυρωμένην ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ μετὰ τετρακόσια καὶ τριάκοντα ἔτη γεγωνὸς νόμος οὐκ ἀκυροῖ εἰς τὸ καταργῆσαι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν). We should rivet our eyes on his mention of “four hundred thirty years later” and his use of a rare word “previously ratified.” The “four hundred thirty years” must be a quotation, not from Genesis 15:13 (“for four hundred years”) but from the LXX version of Exodus 12:40: “And the sojourning of the children of Israel, while they sojourned in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, [was] four hundred and thirty years” (ἡ δὲ κατοίκησις τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ, ἣν κατώκησαν ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ ἐν γῇ Χανααν, ἔτη τετρακόσια τριάκοντα). The Greek version has “and in the land of Canaan,” which is missing from the Hebrew text (cf. Josephus, *Ant.*, 2.318).<sup>9</sup> This indicates that by “four hundred thirty

years later" Paul means the period from *Abraham's coming to Canaan* (Gen 12:1-5) down to the Israelites' receiving of the Mosaic law at Mt. Sinai (Exod 19:1ff.).

The meaning of "previously ratified" should also be determined in this connection (*not* "previously established" as in the NIV). Paul does not compare the Abrahamic covenant made in Genesis 15:18 with the Mosaic covenant (the "law") that came later (Exod 19:5; 24:7, 8). Since the "covenant" in Galatians 3:17 is used as an umbrella term to cover the covenant-related texts (Gen 15:7-21 and 17:1-8 in particular) in connection to God's promises as a whole, the time of the "previous ratification" must be placed not in Genesis 15 but at the outset of Genesis 12, when God chooses Abraham and orders him to go out from his country, with promises of blessing. In other words, God "ratified" the "covenant" he would later establish with Abraham "previously" at the time of his choosing and speaking to him.

### VIII. *Proto-Pistis*

Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gal 3:6; Gen 15:6). However, it was not what happened in the first place. God's will goes ahead of everything; it is God who chose and spoke to him with promises. Obeying God's call, Abraham left his country for the land God would show him (Gen 12:1ff.). Although the Scripture is silent on whether Abraham "believed God" at that time, it seems certain that something like a "relation of faith" was at that time established between God and Abraham through the word of the "gospel" (Gal 3:8; Gen 12:3b). Moreover, this relation of faith was destined to grow stronger by God's will to speak repeatedly to Abraham with promises and the latter's obedient responses. It was within this relation that Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

We should note three essential characteristics of this series of incidents. (1) The "relation of faith" preceded Abraham's "justification by faith." (2) Abraham's faith means not only that he believed God's promises concerning the birth of his "very own issue" and the multiplication of his seed (Gen 15:4-5), but also that he relied on a faithful, omnipotent God (cf. Rom 3:3-4; Gen 14:22 LXX, "the most high God, who made the heaven and the earth"). (3) The reckoning as righteousness is salvific. Abraham's "justification by faith" took place within a certain saving system or economy. This economy certainly stems from the "relation of faith" already established between God and Abraham, but we cannot consider them identical. While the former is surely salvific, the latter, in itself, is not necessarily linked to justification, in spite of its essential connection with the "gospel."

It is plain, from Paul's discussion in Galatians 3, that God's justifying economy prepared for Abraham involves God who is believed, Abraham who believes, and two other essential elements: Abraham's "seed" Christ (3:16) and the gospel proclaimed beforehand (3:8). We should be careful not to mistake Paul's wording. In Galatians 3:16, he says: "Now the promises were *spoken* to Abraham and *to* his seed." Nowhere in Genesis do we find a sentence like "God spoke a promise to Abraham's seed." Genesis 13:15, for instance, says that "for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your seed (σοὶ δώσω αὐτὴν καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου)

<sup>9</sup> For the Jewish background of "430 years," see Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC, 41. Dallas: Word, 1990) 133.

forever.” Paul’s exegesis seems somewhat odd to our eyes, but it would be more appropriate to interpret what he says literally. He appears to take it for granted that Christ already exists with God. In fact, it is logically impossible for anyone to speak a promise to someone who does *not* exist there. Paul’s discussion in Galatians 4:4, “God *sent his Son*, born of a woman, born under the law,” seems to be in keeping with this. God’s Son Christ existed with God “when the fullness of time had come” (cf. Phil 2:6-8). How Paul’s Christology is related to the Son of Man messiology of “The Book of Parables” (1 Enoch 37-71) is an interesting but difficult issue.

Thus, the justifying or saving economy God prepared for Abraham involves God who is believed, Abraham who believes, and Abraham’s “seed” Christ, and the gospel that “all the nations shall be blessed in Abraham,” whose realized form, according to Paul, is that “God justifies the Gentiles from the *Pistis*” (Gal 3:8). It has almost the same structure as God’s eschatological saving economy, the *Pistis*. We should not think of the two systems as separate. Paul probably thought the former to be a primordial form of the latter. For Paul they are one and the same saving economy of God. However, we cannot but see one important structural difference between them: The eschatological saving economy involves the Spirit, but the justifying economy for Abraham does not. The Spirit is essentially an eschatological agent (Gal 3:2, 3, 5; 4:6; 5:5, 16, 18, 22, 25; Acts 2:1-13, 14-21, 33, 38; Joel 3:1-5; Isa 32:15-18; 44:1-5; 59: 21; Eze 11:17-20; 36:24-28; 37:1-14). This was not known to Abraham. So let us distinguish them by calling the economy God established for Abraham “proto-*Pistis*.” This is like a growing tree; a tree does not bear fruit in its youth, but the same tree does when it reaches maturity (Gal 6:8).