



Accounting for Abraham (1)

John Adey

THE ABUNDANCE of examples of number, or acts of numbering and of reckoning, associated with Abraham seem unparalleled of an individual in the Bible.¹ This article investigates certain examples in Abraham's life that provide insight into the mind of this prophet (Gen. 20:7) and friend of God (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; Jas. 2:23). It should be of significance to Abraham's seed in Christ.

The value of numbers

Numbers measure, or represent, value; they facilitate reckoning. Abraham's saintly seed, like the stars, are humanly uncountable, yet numbered in God's heavenly book (Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Mal. 3:16; Rev. 21:27). God's counting takes in both the stars and the saints (which the stars represent). Both are a heavenly host "which no man could number" (Rev. 7:9). The *many* of this innumerable saintly assembly (Heb. 12:22,23) are measured on the value of *one*, "thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

Here, number accounts for the quantity and quality of the sum of the godly seed. The many numerically are qualitatively one. This is a plural-unity: "And did not He make *one*? . . . And wherefore *one*? That He might seek a *seed of God* [godly seed, AV]" (Mal. 2:15; cf. Jno. 10:34-36).² Therefore number, both literal and symbolic, figures significantly in any account of the gospel preached to Abraham and subsequently to his seed.

God counts

In Genesis 15, Abraham (Abram as he was then called), being old and childless, shows his concern for an heir. For how could God's promises to him about his seed be fulfilled? God's response is to ask him to count the stars! It was a rational option for God to select such a task for a human. For, beyond what could conceivably be attempted or measured lay the significance that met Abraham's concerns. His limited vision was

refocused. A metaphysical horizon appeared, and an eternal reality beyond the astrophysical came into view.

The heavens, the host of humanly uncountable stars, declared Abraham's future in God's glory. The stars he looked at were "the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1; 2 Cor. 4:18); they were signifiers of a seed whom he believed Yahweh would provide. The God of glory, Who had called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2), had foreknowingly 'seen to' it.³ Abraham thereby came to see his seed "afar off" (Gen. 22:4,14; Heb. 11:13), and so rejoiced to "see [Christ's] day" (Jno. 8:56). Hence, even in this allegorical way, "the scripture, *foreseeing* that God would justify the heathen [nations] through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Gal. 3:8; cf. Gen. 22:16-18).

In Genesis 15 Abraham goes on to ask and receive further assurances about his seed (vv. 8-18). But, given God's response to him before this, the substance of his faith, what he hoped for, is implicit. Abraham reckoned with what

1. Though see also Peter in the New Testament. He is particularly associated with the number three.
2. The Hebrew *zera' 'elohim* is susceptible of two complementary senses: 'seed of gods' and 'seed of God'. The 'godly seed' of the AV are the 'gods' of whom Jesus speaks in John 10:34,35. They are the saints, individuals who are recipients of God's Word. The seed of the Word is sown in their (our) hearts, and such are begotten as God's sons and daughters. God's seed, His Word, produces its like. The identity of God is encoded in His offspring.
3. Compare my intentionally angled 'seen to it' with 'He will be seen' (because 'He will see to it') = 'He will provide [Hebrew, *yireh*]' used by Abraham later in his life (Gen. 22:14). This matches how God chose David in 1 Samuel 16:1 (using the past tense/sense of *yireh, ra'ity*). God *had seen to it*. He had, in His way of seeing the not seen (as yet), provided a replacement for Saul. God sees not as man sees.

was *spiritually* 'seeable', symbolised by the stars, and God became his rewarder (v. 1; Heb. 11:6).

Abraham "believed in the LORD [Yahweh]; and He *counted* it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). Where this text is cited in the New Testament, the AV uses three English terms: 'counted' (Rom. 4:3), 'accounted' (Gal. 3:6) and 'imputed' (Jas. 2:23). However, the Greek is *elogisthē* each time. So this Greek term represents the Hebrew word *yhšbh* ('he counted it') used in Genesis 15:6.⁴ *Elogisthē*, like its Hebrew counterpart, is part of a family of words whose usage is specific to mental acts, reasoning, involving logical processes of thought, or reckoning. Calculating the sum of some experience, reckoning what it means, is analogous to functions associated with number.

If one wanted to identify this New Testament 'accounted' family of words by a common element then the Greek *logo-* (or the stem *log-*), as used in the terms 'word', or 'logical', is most apparent. Romans 4 has much about Abraham's imputed righteousness, and how this works also for the believer. Therefore, not surprisingly, the text uses this Greek *log[os]-* based term quite densely in verses 3-24. The range of English translations for *elogisthē* and its cognates includes 'counted', 'reckoned' and 'impute'.

Abraham counts

Hebrews 11 comments on Abraham's concern to reckon with the meaning of the Mount Moriah incident when God tried him (Gen. 22). No *counting*-related terms occur in the relevant part of Genesis 22. However, in Hebrews 11:19, Abraham's proving involves his "accounting" (or reckoning) with the implications of his faith and God's promises to him. (*Logisamenos*, the Greek for 'accounting' here, is related to the terms found in Romans 4.) He reasoned with the reality of his belief in resurrection and its consequence for Isaac, the promised seed, whom he was preparing to sacrifice. Abraham's reckoning focused on the need for resurrection, should his child of promise, Isaac, be killed. It is noteworthy that this experience is also parabolic: "*accounting* that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure [*parabolē*, the usual New Testament term for 'parable']".

In this situation on Mount Moriah, 'seeing' is also associated with 'reckoning', as it had been in Genesis 15:5,6: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars . . . So shall thy seed be . . . And he believed in the LORD [Yahweh]; and He *counted*

it to him for righteousness". Abraham names the spot in that mount 'Yahweh Yireh', meaning, 'Yahweh [He] shall be seen' (22:14). Figuratively, in this place he received Isaac back from the dead. God had 'seen to it' that an animal was offered (typical of the Lamb of God) instead of Isaac. The place is associated with the person previewed: "In the Mount of Yahweh *he* shall be seen" (Hebrew; not 'it' as in some English versions). The place where Abraham puts God's name (compare Deuteronomy 12:5ff.) is ultimately where Yahweh *will be*: "The LORD is there [Yahweh shammah]" (Ezek. 48:35).⁵

Abraham's *reckoning* process was set in a circumstance of trial that was atypical in one key respect. No saint, before or since, has had to meet this condition: to be asked by God to sacrifice his only son, his seed and heir specially provided by God. This need not, of course, exclude other elements from being typical, or educative, for the believer. What is exclusive is that Abraham was uniquely involved with what God would do with, or in, His Son. The 'Yahweh Yireh' narrative echoes down time to Calvary as typical, in preview, of a Father's sacrificial love (Jno. 3:16) united with a Son's sacrificial obedience (Heb. 5:8). The significance and scope of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection impacted on Abraham, since his faith reckoned with that hope.

Abraham's service was to do with presenting the body of Isaac as a living sacrifice. Thus both body and mind were involved in his "accounting" (Heb. 11:19) what God could do for Isaac.⁶ Such was the quality of mind of our father Abra-

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4. The basic sense of 'reckon' (etc.) is maintained whether the grammar is identical or not. The grammar shifts to passive in the New Testament where the Genesis 15:6 text is reused.
 5. The instances of 'place' (where God puts His Name) relate to the use of 'there' or the motioning 'there', 'thither'. The 'there' is that singular place where Yahweh is to be installed. Hence His Name will be 'there'. The Hebrew term *shammah* is used for 'thither' and 'there' in Deuteronomy 12:5ff., and many times in Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, *shammah*, 'there', has its final application, in the last verse of the last chapter.
 6. Of course, in Genesis 22:6, we are told that "both of them", father Abraham and son Isaac, "went . . . together". The word 'together' is a developed sense of the Hebrew for 'unity' or 'one'. So Isaac could have said, "I and my father are one" (Jno. 10:30). It is not surprising, therefore, that, as already stated, Hebrews 11:19 tells us that this experience was coded as a 'parable'.

ham (Rom. 4:16) that his example can still “command his children . . . after him” (Gen. 18:19; Rom. 4:23-25). He would implicitly have this to say to us:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your *reasonable* service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:1,2).

“Reasonable” in the above passage is related in Greek to ‘accounting’, being equivalent to ‘logical’ (Gk. *logikēn*). This is in the context of “mind” and “prove”. Hence, applied to Abraham when God proved him (Gen. 22:1; Heb. 11:17), his

works, or “service”, of faith and obedience in sacrificing his son were ‘logical’. His *reckoning* was logical. Logical service is effected, or exercised, through a mind being “transformed”, and thus “renewed”, in a mortal body, by Divine revelation.⁷

This shows that a true Christian saint, of the seed of Abraham, should combine undivided, or inseparably, the mind, will and body in serving Abraham’s God.

(To be concluded)

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7. This is analogous to the quickening process within Sarah’s dead womb and Abraham’s aged body to produce a godly seed (Rom. 4:17,19,20).



Principles, Preaching
and Problems

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God’s purpose with Israel

6. Israel not replaced by the Church (Part 2)

Stephen Green

CONTINUING AN investigation of the Supersessionist viewpoint (see previous article [Jan. 2002, p. 5] for an explanation of this term), we concentrate on the question of whether God has cast away Israel. In doing so we shall spend much of our time looking at Paul’s letter to the Romans, especially chapter 11.

“Hath God cast away His people?”

Paul asks the question which forms our cross-heading in the following passage: “But to *Israel* He saith, All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying *people* [quoting Isaiah 65:2]. I say then, Hath God cast away His *people*? God forbid. For I also am an *Israelite*, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away His *people* which He foreknew” (Rom. 10:21–11:2).

In understanding the ‘cast away’ passages in both Testaments we need to be sensitive to the context on each occasion and determine whether

the words ‘Israel’ and ‘people’ refer to the nation at the time or over a long period, to the majority of the people or to all, to a small remnant or the accumulated remnant to date. Similarly we need to be careful about the kind of ‘casting away’ that is being referred to. Is it a temporary punishment or permanent rejection? Is it a casting out of the land or a complete loss of God’s interest and favour? We should take into account the passages which say Israel will be cast away, and also those which say they will not.

“Israel” in the above passage must be the nation who had received the words quoted from Isaiah 65:2. The first “people” must include at least a majority of the nation over a lengthy period reaching to late in Isaiah’s ministry. The second “people” Paul takes as referring to the whole nation in his own days, because he goes on to include himself as well as the disobedient: “God forbid [By no means!, RSV, etc.]. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the