



EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

Gary Ingrid writes that before James Garfield became the twentieth U.S. president, he was the president of Hiram College (Hiram, OH). One day a father of a prospective student questioned Garfield about the difficulty of the college's curriculum. As Garfield began to list the courses in the curriculum, the father stopped him and said, "Mr. Garfield, these courses are far too much for the degree my son is desiring to get. Couldn't you make it easier?" Garfield paused for a moment and then said, "Yes, I suppose the college could moderate these courses. However, I am reminded that it takes God one hundred years to grow an oak tree, but only three months to grow a squash." This thoughtful answer reminded me of Philippians 1:6, that God "has begun a good work in you [and he] will perfect it until the day of Christ." So be encouraged! Every event of life is from God to mature you in his grace.



VBTS celebrated its twenty-first annual Commencement on May 2, 2021. It was a joy to acknowledge eleven graduates from both the 2020 and 2021 classes (seven pictured above). Thank you for your prayers and support for these men and their ministries which are listed below. We are thankful to God for their testimonies of grace and their desire to build Christ's church around the world!

Master of Biblical Studies | 39 credit hours

- Paul Broadwater, West Huntsville Baptist Church, Huntsville, AL
- Josh Burrill, Missionary on the island of Malta
- Dusty Carson, Braveheart Community Church, Fredericksburg, VA
- Phil Dansby, New Covenant Church, Hampton, VA
- Nolan Murphy, Grace Baptist Church, Hampton, VA
- Scott Rosen, Colonial Baptist Church, Virginia Beach, VA

Master of Divinity | 96 credit hours

- Sam Roderick, Colonial Baptist Church, Virginia Beach, VA
- Andrew Stroud, Trinity Presbyterian Church, Norfolk, VA
- Ethan Van Bruggen, Colonial Baptist Church, Virginia Beach, VA
- Miguel Yustiz Torres, Independent Bible Church, Martinsburg, WV

Master of Theology | 30 post-graduate credit hours

- Daniel Steinman, Freedom Baptist Church, Chesapeake, VA



Abraham's Salvation Conversion: When and How?

Mark A. Hassler, Ph.D. | VBTS Professor of Old Testament

At what point in Abram's life did he experience salvific conversion? Some people think he was regenerated the same night that Yahweh established the Abrahamic covenant with him (Gen 15:1–6). By contrast I suggest that Abram was converted before entering the land of Canaan when he still lived in Mesopotamia.

Abram came from a pagan family that worshipped idols (Josh 24:2, 14). When Abram lived in Haran, Yahweh instructed him to leave his own country for a foreign land (Gen 12:1). Abram's obedience to Yahweh serves as strong evidence that he had already turned from idols to the true and living God (v. 4). The writer of Hebrews confirms this interpretation: "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place . . . and he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Heb 11:8). If Abram still served idols at that time, the writer of Hebrews could not say that Abram "obeyed" God "by faith." If Abram remained dead in his trespasses and sins, God would not have asked him to "obey by going out." If Abram still walked in darkness, he probably would not risk his life, household, and riches to obey an unknown deity and travel to an unknown place.

Interestingly, the Old Testament authors do not often elaborate on a character's conversion; rather, they put the character in a decisive situation and allow the character's response to reveal whether they have faith. Their works evidence their faith. For instance, Rahab the Canaanite was already converted before she decided to help the spies, just like Abraham was already converted before he offered Isaac (Jas 2:21–26). Their good works revealed their faith (Heb 11:17, 31). Similarly, the faithful priest Phinehas was already redeemed when he speared the fornicators. His intervention "was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he received the Priestly covenant (Ps 106:31; cf. Num 25:13).

Genesis 15:6 famously says of Abram, "and he believed in Yahweh, so he reckoned it to him as righteousness." The NASB uses a temporal connector ("*then* he believed"), suggesting that Abram only started to believe *after* the Word of Yahweh had spoken to him under the starry sky (v. 5). However, the Hebrew syntax does not express sequential action; it uses a non-sequential conjunction (*wəhe`emin*, "and he believed").

At age seventy-five Abram departed Haran by faith, and at age ninety-nine he was circumcised (Gen 12:4; 17:24). His faith preceded his work of circumcision by at least twenty-four years, making him a good case study for the New Testament authors. Paul argues that Abraham had nothing to boast about because he was saved by faith, not by works, such as circumcision (Rom 4:1–12; Gal 3:5–9). James shows that Abraham and Rahab already had faith when they did notable works (Jas 2:21–26).

Like many people, Abram became a believer by reading the Bible. He read about the gospel in Scripture, according to Paul: "the Scripture . . . preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham" (Gal 3:8). Paul's sentence contains a grammatical subject in the nominative case ("Scripture"), a main verb ("preach the gospel beforehand"), and an indirect object ("Abraham"). "Scripture" (*graphē*) by definition is something written. The only Scripture in existence during the time of Abram was the book of Job, therefore we can conclude that Abram responded to the glorious gospel of the Redeemer by reading the book of Job (esp. Job 9:2, 30–33; 16:19–21; 19:25–26; 33:23–28).