Chapter 15 in Genesis tells of the Lord's appearing to Abraham in a vision and promising him support and a great reward. The Lord assures Abraham that Eliezer of Damascus, a slave born in his house, would not become his heir but rather one of his own descendants would inherit him. "Look at the heavens and count the stars, if you can count them; so shall your descendants be" (Gen 15:5). The text then continues:

וַיֵּרֶא אֵלֵיהֶזֶר בֶּן דָּמָשְׁקָה—worth it for an offering (15:6).

This verse speaks of a new act of faith on Abraham's part. He had not only left his native land at God's behest (Gen 12:1), but now he has believed (an anomalous perfect with waw, יִרָאֵה) in God's promise of numberless progeny (15:5). Against all appearances Abraham put his trust in God, to whom he submitted himself. This belief of Abraham was judged (秣) by God, who is depicted as an assessor in the manner of priests in Israel assessing the offerings made in the Temple (Num 18:27; Lev 7:18; 17:4). God reckoned Abraham's belief to his credit as uprightness, considering it a righteous act (ןְּרָאָה).

1 Following upon the waw-conversive imperfects in v. 5 (יֵרֶאֶה, יִרָאֶה, יִרָאַה), the perfect with waw is anomalous. It is listed as such in P. Jouën, Grammaire de l'hebreu biblique (2d ed.; Rome: Institut Biblique, 1947), §119z; cf. Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, Hebrew Grammar (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946), §112ss. It is sometimes said that the perfect is used because the clause does not carry the narrative forward. See also B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §32.3d; but also §16.4f. (p. 305): "Now he trusted [the Lord] and he counted it to him as righteousness."

conducts himself properly and affirms the consequences of that relationship (cf. Ezek 18:5–9; Ps 24:5).3

So this verse has often been interpreted, but some medieval and modern commentators have pointed out the ambiguity of the Hebrew verbal form רָצוֹן, "and he reckoned it to him." Who is meant by "he"? The parallelism of Hebrew poetry would call for the subject of the two verbs to be the same, viz. Abraham. Then, because "righteousness" is a relational concept and implies that one is acting in accord with one's social obligations, the alternate meaning of the verse would be that Abraham is acknowledging the Lord's righteousness, believing that the Lord will be true to the commitments expressed in 15:1.4 This alternate meaning is not adopted by the

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It is also found in an article by M. Oehming, "Ist Genesis 15,6 ein Beleg für die Anrechnung des Glaubens zur Gerechtigkeit?" ZAW 95 (1983): 182–97, who has judged that Paul's use of the verse is "simply wrong" (schlicht falsch). Oehming criticized von Rad's treatment of הָצָרִין, maintaining that the occurrences in Num 18:27; Lev 7:18; 17:4 are niphal, not qal (as in Gen 15:6). He fails to note, however, that the qal of הָצָרִין is used in 2 Sam 19:20 and Ps 32:2 with the same meaning, "reckon, credit." This has been pointed out rightly by A. Behrens ("Gen 15,6 und das Vorverständniss des Paulus," ZAW 109 [1997]: 327–41, esp. 329). Behrens translates Gen 15:6 thus: "Er [Abraham] glaubte Jahwe, und der rechnete es ihm als Gerechtigkeitserweis an." Behrens also calls attention to the subject of הָצָרִין in 15:7, which can only be God; so the context supports the traditional understanding of the second verb in Gen 15:6 (p. 331).

A questionable analysis of Gen 15:6, which attempts to build on Oehming's interpretation has been proposed by D. U. Rottzoll, "Gen 15,6—Ein Beleg für den Glauben als Werkgerechtigkeit," ZAW 106 (1994): 21–27. He argues from the use