

## Chapter Eighteen

## The Gospel Preached to Abraham

How were people saved before Jesus died and rose to justify the believer? How was Adam saved? How was Abraham saved? Were they saved by the Law? This was impossible for all of them lived before the giving of the Law. Abraham knew absolutely nothing about the Ten Commandments given to Moses upon Mount Sinai. Clearly the bible declares that the Law was not given to Israel until four hundred and thirty years after Abraham was saved (Galatians 3:17). Certainly Abraham was not saved by keeping the Law, nor was he kept saved by it. How then was Abraham saved? The Bible takes great pain in telling us. In the first three chapters of Romans Paul had gone to great lengths to prove that no one ever was saved by works – and rules, regulations, or laws – but by grace. He comes to the final conclusion to verse 28:

*“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28).*

This was a difficult truth for his legalistic listeners to accept, and so Paul refers them to “*father Abraham,*” revered and honored by all. He asks, “*How was Abraham saved? By the Law, or by grace?*” Listen to Paul:

*“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:1-5).*

Abraham was saved by believing, long before the Ten Commandments were written upon tables of stone. How then was he saved? Paul asks,

*“What saith the Scripture?” (Romans 4:3)*

The final word on any question or matter is, “*What does the Scripture say?*” Was Abraham saved by keeping the Law? Paul’s answer . . .

*“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3).*

Note exactly what this verses says, “***Abraham believed God.***” It does *not* say, “*Abraham believed in God*” – but Paul writes, “*Abraham believed God!*” Of course, Abraham believed *in* God. He could hardly believe God, until he first believed in God.

*“...he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).*

A person may believe in God and be lost forever. Only a fool says in his heart, “*There is no God.*” But simply believing in a God – some kind of a God – is not enough. It

is well to remember this in these days of such flippant talk about God. Everyone today talks about God; about praying to God; returning to God; putting God back in our nation's life. It is well to remember in all this talk about faith in God, that this is not enough! *Abraham believed God*. He believed what God said. He believed God's Word.

### What Did Abraham Believe?

The question is, "*Just what did Abraham believe?*" He believed not only that God existed, but he believed what God *said*. Abraham believed the *Gospel*! He believed the Gospel, the Good News of the virgin birth, the atoning death, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to the inspired words in Galatians 3:

*"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them" (Galatians 3:6-12).*

### The Gospel

In this passage we see that Paul contrasts faith and the Law, and proves that Abraham was saved because he believing the *Gospel*. To the question, "*What did Abraham believe to be justified?*" the answer is, "*He believed the Gospel.*" To understand what Abraham believed, we must define what we mean by "*the Gospel*." The Greek word that is translated as "*Gospel*" is "*evangelium*" - meaning, "*Good News*." Usually the Gospel is defined as the Good News of the death and resurrection based on Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15 . . .

*...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).*

This definition is usually accepted for the Gospel, but there is *more* to the Good News than that. The Good News also includes the virgin birth, the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The birth of Jesus was declared to be the Gospel by the angel on the hills of Judea. The angel announced,

*...Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy...For unto you is born this day...a Saviour" (Luke 2:10-11)*

The word translated "*good tidings*" is the same Greek word, "*evangelium*" - that is translated as the "*Gospel*." The supernatural birth of Jesus is part of the Gospel!

## Abraham and the Gospel

Now back to Abraham and the Gospel. God revealed to him the message of the Gospel of the miraculous conception and birth, the substitutionary death and the glorious resurrection of the coming Redeemer. Abraham believed in the supernatural conception and miraculous birth of a promised son. God had said, concerning Sarah, Abraham's wife,

*"...I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her...and she shall be a mother of nations..."* (Genesis 17:16).

But the years dragged on and on and this promise remained unfulfilled until Abraham and Sarah had both long passed the age at which either one, in the natural course of nature, could become parents of a son. Abraham was impotent, and Sarah was sterile. Abraham was 100 years old, and Sarah was 90, when we read:

*"Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women"*  
(Genesis 18:11).

Sarah had passed the age of childbearing and Abraham was impotent (See Romans 4:19 & Hebrews 11:11). It was at this time God came and told Abraham that he and Sarah would become parents of the promised son. God said,

*"Sarah thy wife shall have a son"* (Genesis 18:10).

And Abraham believed this word of God, even though it was impossible in the course of nature. It would take a miracle, a supernatural act, to make these two old people parents of a son. Although it was naturally impossible, we read:

*"And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness"* (Genesis 15:6).

Abraham believed the **Gospel**, and *Good News* of the birth of a promised son by a supernatural birth. The birth of Isaac was as great a supernatural miracle of God's working as the virgin birth of Jesus Christ – *and Abraham believed it!* But there is more to the Gospel than the virgin birth. The next step is the substitutionary death of this promised Son. This part of the Gospel also was preached to Abraham and believed by him. When the miraculously born son, Isaac, had reached maturity (It is believed that Isaac was thirty-three years old when Abraham was commanded to take him to mount Moriah and sacrifice him upon the altar). Abraham again believed the Gospel, and in Genesis 22 we have a detailed account of Abraham (type of the Father) taking his son (type of the Lord Jesus Christ) up the mountain, and there potentially and typically offering his son upon the altar. Abraham believed the Gospel, and Good News of the miraculous birth and the substitutionary sacrifice of that same son. For God provided a substitute for Isaac when Abraham took the ram from the bushes and offered him up in the *"stead of his son"* (Genesis 22:13).

There is, however, another part of the Gospel of Good News. It is the resurrection of the miraculously born son, who was sacrificed on the mountain. While Isaac was not

literally slain, nevertheless, God reckoned it as though it actually occurred. Isaac was only a type of the Lord Jesus, but Isaac himself was in need of a Savior, and so God provided for him a substitutionary ram to die in his stead. But as far as God was concerned He reckoned it as though Isaac was actually slain. And Abraham also potentially sacrificed his son. To Abraham, Isaac was as good as dead for three whole days, from the time of the command to sacrifice his son until God spared him. And so when God suddenly intervened it was a potential resurrection of the son. Abraham, therefore, believed the Gospel – the miraculous birth, the substitutionary death, and the victorious resurrection after three days. Abraham believed that while he would have to put his son to death, God would also resurrect him. It had to be that way. How else could God fulfill His promise of the seed? God had promised that in Isaac would his seed be called. But Isaac had to seed; he was not even married when he was to die. If then God is to keep His word, Abraham reasoned, God would have to raise him from the dead after his sacrifice.

### The Bible Confirms

The Word of God confirms Abraham's belief in the death and resurrection of the coming Messiah. Abraham understood that the death and resurrection of Isaac pointed to the death and resurrection of the Greater Son, the promised seed, of whom Isaac was only a type. In Genesis 22:13, after he had offered his son and saw him restored, Abraham called the name of that place "*Jehovah-Jireh*," meaning, "*the Lord will provide*," a saying is still used to this day in Hebrew. Genesis 22<sup>14</sup> states, "*In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.*"

Abraham looked ahead and saw in this the Gospel of the supernatural birth, the atoning death and the resurrection of the Greater Son of Isaac. If you doubt this, then read Hebrews 11:

*"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. According that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" [hope],*  
(Hebrews 11:17 &19)

This was the Gospel that Abraham believed and by which he was saved. It had nothing to do with keeping the Ten Commandments, because they were not yet given, and God's plan has never changed. Salvation today is still – believing what God says about His only Son, virgin-born, crucified and risen again. Paul says, referring to Abraham's faith,

*"Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification"*  
(Romans 4:23-25).

Salvation is not believing in God, or a God, but believing “*the record God gave of His Son*” (1 John 5:10-11). Salvation is not by the Law or by works of man, but by faith in the virgin-born, crucified, risen Savior. The Law is bad news for the sinner, but the Gospel is the “*Good News*” of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.