

ROMANS 4:3

GREAT QUESTIONS OF LIFE: WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE SAY?

“What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’”¹

If you have walked in the Faith for very long, you will have been challenged by some dear soul who does not believe the truths of Christ the Lord. Such benighted souls appear to delight in asking what they imagine to be unanswerable questions. Among such supposedly difficult questions they delight to pose are gems such as these:

- “Where did Cain get his wife?”
- “If God is good and all-powerful, how come there is evil in the world?”
- “What about the innocent pagans who never had a chance to hear the gospel?”

Because the questions are asked so frequently, it is difficult to take them seriously. However, occasionally such questions do provide opportunity to explore great theology, if the questioner is serious about such pursuits. Among these old saws that outsiders imagine unanswerable is one that we will consider today: “How were people saved before the death of Christ the Lord?”

The question is important, presupposing as it does, the necessity of the death of Christ. Christians should recognise as well that the question is important because it points to the importance of making the Good News of Christ’s sacrificial death known to those who are lost. Finally, the question is important because whether the questioner understands the issue or not, the question acknowledges the need to believe Jesus the Son of God. Whether intentional or not, the questioner tacitly confesses, “Without faith it is impossible to please [God]” [HEBREWS 11:6]. Moreover, the question presupposes the accuracy of the biblical account. Otherwise, there is no possibility of answering the question.

Pause for a moment to absorb the point that was just made. To ask the question, “How were people saved before the death of Christ the Lord?” presupposes that an answer is possible. Since the question relates to an activity God initiates and controls, God alone can provide an answer. In order to discover the answer to the question, we must either have private access to the mind of God, in which case we are at the least equal to God, or we must rely upon that information which God has revealed through His Word. We must accept that the Bible is what it purports to be, or we must appeal to some other writing that qualifies as “the Word of God.”

Let me take a brief moment to address the facts that point to the veracity and authenticity of the Bible as the very Word of God. The accuracy of the Bible speaks of the divine origin. The Book of Mormon has never guided an archaeological dig—not one! The same can be said of the Doctrines and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. The Quran is unreliable as a source of historically verifiable information; no reputable archaeologist would think to consult the Quran as a reliable guide to ancient events. The same deficit attends the Bhagavad Gita, the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Tao Te Ching, the weird writings of Ellen White, Dianetics, the Divine Principle of the Unification Church, the Guru Granth Sahib or the Avesta Collection. Though these writings are deemed sacred by their several devotees, they fail the test of accuracy.

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Prophecy points to the accuracy of the Bible as the Word of the True and Living God. At the time of writing, over two-thirds of the Bible was prophecy. Time and again the matters of which God's prophets spoke came to pass. It has been said that in the birth and death of Yeshua Ha-Mashiach over seventy specific prophecies were fulfilled. Moreover, the prophets had an amazing track record. This is as stated through Moses, who wrote: "The prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?' —when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him" [DEUTERONOMY 18:20-22]. Nearly three quarters of the prophecies that are recorded in the Word have come to pass. Those which are unfilled all point to the fulfillment of days as this present age draws to a close.

And what of these other writings presented as sacred? Have they proven trustworthy when purporting to speak prophetically? Do they not fall under the condemnation of the Word? "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" [DEUTERONOMY 13:1-3].

Let me speak of the character of the Word, as well. It is with good reason that the Bible is frequently referred to as "The Good Book." If a sacred writing purports to be from the Lord, one would expect it to reflect the character of God. Ask yourself some simple questions. Is God concerned only that a person should be self-fulfilled? Is God capricious? Is God blood-thirsty? Does the Living God condone lying? Or brutality? Or does He compel agreement through coercion? These other writings advocate and condone such manifestly wicked acts; but the Bible speaks of making bad men good through transforming their heart.

No one is particularly shocked when Sikh extremists murder for the cause of their religion. When Islamic jihadists detonate explosive belts to slaughter innocent people—even other Muslims who disagree with the point of view of the jihadis—we are not terribly surprised. Few people express surprise when followers of the Religion of Peace behead school girls or butcher journalists. When Hindu mobs attack and burn others who do not agree with them, we are not surprised. However, we are shocked, astonished, flabbergasted when people calling themselves Christian murder or maim or menace in the name of the Faith. It is incongruous when professing Christians fail to live according to His teachings. Assuredly, the Bible reveals its divine origin through the message it delivers and through the character of the Book itself.

There is yet one other matter of significance in giving the reader of the Bible confidence in this glorious book that the Lord God has given to mankind. How can we know that the Bible we read has been given by God? Can we be confident that His Word has been accurately transmitted? No one would argue that a translation, however good that translation may be, is divinely inspired. However, we may be confident that the original autographs, the original writings have been preserved through the multiplicity of manuscripts available to us in this day.

Scholars have at their disposal over 5,300 copies of the Greek New Testament. The diligent scholar can reproduce accurately precisely what was written at the first. Many of these manuscripts go back to the early years of the Second Century. In addition to Greek manuscripts, we have ancient manuscripts in Amharic, various Syriac translations (Old Syriac, the Peshitta and the Philoxenian) and Egyptian versions (Memphitic, Bohairic, Thebaic and Fayumic).

When it came to copying the manuscripts of the Old Covenant, great care was taken to ensure that the text was not corrupted. The manuscripts were copied onto animal skins—vellum. The vellum was precious, costly. As the copyist would pen the letters, he would count letters on each line. If at some point the letter count did not match, the entire vellum was destroyed because it had been corrupted. Whenever the copyist came to the Name of God—YHWH—he would bathe before proceeding. He would use a new pen for each letter. When he had finished inscribing the Tetragrammaton, he would again bath before again taking up his task of copying. I do not relate these extreme procedures to commend them, but to demonstrate how serious the copyists viewed the work in which they were engaged. Should it be any surprise that when among the Dead Sea scrolls was found a copper scroll of the Book of Isaiah, that it agrees in toto with the various texts available to the scholar in this day.

Were one to begin at this point to reconstruct the Bible using only the manuscripts and references from ancient writers quoting the Scriptures, that one could reproduce our Bible as it exists today. We can be confident when we pick up a sound translation of the Word today that it is based on solid evidence that we know precisely what God was communicating.

For the sake of comparison, think of this. Only ten manuscripts remain of Julius Caesar's "The Gallic Wars"; and the earliest manuscript dates to one thousand years after the original autograph. There are but seven manuscripts of Pliny the Younger's "History," with more than seven hundred fifty years elapsed after he had written. Thucydides' "History" has but eight manuscripts available, the earliest having been written thirteen hundred years after he penned that text. Herodotus' "History" also has but eight manuscripts; and the earliest was written thirteen hundred years after he lived! There are one hundred ninety-three manuscripts of Sophocles' writings, the earliest inscribed fourteen hundred years after he died. There are nine manuscripts of Euripides; and the earliest was copied fifteen hundred years after he had lived. There are forty-nine manuscripts of Aristotle, the earliest of which was written fourteen hundred years after he had died. Scholars don't debate whether these authors lived or whether the copies should be discarded. Yet, they imagine that the Bible is somehow flawed; such people reject the Word because they contend it was "written by men." Mere men? Absolutely! However, as the Word testifies concerning these holy men of God, "No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" [2 PETER 1:21]. God Himself superintended the writing of this book, ensuring that His Word would be available to all mankind. Surely, the Psalmist spoke truth when he wrote, "Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens" [PSALM 119:89].

In this context, let me point out one further matter of interest. Next to the New Testament, there are more extant manuscripts of Homer's "Iliad" than any other ancient book. "Iliad" is undoubtedly the most renowned book of ancient Greece; there exist six hundred forty-three copies of manuscript support. The New Testament has about twenty thousand lines; the "Iliad," about fifteen thousand six hundred lines. In those copies of the "Iliad," there are seven hundred sixty-four disputed lines of text, as compared to forty lines in all the New Testament manuscripts.² This means that the New Testament has better support for its accurate transmission and that the transmission is in purer form, than any other ancient text. In fact, many people are unaware that each of William Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays (written in the 1600's) has gaps in the surviving manuscripts, forcing scholars to "fill in the blanks."³

² See Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, **A General Introduction to the Bible** (Moody, Chicago, IL 1968) 366-7

³ "Origin of the Bible—Credible & Authentic," <http://www.allabouttruth.org/origin-of-the-bible.htm>, accessed 7 December 7, 2012

TWO CONCEPTS FOR PLEASING GOD — We have established that when speaking of salvation, of being acceptable before the Lord, we must consider what God has given in His Word. Moreover, we have established that His Word is the Bible. Thus, if we will be acceptable to the Lord, we must consider what is provided in the Bible, which is the Word of God.

There is yet another issue of considerable importance to our study this day. There are but two ways that have ever been proposed for how man may be made acceptable to God. Either God must make man acceptable; or man must make himself acceptable. Long before this present day, Job asked, “How can a man be right before God” [JOB 9:2]? The thought of his comforters, and the concept that holds sway over most of mankind, is that the individual can do something to make herself or himself acceptable to God. The prevalent idea in this fallen world is that a person can do something to justify himself or herself before the Lord. The thought prevails that going to church, participating in the rites of a church, adhering to a code of conduct, reading the Bible or reciting specific prayers will gain one acceptance before God. Within a majority of Christendom the idea that one can do something to make himself acceptable to God seems to prevail. Assuredly, such ideas lie at the core of the multiplied religions of the world.

Set against this idea that the individual can do some particular act to make herself acceptable to God is the affirmation of the Word of God—acceptance of the individual is through faith in the Son of God, who was presented as a perfect sacrifice and who also conquered death to be raised to life. Thus, the Bible is quite specific in declaring, “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” [EPHESIANS 2:8, 9].

Establish in your mind, therefore, these two ideas of assuaging God—either one makes oneself acceptable to God through performing some act designed to make one acceptable, or one is made acceptable through casting himself or herself on the mercy of God. If one must perform a particular act, how will the individual know that the act will suffice to make one pure? How can one know that she will not be compelled to continue performing that act in order to maintain her standing before God? How frequently will the individual be required to perform the act in order to gain assurance that the action is sufficient? Even casual thought about the problem presented will demonstrate that there is no answer possible for such questions.

God is holy; He is perfectly righteous. Therefore, for a person even to come into the presence of God, that person must be righteous, perfect, holy. Unfortunately, as Solomon observed, “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” [ECCLESIASTES 7:20]. The Bible is very clear on this dreadful situation. Listen to some of the dark statements that speak of our condition.

Solomon, praying at the dedication of the First Temple, spoke an uncomfortable truth when he confessed before the LORD, “There is no one who does not sin” [1 KINGS 8:46].

The Wise Man has asked, “Who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin’” [PROVERBS 20:9]?

Paul bluntly states, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” [ROMANS 3:23].

James, the brother of our Lord, exposes our condition by writing these sorrowful words, “We all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body” [JAMES 3:2].

Confronting us in our fallen condition, the Apostle of Love writes, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” [1 JOHN 1:8, 10].

So a sinful individual cannot even come into the presence of God—and that includes all of us! Therefore, even were acts designed to make the individual acceptable to God; no individual can present his good deeds in order to assuage the righteous wrath of God who is holy. We need one who will intervene. Christ Jesus the Son of God is the very One we need. First, He is the Son of God. He is very God and very man. He presented His life as a sacrifice in the place of sinful people. Had He only given His life, it would be significant. However, He conquered death, breaking the bonds of death and rising from the dead. He “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” [ROMANS 1:4].

In this Faith, we present not a religion, but a relationship. We call people to a living relationship with Him who has conquered death, has risen from the tomb and has ascended into the heavens where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. We call people to receive the mercy of God offered through faith in the Son of God, just as it is written in the Word of God.

Now, I ask in a spirit of gentleness, can the Muslim know that he is saved? The answer is that a Muslim cannot know that he is saved. He may recite his prayers five times a day, faithfully fast throughout Ramadan, make the pilgrimage to Mecca each year, give alms to the poor, endeavour ever so valiantly to avoid sin and work every so diligently to perform righteous deeds, yet, he has no assurance of God’s forgiveness and acceptance. The Christian, however, may be confident in God’s mercy, and she rests in the promise of God delivered through the Apostle of Love, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life” [1 JOHN 5:13]. We Christians have a “know-so” salvation.

Adherents of Jainism and Buddhism are emphatic that liberation can only be achieved by personal efforts; and these efforts invariably involve a significant degree of self-discipline and asceticism. With the Apostle Paul, the disciple of the Lord would say, “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—‘Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch’ (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” [COLOSSIANS 2:20-23].

A tragic number of sects and cults that claim to be part of Christendom depend upon the efforts of the worshippers to be acceptable before God. Whether reciting prayers, performing ritual duties or acts to show penitence, being baptised, partaking of the Eucharist or participating in any of a number of ritualistic acts, the adherents have no confidence that they are acceptable before God. The one who accepts the Word of God, however, rests confident in the promise of God. God has promised, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” [JOHN 3:16-18]. This promise is iterated momentarily when John writes, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” [JOHN 3:36].

This promise is iterated throughout the Word of God. Jesus is recorded as promising, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” [JOHN 5:24].

John testified of the Word, “These [things] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” [JOHN 20:31].

Indulge me by permitting me to cite a few additional Scriptures that speak of God's great mercy toward us in giving life through His Son. Paul, writing Titus, penned these words, "When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" [TITUS 3:4-7].

Peter, Apostle to the Jews, opened his First Epistle by exalting the mercy of God. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" [1 PETER 1:3-5].

One final passage of the Word that points to what God has done is cited from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" [EPHESIANS 2:1-10].

THE ENVIRONMENT OUT OF WHICH ABRAM WAS CALLED — All that has been said to this point provides background so that we can answer the question asked, "What does Scripture say?" Abraham was called out of paganism. Stephen referred to this when he made his final defence before the mob that would take his life, certifying him as the first Christian martyr.

In the account Doctor Luke provided, we read in the opening words of Stephen's defence, "Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.' Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living" [ACTS 7:1-4].

When he was called, Abram was not a worshipper of the True and Living God; he was called while living as a pagan—an idolater. Joshua, delivering his final admonition to Israel, said, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; *and they served other gods*. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many" [JOSHUA 24:2, 3]. Joshua also warned the people, "Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD" [JOSHUA 24:14]. We know that Terah, Abraham's father, was named after the moon deity worshipped at Ur.⁴

⁴ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, **Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 1988) 11

God intervened in Abram's life, calling him to obedience and to worship Him, the True and Living God. We know that Abram did obey God, though not perfectly. God called him to leave his family and go into the land of Canaan. Abram took others with him, Terah and Lot, of whom the Lord had said nothing. Abram travelled only as far as Haran, where the little band settled [GENESIS 11:31]. It was only after the death of Terah that Abram continued on his journey into the Promised Land. Stephen makes it evident that God called Abram before he lived in Haran, and Genesis indicates that God again issued His call to Abram after the death of Terah.

What is important to note is that God calls whom He wills. Moreover, God may call when people are engaged in unholy and unrighteous pursuits. It is the responsibility of the one called to respond. God is patient, and He guides the recalcitrant soul ever toward truth and light, just as He continued to direct Abram. Abram did not obey God perfectly, and there would be multiple missteps on his part as he progressed in faith before being known as "the friend of God" [see JAMES 2:23, citing 2 CHRONICLES 20:7 and ISAIAH 41:8].

This brings to the fore another issue that must be stressed at this point: *where you begin does not dictate where you will end in your faith journey*. Abram began as an idolater; he concluded life by being "the friend of God." He became the father of the faithful. That should encourage each of us. Regardless of what we once were; we can become someone great in the sight of the Lord. You can permit yourself to be so focused on past failure that you fail to seize the glory of what is coming to be. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus rather than thinking of what has gone before in your life. Remember, He will not permit you to fail, if you walk with Him.

WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM ABRAHAM — "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." There is a serious misunderstanding of this text. The text states, "It was counted to him as righteousness." Many evangelical believers assume that "it" refers to Abraham's faith. However, there are several very good reasons we should not draw this conclusion.⁵ The antecedent of "it" cannot be that fact that Abraham believed God. "It" demands a noun as an antecedent. The text does not supply a noun. This fact alone suggests that we should look beyond the superficial to discern the factual.

Again, throughout the writings of the Apostle to the Gentiles, we never witness a statement that people are saved "because of" their faith or even "on the basis of their faith." According to Paul, people are saved "by" faith. The Greek preposition is *dià* with the genitive, not the dative. The meaning is "by faith as a channel."⁶

The Greek preposition can be translated by either "because of" or "through." If the word means "because of" in the phrase *dià písteos*, faith would indeed be the ground of salvation and a substitute for salvation. However, this cannot be the meaning, because whenever *dià* means "because of," its object is in the accusative case and this never happens when faith is the object. When the Greek term translated faith occurs with *dià*, it is always in the genitive case. Since this is the case the object should be in when *dià* means "by" or "through," indicating that faith is a channel and not the grounds of salvation.

In order to spend money, you have to have faith in its purchasing power. However, it is not your faith that makes the money valuable; it is the value of the money and not your faith that makes money worth the face value. Value is inherent in the worth of the bill as stipulated by the government. Thus, a loonie is valued at one dollar. The same thing is true spiritually.

⁵ The following discussion relies heavily on James Montgomery Boice, **Romans, Volume 1: Justification by Faith** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 1991) 434-5

⁶ ROMANS 3:22; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:7; GALATIANS 2:16; EPHESIANS 2:8; PHILIPPIANS 3:9; 2 TIMOTHY 3:15

Faith cannot be a substitute for righteousness because the important word “counted” in the text does not permit that interpretation. Whether in Hebrew or in Greek, the words (*yichs^{ba}* in Hebrew and *elogísthe* in Greek) are bookkeeping terms. The words refer to accounting. Accounting requires accuracy to be acceptable. Suppose I go into Tim Horton’s and I have ten cents in my bank account. I want a large double-double and a crueller, but I don’t have sufficient money in my account. However, I “reckon” I have ten dollars in my account and I attempt to use my debit card because I “reckon” I have enough money to pay for the purchase. According to my accounting I have enough to make my purchase; but my accounting means nothing. I must actually have enough in my account to make the purchase. Reckoning, accounting or crediting is an acknowledgement or marking down of what is the reality.

The same holds true in justification, leading to the proper understanding of this verse. God performed two acts in saving Abraham—one negative and one positive. First, God did what Paul quotes David as saying in verses seven and eight. Quoting from **PSALM 32:1, 2**, Paul writes:

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;
blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

[ROMANS 4:7, 8]

God didn’t merely wipe Abraham’s sins from the ledger and forget about them, as though sins could be discounted. It is true that God did remove Abraham’s sins from the ledger, but it was only because He had first transferred those sins to the ledger of Jesus His Son. Jesus took the liability of Abraham’s sins on Himself and paid their price by dying for them. Abraham’s sins were not reckoned to Abraham because they were reckoned to Jesus Christ!

Simultaneously, God also reckoned the righteousness of Christ the Lord to Abraham, which is precisely what **GENESIS 15:6** teaches. God transferred Jesus’ righteousness and wrote it in Abraham’s ledger.

This is the only way anyone has ever been saved, and it is precisely what happened for you, if you are saved. I do not say that Abraham understood as completely as Paul understood what happened, but this is what God has done for each person who is saved. To substantiate what I am saying, consider another instance where Paul cites the salvation of Abraham.

“Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’” [GALATIANS 3:6]

“The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” [GALATIANS 3:8, 9].

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” [GALATIANS 3:13, 14].

Here are the facts, then. **ABRAHAM BELIEVED THE GOSPEL**⁷. Abraham believed God regarding spiritual issues [GALATIANS 3:8]. Abraham did believe God’s promise concerning the land and concerning offspring; but what truly gripped the old man was the promise of salvation for all nations! For this reason, the author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians writes: “[Abraham] was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” [HEBREWS 11:10].

⁷ The following three points are drawn from Boice, op. cit., 441-2

ABRAHAM POSSESSED FAITH THAT GOD WOULD REDEEM SINFUL PEOPLE. Listen again to Paul's words in **GALATIANS 3:13, 14**. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law ... so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. He redeemed us from bondage to sin through sacrificing His own life. Living as we do on this side of the Cross, we must not imagine that those who lived on the other side of history were utterly ignorant of what would transpire. None less than Jesus Himself said of Abraham, "Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. *He saw it and was glad*" [**JOHN 8:56**].

Finally, **ABRAHAM BELIEVED IN THE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST SPECIFICALLY.** Having argued that God announced the Gospel to Abraham in advance and that Abraham looked forward to the blessing of redemption, Paul says, "The promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' who is Christ" [**GALATIANS 3:16**]. On no less than three occasions did God promise blessing through a singular descendant of Abraham. In **GENESIS 12:7**, God promises Abraham, "To your offspring I will give this land." In **GENESIS 13:15**, God promises Abraham, "All the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever." And in **GENESIS 24:7**, Abraham recalls the promise of God when he speaks of, "The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land.'" It is apparent that Abraham understood that God was presenting a specific promise that could be achieved only by one specific descendant, Christ Jesus the Lord. Admittedly, Abraham did not know His Name; but he was anticipating the coming of this one individual. It was through this channel of faith that God declared him to be justified.

Before the death of Christ the Lord, people were saved by believing God—believing that God would provide the Redeemer. How are people saved today, after the death of Christ the Lord? They are saved by believing God—believing that He has provided the Redeemer. Salvation is the free gift of God given to all who believe the message of life. Christ Jesus died because of your sin. He was buried, and He conquered death and has risen from the dead. He ascended into heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Now, He calls all who are willing to believe this glorious truth, receiving Him as Master over life.

For this reason, the Word of God promises all who will receive it, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" [**ROMANS 10:9-13**].

So, the question to you is this, "On what basis do you expect to be saved?" What do you believe concerning Jesus, who is the Christ? Do you believe He is your Saviour? That is what the Father declares Him to be. No one—not Adam, nor Abraham, nor Moses, nor David, nor John the Baptist, nor any of the saints saved since the Resurrection of Christ the Lord, has been saved in any other way than by believing the Good News that Jesus Christ is the Saviour. The Word of God declares to you that "Today is the day of salvation." Believe this message of life and be saved today. Amen.