

# Abraham, the First Missionary

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Galatians 3: 6 – 8.



"Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.'"

Galatians 3: 6 – 8.



# I. Introduction

There are so many different aspects of the life of Abraham. Through all of them, and especially through his relationship with God, his faith, and his obedience, he became for all believers a source of inspiration, and a model in our witnessing.



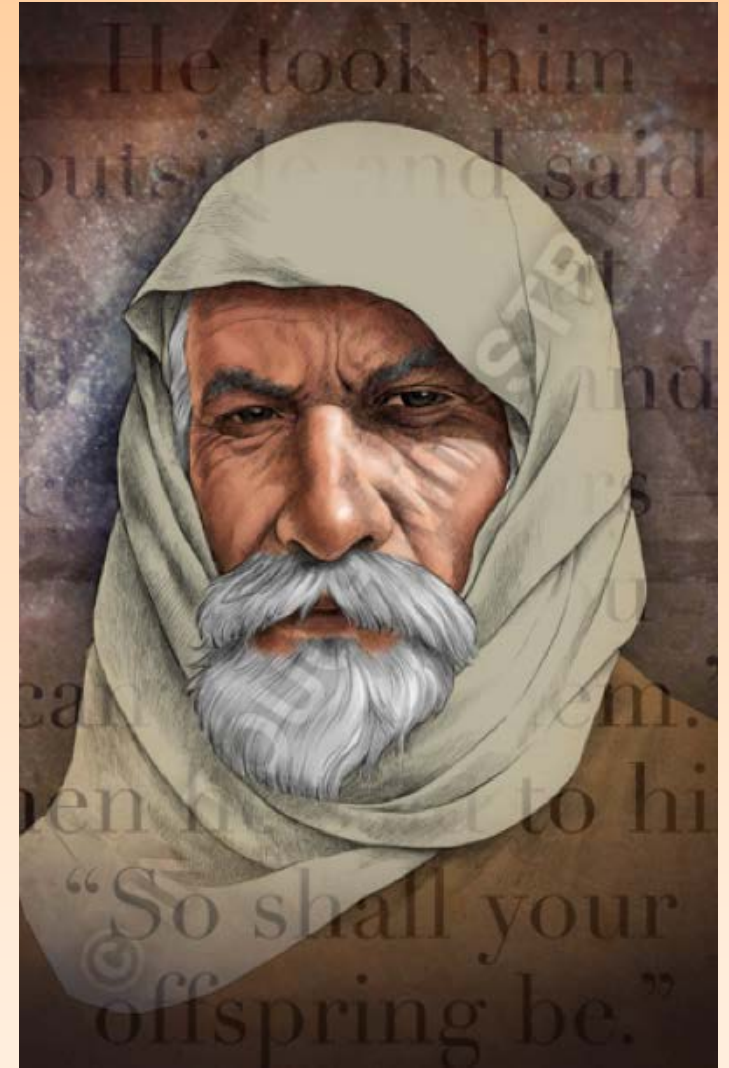
“Abraham was above all an example that God was faithful, that His words were steadfast and that He always fulfilled His promises.”

Halvor Moxness,  
Theology in Conflict:  
Studies in Paul’s  
Understanding of God in  
Romans, p. 189.



"Abraham is such a fascinating figure. Three world religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - all claim him as a patriarch. He was raised in a religious home. And yet he rejected existing religion in order to pursue a personal relationship with God."

Anne Graham Lotz



“Westerners often define spirituality as denying oneself, being detached from earthly concerns, and being intent on otherworldly values. By contrast, the Hebrews experienced the world of spirit as robust, life-affirming, and this-worldly in character. Such was the "spiritual" orientation of the Hebrews. So-called spirituality did not come by negating the richness of life's experiences or withdrawing from the world. Instead, they affirmed creation by finding a sense of holiness in the here and now. There was no division between the sacred and secular areas of life. It was all God's world, and it was to be enjoyed without a sense of shame or guilt. In Paul's words, "to the pure, all things are pure" (Tit. 1:15). As trustees and stewards of God's world, human beings were to live within it and use it in accord with divine directives.”

Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*

“Now since the Jews kept turning over and over the fact, that the Patriarch, and friend of God, was the first to receive circumcision, Paul wishes to show, that it was by faith that he was justified. And this was quite a vantage ground to insist upon. For a person who had no works, to be justified by faith, was nothing unlikely. But for a person richly adorned with good deeds, not to be made just from hence, but from faith, this is the thing to cause wonder, and to set the power of faith in a strong light.”

John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, Homily 8

“On one great promise made to Abraham all the others hang, and without it they lose all their value: “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 22:18.) Take away the covenant of salvation, and there remains no hope.”  
John Calvin



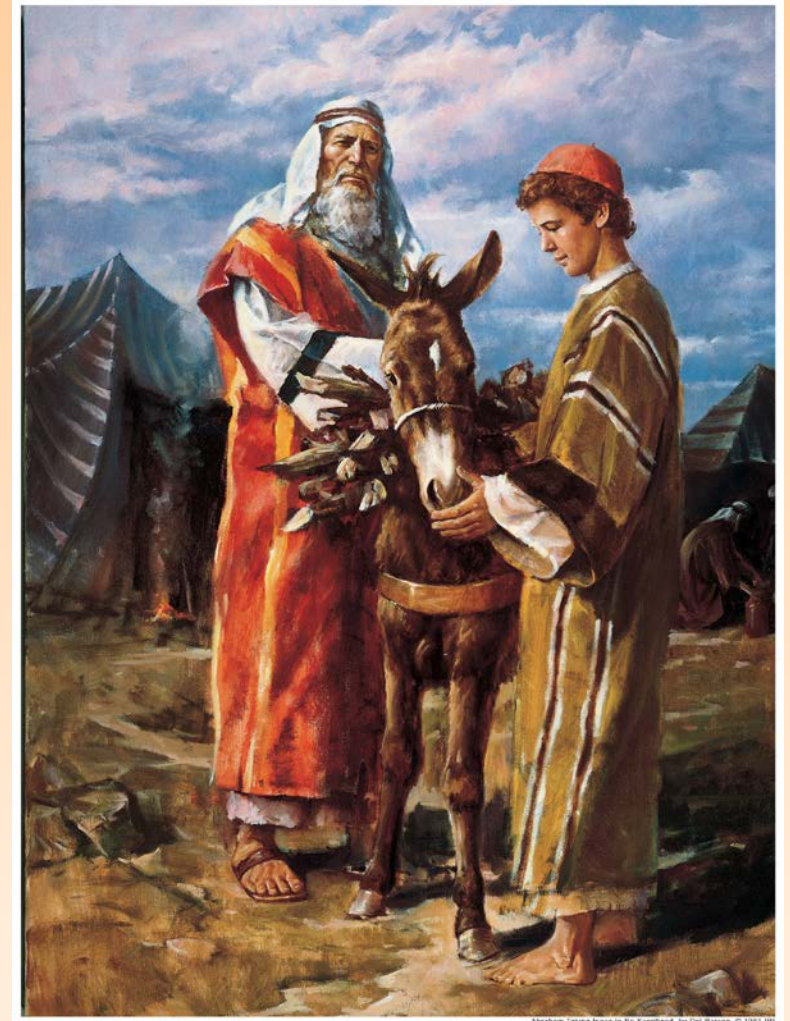
“Abraham may have enjoyed a good standing with men for his upright life, but not with God. In the sight of God, Abraham was a condemned sinner. That he was justified before God was not due to his own exertions, but due to his faith. The Scriptures expressly state: "Abraham believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Martin Luther



## ALL NATIONS BLESSED THROUGH ABRAHAM

"Thus, then, they who are of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham, and these are the children of Abraham. Now God made promise of the earth to Abraham and his seed; yet neither Abraham nor his seed, that is, those who are justified by faith, do now receive any inheritance in it; but they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For God is true and faithful; and on this account He said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (Against Heresies, Book 5, chapter 32, par. 2).



# II. Context



The 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of the Book of Galatians is presenting the arguments of Paul to those who are tempted to return to the practices existing before the ministry of Jesus and to promote the salvation by the works of the law. The apostle is reminding the Christians from Galatia that they already received the gifts of the Holy Spirit through faith and the redemption in Christ through faith also. (A) and (A'). No human efforts can make a valid contribution for our salvation.



## Structure of Galatians Chapter 3

<b>A</b>	1 - 5	RECEIVING SPIRIT THROUGH FAITH
<b>B</b>	6 - 14	SONS OF ABRAHAM THROUGH FAITH
<b>C</b>	15 - 18	INHERITENCE IS OF PROMISE TO ABRAHAM AND NOT BY LAW
<b>B'</b>	19 - 26	SONS OF GOD THROUGH FAITH
<b>A'</b>	27 - 28	RECEIVING JESUS THROUGH FAITH

The second argument confirms that God accepts us as children of Abraham through faith only (B). In the same way, through faith, we become the sons of God (B') Through the baptism we become part of the New Covenant and receive eternal life as inheritance, promised to all true children of Abraham.



The third aspect is that the inheritance is not related to the law. If it is the case, it would be more a question of merit. But God gave inheritance to Abraham as a promise, therefore not related to his works of the law. This is how every element of the story of Abraham points toward the salvation by faith, the gifts of the Spirit by faith, and the inheritance by faith.



## Structure of Galatians Chapter 3: 6 - 14

A	6 - 9	FAITH OF ABRAHAM
B	10	CURSE OF THE LAW FOR THOSE WILLING TO BE SAVED BY WORKS
C	11	LIVING BY FAITH
B'	12 - 13	CURSE TAKEN BY CHRIST FOR THOSE SAVED BY FAITH
A'	14	BLESSING OF ABRAHAM

Our text about Abraham's salvation (3: 6 – 14) has a central part based on an important quotation of the OT. The text of the prophet Habakkuk is reinforcing the central concept of the reconciliation with God: "the just shall live by faith." There is no real life without faith. One can find an echo of this statement in Hebrews 11: 6. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."



Verse 10 (B) is reminding all Christians that those who are trying to be saved by the works of the law must face also the cursing of those who are not keeping perfectly the law. At the same time, there is another excellent news: for those who live by faith Jesus already took the cursing on himself, in order to give us the opportunity to be beneficiaries of the blessing of Abraham.



### III. Abraham as a blessing for everyone



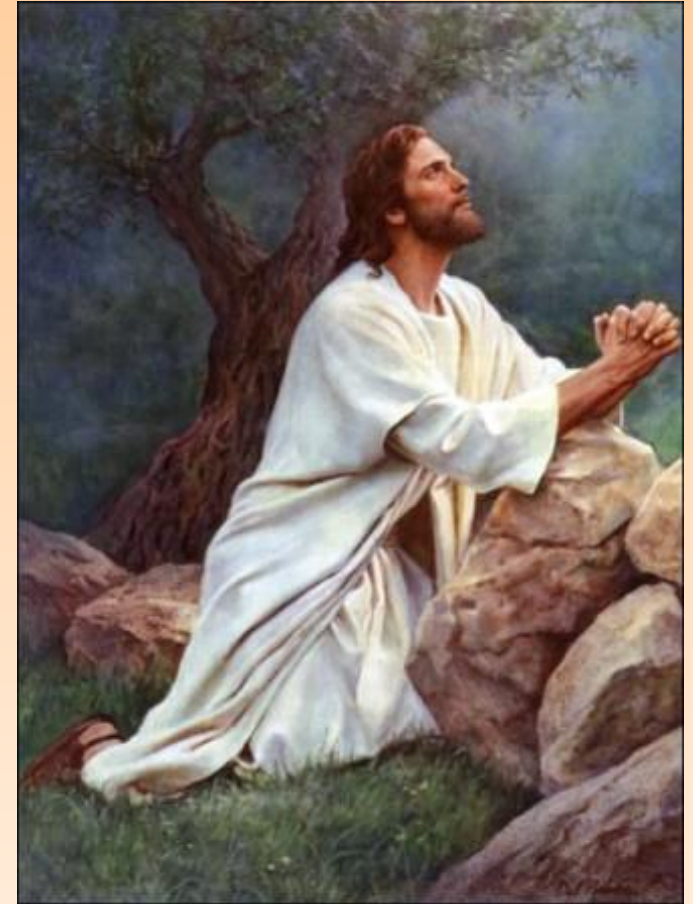
# 1. God accounts faith into righteousness

"Just as  
Abraham "believed  
God, and it was  
accounted to him for  
righteousness."



"God accounts faith to a man as righteousness, but the underlying and secret truth which the Old Testament does not so clearly give us is found in the New Testament declaration, that we are accepted in the Beloved, and justified because of the obedience of Christ. Faith justifies, but not in and by itself, but because it grasps the obedience of Christ."

C. H. Spurgeon, Sermon # 844, on December 6th, 1868.



“Faith is clearly excluded from the category of human achievement. Righteousness is reckoned to ‘one who doesn’t work.’ What is reckoned is not faith but righteousness on the basis of faith.”  
George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament, p. 491.



“I do not try, Lord, to attain Your lofty heights, because my understanding is in no way equal to it. But I do desire to understand Your truth a little, that truth that my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand.”

Anselm of Canterbury,  
Proslogion, 1, p. 87.



## 2. Sons of Abraham

"Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham."



"Anyone – Jew or Gentile,  
rich or poor, male or female,  
white or black or brown,  
quick-witted or slow, old or  
young – anyone can be a  
child of Abraham and inherit  
the blessings promised to  
Abraham's children, if you  
live by faith."

John Piper



"It is noteworthy that this text places Paul in conflict with the customary usage of Abraham in Jewish literature, which employs him as an example of one whose faith, accompanied by works, was itself an attainment...

Paul's emphasis on the sons of Abraham and the blessing of Abraham suggests that Abraham... is part of a process which works for the salvation of all, including the Gentiles."

George Howard, Paul, Crisis in Galatia, A Study in Early Christian Theology, p. 54. 55.



“The true, spiritual descendants of Abraham are not those who inherit his genes, but those who share his faith.”

Phil Johnson



### 3. Blessing of salvation

"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.'"



“The nations will come to be blessed as Abraham was, but only because they will have turned to the only source of such blessing, Abraham’s God.”

Christopher J. H. Wright, *Salvation Belongs to Our God: Celebrating the Bible's Central Story*.



“The blessing to the Jews and to every nation is identical, namely, the gift of salvation in Christ, brought about by “turning every one [of them] from [his] iniquities” through the preaching of the gospel of Christ.”  
Steve Gregg



“Abraham was chosen to inaugurate historically the covenant of grace whose blessings were finally to flow to the world through the work of the Son of Abraham who is also Son of God. Paul appealed to the Jew to see in Christianity the original message of Israel. And to the Gentile to observe the age-long operation of the divine mind in bringing through Christ to fruition the principles on which he had acted in the whole history of the world.”

G. T. Purves, Paul's Explanation of the Place of Abraham in Revelation, in Christian Faith and Life, 1901. p. 101.

# V. Conclusion



“Every mystery which is enacted by our Lord Jesus Christ asks only for faith. The mystery was enacted at that time for our sake and aimed at our resurrection and liberation, should we have faith in the mystery of Christ and in Christ. For the patriarchs prefigured and foretold that man would be justified from faith. Therefore, just as it was reckoned as righteousness to Abraham that he had faith, so we too, if we have faith in Christ and every mystery of his, will be sons of Abraham. Our whole life will be accounted as righteous.”

Marius Victorinus, (280 - ?), *Epistle to the Galatians, 1.3.7*. Mark J. Edwards, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 39).

"In ourselves we are incapable of doing any good thing; but that which we cannot do will be wrought by the power of God in every submissive and believing soul. It was through faith that the child of promise was given. It is through faith that spiritual life is begotten, and we are enabled to do the works of righteousness."

Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 98.



"The Faith that removes  
mountains, moves us to  
obey God."

Alfred Shannon



# Abraham, the First Missionary

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Galatians 3: 6 – 8.

