**ABRAHAM (#1)**

***Exposing The Wizard***

*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was a children’s book written by Frank Baum in 1900. It was enormously popular as a book long before it was made even more famous by the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, starring Judy Garland. Both the book and movie show how Dorothy and her faithful dog Toto are magically transported to the enchanted land of Oz by a Kansas tornado. There they meet various Witches. The Witch of the North, who is good and gives Dorothy her magical slippers; The Witch of the East, who is bad but killed by Dorothy’s house falling on her; The Wicked Witch of the West, who tries to steal her slippers and kill her friends; and, The Witch of the South (named Glinda), who helps her return home to Kansas by telling her to click her heels three times and say, “There’s no place like home. There’s no place like home. There’s no place like home.”

In the story we learn Dorothy and Toto are told to go to the Emerald City to find the great Wizard of Oz, who will then be able to help her. On her journey she runs across the strange characters of the Tin Woodman, the Brainless Scarecrow, and the Cowardly Lion. They all join her to find the Wizard so they can be rewarded with their wishes. After many trials brought on by the Wicked Witch of the West they finally reach the Emerald City and find the Wizard. He hesitates to hear their pleas but finally promises to help them only when the Wicked Witch is killed. After the Witch is dead they return to the great Wizard to be rewarded. He again hesitates. When Toto knocks over a screen (in the book), or pulls back the curtain (in the movie), the Wizard is exposed as but a common man with no powers. But he does tell them they all got what they came for – the Tinman got his heart, the Scarecrow got his brains, the Lion got his courage, and Dorothy can have a balloon to take her back home.

There is more to the story (please read the books – a great purchase for kids to read). But I wanted to use this story as a “pull back the curtain” moment regarding what Paul said to the Jews about “father Abraham.” Almost 2,000 years of history had elapsed by the time Paul wrote the book of Romans. In those two millenniums the Jews had rewritten history to turn Abraham into a sinless saint. And they had come to believe that if they were descendants from this holy man then their ticket was punched to heaven. Since they had the blood of Abraham flowing in their veins then they were privileged people who would surely be saved at judgment day. They were “justified” by the life of Abraham.

Paul spends a lot time and a lot of ink in the book of Romans exposing this rewriting of history. Their beloved Abraham was not saved by his great works of righteousness, but by faith in God’s amazing grace. As we read Romans we discover Paul, like Toto, pulling back the curtain to reveal an Abraham who was a sinner, not an all-powerful Wizard. If you spend just a few minutes reading Romans 4-5 you quickly learn that if you could have asked Abraham how he was saved, he would immediately raise his voice to a high pitch and shout, “God’s grace!”

Just read it for yourself. After spending three full chapters arguing vehemently that “*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*” (3:23), Paul then uses their favorite saint as his Exhibit A.

*​1 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.*

To the Jew in Paul’s day the dear beloved Abraham was their “savior.” If anybody was going to be saved it would surely be Abraham! Yet, if you could speak to him in person he would recount all of his terrible past, exposing his sinful life as unworthy of salvation.

He would talk of his life as an idolater in his father Terah’s home in Ur of the Chaldees (Josh. 24:2).

He would talk of his disbelieving God and laughing when told by God he would have a son in his old age (Gen 17:17).

He would talk of his despicable behavior of endangering his wife, not once but twice, by calling her his sister to save his own skin (Gen. 12:13; 20:2).

In these stories we learn that God did not call Abraham to be the father of the Jews because he was sinless and had merited His favor by great works. He had his warts exposed like everyone else. Paul included Abraham when he said in Rom. 3:10-12,

*“There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none who understands. Thee is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside. They have together become unprofitable. There is none who does good, no, not one!”*

When Paul writes this incredible treatise on God’s plan of salvation in Romans he is writing his own biography. He had grown up a Pharisee, believing with all his heart that the Jews were a favored people, destined to a national salvation because of their fleshly connection to Abraham. Jesus had shattered that doctrine, which is why Paul hated Him and Christianity so much, working feverishly to exterminate it (Acts 7:57 – 8:3). Upon his conversion (Ac 9:1-19) he made it his life’s work to expose this myth of salvation through the lineage of Abraham, and by works of law-keeping as a Jew. Abraham, as great as he was due to his faith, had to be revealed as a sinner saved by grace like everyone else.

Why am I writing this about Abraham? Because, without knowing how he was saved, I won’t fully understand how I am saved. Since God chose to give so much attention to his life in the New Testament (did you know he was mentioned 65 times in the N.T.?), we need a deep study of Abraham to appreciate how his salvation connects to ours.

Paul has pulled back the curtain and exposed the Wizard of Works. In seeing Abraham’s “*justification by faith*” – we can then say, “There is no place like home: Heaven.”

I love you. - Rick