

What is an “Abrahamic Faith?”

Many today argue that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are “Abrahamic faiths,” all finding their origins in the life and ministry of Abraham. The implication is that since all three faiths drink from the same well, all worship the same God and share heavenly truths. How do we respond?

First, we affirm that the Jews were indeed the “chosen people,” intended by God to be a light to the nations, leading the peoples of the world to faith in the one true God and the Messiah of God through the living witness of the prophets, the Torah, and the sacrificial system at the Jerusalem temple. However, in rejecting the Messiah of God, the Jewish nation rejected their role as God’s chosen vehicle to the nations. Jesus affirmed this rejection in His tragic lament over Jerusalem and the Parable of the Landowner (Matt. 23:37-38, 21.43).

Second, with Pentecost (Acts 2) and the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7.54-60), God’s salvific purposes on earth have no longer centered around ethnic Israel but around spiritual Israel, the church of God. It is not the children of the flesh, i.e. ethnic Jews, who are the children of Abraham, but the children of the promise, those who regardless of ethnicity are born (again) into the promise of the Messiah, i.e. spiritual Israelites (Rom. 9.11).

Third, the spiritual descendants of Abraham are those who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, regardless of ethnicity. *“Just as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.” For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed*” (Gal. 3.6-9, NRSV). Abraham’s spiritual descendants are defined as, “Those who believe are the descendants of Abraham.” And the focus of that belief is faith in Jesus Christ as the only source of justification and salvation (Gal. 2.16, NRSV).

According to the Scriptures therefore, the spiritual descendants of Abraham have the following characteristics: 1) they are born again through the work of the Holy Spirit on their hearts (John 3.3); 2) they believe God’s promises to Abraham of justification for all families of the earth through the Good News of the Messiah of God (Gal. 3.6-9); 3) they trust in Jesus Christ’s substitutionary atonement on Calvary alone for their justification and in His indwelling for their sanctification (Gal. 3.19-20); 4) they are baptized into the Body of Christ where there are no social, ethnic or gender distinctions (Gal. 3.27-28); and 5) they receive the gift of, and are united by, the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3.14). For such individuals, there is the ringing affirmation, *“And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise”* (Gal. 3.29, NRSV).

Thus understood, Judaism, Roman Catholicism and Islam cannot be considered “Abrahamic faiths.” Judaism has rejected outright Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah of God. Islam teaches a blend of divine predestination and human righteousness by works, and Catholicism teaches grace plus works as being necessary for man’s salvation.

So what are we laboring for in 2016? We are seeking spiritual descendants of Abraham from every nation, tribe, language and people – and we allow the Scriptures to define what represents the faith of Abraham. As such, we reject any theology that suggests post-Pentecost special dispensations for any specific ethnic group linked to Abraham. Let us therefore examine ourselves and humble ourselves before God that we may be spiritual descendants of Abraham ourselves! May God work through us that others of all spiritual backgrounds may also join in the faith of Abraham, and live joyously with us in the remnant Body of Christ as we await the return of the Messiah of God. Thank you for sharing in this joyous ministry!