

“God so loved ... THAT...”

You may know that Muslims, Jews, and Christians all claim Abraham as their father in the faith – but did you know that there are other religious groups that claim to him – the Baha’i, Yezidi, Druze, and others?

If all these religions have a common root – then why do they have such different, and even conflicting, beliefs? At their root (if you will), they do not have the same God, or the same Gospel of salvation.

God makes His covenant with Abram saying – “I will bless you” – but if that is all that is said, if that is where you stop, if this “blessing” is left general and undefined – well, then you can end up with Muslims, Jews, Christians, Yezidi, and others.

The same is true with the promise of Jesus in John 3:16 – sometimes called “the Gospel in a nutshell” – “For God so loved the world ...” If left as a general statement that “God loves you” – if left unfinished – it opens God and His love up to all kinds of false teachings --- and remember, we’re talking about eternal salvation here!

That is why the blessing given to Abraham is repeated, and further defined, as we move through the Old Testament. That’s why Jesus doesn’t stop with, “God so loved the world” – but gives meaning, and definition, saying – He “so loved the world THAT He gave His only-begotten Son.”

God’s love for us, and for the whole world – is centered in Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son. But there’s more – more definition – more Gospel that is in and through Jesus Christ alone.

We’d rather have an undefined God – one that we can define according to our own desires. It’s like wanting our parents to say – “Make sure you come home” – and leaving the timing of that squarely in our hands.

When it comes to TRUTH – we prefer a “lowest common denominator” approach – where we can all agree that God “blesses” and “loves” – without getting into the weeds of what that means – what is true about God, His blessing, and His love.

When man defines who God is – when man tells God what is good and what is evil – when man becomes the creator and God becomes OUR creation – then we show that we are children of our father ADAM – that we are rebellious sinners who live as if we are the gods of our own lives.

To live as the gods of our own lives is to be cursed. It is to live in death – to be damned eternally. But, “God so love the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

God giving His Son IS the “blessing” promised to Abram – but not only Abram – for the Lord promises, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” God so loved the whole world, every last person – that He gives His Son to be born in human flesh, a descendant of Abraham – so that all the families of the earth may be blessed by the salvation He brings!

Connected to this Gospel preached to Abraham, is the land God promises to Abraham and his descendants. Romans 4 says that – “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” In Genesis 12 we see this faith in action – as Abram packs everything up and heads to this unknown land that the Lord will show him.

Abram lives by faith, not by sight. And when he is brought into the Promised Land – in faith, he builds an altar and calls upon the name of the Lord. But there’s more to the story – more to the promise – more to God’s blessing and love.

Abraham and Sarah are old, “as good as dead.” How can this blessing and life that God has promised, come from Abraham? Well, man plays god and comes up with his own solution. Bring Sarah’s servant Hagar and Abraham can fulfill the promise with her.

Their son is Ishmael – the one through whom the Muslims trace their lineage back to Abraham. They say God’s blessing comes through Ishmael (not Isaac) – and therefore, salvation is not through Jesus Christ alone. This is what happens when man does not trust the Lord and His promises – but plays god. Salvation is at stake!

How could the one true God LOVE such self-made gods like us – give life to us who are dead in our trespasses and sins – fulfill His promise, in spite of our enmity with Him? This is where you get to the heart of God and His love. He is a God of grace – who loves the undeserving – who loves a world full of undeserving sinners.

That is why He gives His Son – because we are perishing in our sin. He loves so THAT He sends His only-begotten Son into this world, taking on our human flesh and blood – specifically, so THAT He may suffer, shed His blood, and die to redeem all mankind.

Jesus is like the snake lifted up in the wilderness. God’s own people grumbled against Him, rebelled, worshipped false gods – lived as if they could live without Him. But God did not abandon them, He “loved” them – sending poisonous snakes into their camp, so THAT they could see the deadly nature of their sin – so THAT they could see there is no life, no blessing, apart from God.

Rather than leave them with what they deserve – God, in His love, promises that all who looked in faith to the bronze snake on the pole – would not die, but live.

God loves you so THAT He lifts His own Son up on the Cross of Calvary – so THAT you may look to Jesus, trusting His promise – that by this blood your sins are forgiven – by this death your death is taken away. You shall not die, but live.

This is the “love” and the “blessing” of God our heavenly Father. Jesus’ Body and Blood is lifted up before your eyes today – even as His promise fills your ears – “this is for you, for the forgiveness of all your sin.”

God’s “love” and “blessing” is poured out today – not in some general, define it your own way – but in His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ – and according to His Word of Promise ----- “that WHOEVER believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.