



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

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HOW WERE SOME SAVED BY FAITH, APPARENTLY WITHOUT BAPTISM?

A conscientious person recently asked about this topic. In particular, he wondered: If the Bible says that a person's faith saved him, should we conclude that he was baptized at some point? How would that apply to people living on the earth today?

In every era of human history, those people who have pleased God have been those who lived by faith. We often recall the faith of Abraham, who clearly was justified by faith (Romans 4:1-12). A number of other men and women from the Old Testament era who pleased the Lord “by faith” are noted in Hebrews 11.

Habakkuk, a prophet of Jehovah, received this message from Him: “*But the just shall live by his faith*” (Habakkuk 2:4). That thought is repeated three times in the message of the new covenant (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). It is undeniable that, per the Lord's arrangement, the just/righteous live by faith.

There were instances in the life of Jesus when He proclaimed that a person was saved or blessed because of his/her faith. Here are three specific cases:

Luke 7:48 – He told a woman who had anointed Him, “*Your faith has saved you.*”

Luke 8:48 – He told a woman who had suffered with a flow of blood, “*Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well.*”

Luke 17:19 – He told a leper (the only one out of ten who returned to express thanks and give glory to God), “*Your faith has made you well.*”

Concerning this last gentleman's situation, some have asked: If all ten lepers were healed, how is it that this one man's faith made him whole/well? There is a difference in (1) a person receiving God's blessings and (2) a person being saved. God bestows sunshine and rain on both the righteous and unrighteous (Matthew 5:45). While the Lord blesses the ungodly, that certainly does not mean that they are saved in a state of unbelief.

As for Abraham and others who lived by faith before the coming of the Christ, they were not baptized in water. Thus, they were justified before God without being baptized. That was the case because water baptism was not required of those who lived before the law of Moses was given, nor was it a

part of the instruction of that law for the Israelites (just as offering animal sacrifices and males going to Jerusalem three times annually to observe feasts are actions which are not required for those living under the new covenant of Jesus). Different covenants, different demands.

How did baptism get into the picture? Well, God put it there! He did so in the days of John the Baptizer. John came “*preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*” (Luke 3:3). His baptism was called “*the baptism of John*” (Luke 7:29). The Jews from “*Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan*” went to be baptized by John, confessing their sins (Matthew 3:5).

What about those Jews who had access to John's teaching but failed to receive his baptism for the remission of sins? The Bible says, “*And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him*” (Luke 7:29,30). Those who rejected John's baptism rejected God's will, and no one who rejects His will can please Him.

“Well, what about those people to whom Jesus said that their faith saved them?” Do not forget this truth that Jesus proclaimed about Himself: “*. . . the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins*” (Luke 5:24). He said that after He had pronounced a man forgiven of his sins (5:20). While living on the earth, the Master had the authority to forgive sins according to His desire. You see, His covenant, the covenant of which He is the mediator, did not go into effect until after He died (Hebrews 9:15-17).

That brings us to these giant questions: What about people living today? Can they be justified by faith? In fact, if anyone under the new covenant is going to be justified/saved, it will be by faith (Romans 5:1). Does that eliminate water baptism as a condition of salvation? No, it does not. Under Jesus' covenant, salvation is for those who believe *and* are baptized (Mark 16:16). Baptism's purpose is to wash away sins (Acts 22:16), and that truth will never change.

-- Roger D. Campbell

THE BOOK OF NAHUM: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The very first verse of this book informs us that the message will be “*The burden against Nineveh*” (Nahum 1:1). The major thrust of the book, from beginning to end, is the fall of Nineveh, described as “*the bloody city*” (3:1). When its destruction arrived, people would exclaim, “*Nineveh is laid waste*” (3:7).

Historical setting: When Nahum prophesied, the Assyrian Empire was the dominant power in the Middle East. Assyria had destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel in B.C. 722/721 and also had attacked Judah on more than one occasion. The people of God counted Assyria as a ruthless enemy.

Nineveh, located on the Tigris River, was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. The inhabitants of Nineveh repented when another prophet of Jehovah, Jonah, went there to preach (Jonah 3:1-10; Matthew 12:41). That happened well over one hundred years *before* Nahum’s writing. By the time the Spirit of God guided Nahum to speak of Nineveh’s future, the city’s cup of sin was running over and her destruction was on the horizon.

When exactly did Nahum present his message about Nineveh? Nahum mentions the *past* overthrow of the Egyptian city of No Amon, which occurred in B.C. 663 (3:8; called “No” in the KJV and known in history as “Thebes”). Thus, Nahum wrote *after* that event. As we noted, Nahum foretold the destruction of Nineveh, which took place in B.C. 612. So, Nahum’s message came between the two events and dates reference above: he prophesied after the fall of No in B.C. 663 and before the fall of Nineveh in B.C. 612.

Unlike other prophets who declared God’s word in that same general time period, Nahum writes nothing about the internal affairs and corruption of Judah and Jerusalem. Instead, like Jonah before him, he speaks a message that exclusively was against Nineveh.

Nahum was not the only prophet of the Lord who spoke about Nineveh’s coming desolation. Isaiah foretold that devastating event (Isaiah 10:24-27), as did Zephaniah (Zephaniah 2:13-15).

Some key thoughts:

- The destruction of Nineveh, “*the bloody city*” (3:1), is the dominant theme. The name “Nineveh” is found three times in Nahum’s message (1:1; 2:8; 3:7). The unmissable message for Nineveh was, “*Behold, I am against you, says the LORD of hosts*” (3:5). What was going on in Nineveh that would cause the Creator of the universe to be against it?

Nineveh’s wickedness was continual (3:19). It conspired against the Lord (1:9). It was given over to idolatry (1:14). It was full of lies and robbery (3:1). It was guilty of harlotry and sorcery (3:4).

- In view of the above observations, we are reminded by the book of Nahum that no person or nation can stand against Jehovah and win. On the surface, at times it may appear that a person or country is successful in its rebellion against the Lord. Yet, in the end, God will have the final say! Nineveh plotted against the Lord and failed! (1:9,11). When God is against an individual or a collection of people due to their evil, none can stand before Him. It is true: “*sin is a reproach to any people*” (Proverbs 14:34).

The Bible’s message about the wickedness of Nineveh makes it plain that, though the Ninevites were Gentiles, they were accountable to God for their actions. They did not live under the law of Moses, but they were guilty of sin, meaning that they transgressed God’s will (1 John 3:4; Romans 4:15). God’s destruction of Nineveh was not simply a matter of Him “getting even.” Rather, it was a matter of Him carrying out His justice against those who deserved to be punished for their ungodliness.

- Nahum shows us several aspects of God’s nature. He shows us God’s *goodness*, saying, “*The LORD is good*” (1:7). Amen! All that God ever has done has been done with mankind’s best interest in mind. He is slow to anger (1:3) and has no delight in sin or the punishment of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). We recall that at an earlier time God had shown His goodness by sparing the city of Nineveh after the people repented when Jonah preached to them (Jonah 3,4).

Nahum shows us God’s *severity*, too. “*God is jealous*” (1:2), meaning that He will not share with anyone the devotion which should be granted to Him alone. He takes vengeance on His enemies and pours out His indignation, anger, and fury (1:2,6). God Himself will “lead the charge” against Nineveh. Read how God said “I will” do it to the city (2:13; 3:5,6).

The prophet further shows us God’s *power*. Indeed, He is “*great in power*” (1:3). In part, He demonstrates His power via nature (1:3-5). His power comforts, too, as He is a stronghold in the day of trouble (1:7).

Two other important lessons for us to learn: Through Nahum, God foretold *what* would happen to Nineveh, *why* it would happen, and *how* such would come about. What amazing knowledge! Truly, “*His understanding is infinite*” (Psalm 147:5).

Here is a sad reminder from Nineveh’s history: the repentance of one person, one family, or one group of people cannot guarantee future faithfulness. Nineveh repented when Jonah preached to them over 100 years before Nahum’s day. In Nahum’s time, Nineveh once again was a spiritual disaster. Think about that.

-- Roger D. Campbell

THREE QUESTIONS ABOUT HEAVENLY MATTERS

Christians who set their minds on things above often think about heaven itself. That sounds like a natural thing to do for folks who understand that (1) they are merely sojourners and pilgrims on earth and (2) they will have a wonderful inheritance in heaven (1 Peter 2:11; 1:3,4). I recently have been asked by sincere saints about a few heaven-related matters. Let us take a brief look at them one at a time.

❶ Are those who have left this world “looking down on us,” aware of what is transpiring on earth, and do earth’s activities influence the deceased people’s emotions?

It is not uncommon to hear people remark that as they were facing a particular trial in life, they could feel the presence of a deceased loved one with them. Or, one might attribute his/her success to a loved one looking down on them from heaven and helping them through their endeavor. Maybe someone wants to encourage and comfort a friend who has lost a loved one, so they say, “I am sure that _____ is looking down from heaven right now and smiling when he sees how strong you are.”

In reality, there is nothing in the Bible which would indicate that what you and I do on earth influences the emotions of a person who has left this world. There is nothing in the Scriptures which shows that the dead are aware of what is going on among the living this very day.

When Jesus died, He went to Hades, not directly to heaven (Acts 2:27-31). In Jesus’ story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, those men went to Hades after they left this world, not directly to hell and heaven (Luke 16:19-31). “Yes, but did not the rich man know that he had five brothers on earth who needed to hear a warning about the torment that the unrighteous receive already in Hades?” He was aware that he had five brothers still on earth when he himself died (Luke 16:27,28), but there is no indication that he was aware of their daily routines and doings *after* he passed away. Lazarus and the rich fellow were conscience after death and could remember their earthly experiences (Luke 16:22-25), but there is no hint in the Bible that they have knowledge of what is going on “down here” in their absence or that they in any way can influence what takes place on earth.

Consider these thoughts: “*For the living know that they will die. But the dead know nothing. And they have no more reward. For the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished. Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun*” (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6). While the dead are remembered for a time, and while

they can have some influence on earthly affairs via what they did when they were still living on the earth, it is clear that they know nothing about present-day activities on earth and do not have a direct share in what is going on in the world after they leave it.

❷ Why kind of body will we have in heaven? We simply could say that we will have the type of body that the Lord wants us to have, do you not agree?

The Bible says, “*So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption . . . It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body*” (1 Corinthians 15:42,44). So, the resurrected child of God will have a body, and the Scriptures say it will be a “spiritual” one.

Our resurrected, heaven-bound body will be a *changed* one – it will be different from our current, bones-and-blood body. As Paul said in the same letter which we just quoted, “*We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed . . . and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*” (1 Corinthians 15:51,52). Furthermore, our resurrected, heavenly body will be *incorruptible* and *immortal* (1 Corinthians 15:53,54). Heaven is an environment that is both eternal and free from corruption, so our God will give us a suitable body for such a place.

Whatever kind of body Jesus now has in heaven, *that* is the same kind which we will have there. Read these powerful words of encouragement: “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body . . .*” (Philippians 3:20,21). We will have a *glorious* body that will be like our Lord’s. Yes, “. . . *when He is revealed, we shall be like Him*” (1 John 3:2). I cannot wait! How about you?!

❸ Will we recognize one another in heaven? They were not in heaven, but on the Mount of Transfiguration Peter could identify whom Moses and Elijah were, even though those latter two came back from the realm of the departed (Mark 9:5). Again, though it was in Hades and not in heaven, the rich man could recognize Abraham after both of them had left this world (Luke 16:23,24). Jesus said that many will sit down in the kingdom of heaven with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matthew 8:10). Would that not indicate being able to recognize those three?

After David’s baby boy died, the king stated, “*Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me*” (2 Samuel 12:23). That sure sounds like David would know his son when he saw him.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Philippians 3:3 – “FOR WE ARE THE CIRCUMCISION”

The third division of the book of Philippians begins with Paul’s appeal for the saints in Philippi to “rejoice in the Lord” (Philippians 3:1). He next called on them to beware of dogs, evil workers, and the mutilation (3:2) – a clear warning about people who were dangers to the church’s spiritual well-being. The language Paul used most likely pointed to individuals who still were trying to bind the law of Moses and put emphasis on physical circumcision and one’s biological background.

In contrast to those who put stock in matters of the flesh, Paul said, “*For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*” (3:3). In this case, the word “we” refers to Christians, regardless of whether they are Gentiles or Jews after the flesh.

In the Bible, the expression “the Circumcision” generally is used to refer to the Jews, contrasting them with the Gentiles, who are identified as “the Uncircumcision” (Ephesians 2:11). Circumcision of the male flesh is mentioned first in the Bible in Genesis 17. There we read that God instructed Abraham and his descendants to be circumcised as “*a sign of the covenant*” that Jehovah made with the father of those who believe (Genesis 17:11). Physical circumcision on the eighth day also was commanded under the law of Moses (Leviticus 12:2,3).

It is worthy of noting that under the old covenant, there was another type of circumcision in addition to the cutting off of the male flesh. Through Moses, the Lord charged the Israelite nation, “*Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer*” (Deuteronomy 10:16). One who had a circumcised spiritual heart was devoted to the Lord and ready to lay aside anything that stood between him and his God.

Under the new covenant, Jesus’ followers comprise “the circumcision.” How interesting. As Paul wrote elsewhere, in the Christ we were “*circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ*” (Colossians 2:11). Again, it is clear that this is all about a person’s heart and has nothing to do with the flesh.

Do you recall what Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians about the true circumcision? He made these three observations (Philippians 3:3):

- We worship God in the Spirit.
- We rejoice in Christ Jesus.
- We have no confidence in the flesh.

Let us expand our thoughts. Again, most often

when we hear or read in the Bible about “the circumcision,” we think of the Jews. In fact, there are three ideas which went hand-in-hand during the Old Testament era: (1) circumcision, (2) the people of God and (3) Israel. The circumcised were the people of God, and the people of God were the Israelites.

Bring those thoughts forward to the new covenant. We already have seen that under Jesus’ reign, “the circumcision” refers to His disciples. What about “the people of God” and “Israel?” It is undeniable that under the old covenant, the Israelites were the chosen people of God (Deuteronomy 7:6). In the big picture of things, that simply meant that they would be the ones through whom the Messiah/Savior of the world would come (Romans 9:4,5). Things are different under Jesus’ law. The plain message of Jesus’ doctrine is that today Christians are identified as “*the people of God*” (1 Peter 2:9,10). But what about the Jews? An individual Jew can become a part of God’s family/ chosen people by obeying the gospel and being baptized into the Christ (Galatians 3:26-29). Under the new covenant, being part of God’s chosen people is all about being born again, that is, via a spiritual birth, and has nothing to do with one’s DNA or fleshly background.

In Paul’s letter to the churches of Galatia, he mentioned “*the Israel of God*” (Galatians 6:16). The context of that statement shows us to whom he referred. He was not talking about Israel according to the flesh. Rather, he was talking about those whom he had just described as being “*in Christ Jesus . . . a new creation*” (Galatians 6:15). Whether or not a person is in the right relationship with the Lord has no connection with physical circumcision. Rather, it is all about being new creations in the Christ and possessing a “*faith working through love*” (Galatians 5:6; 6:15).

In our service to the Lord, there is no room for boasting about our physical or cultural heritage. It is, however, appropriate for us to have a sense of satisfaction in knowing that in Jesus we are the *circumcision* of God, the *people* of God, and the *Israel* of God. That is the Lord’s arrangement and His terminology. Let us embrace it. Let us be humbled by God’s mercy, grateful for His abundant blessings, and excited about telling others the good news of His gift of eternal life through Jesus.

-- Roger D. Campbell

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