

THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

By

Curtis Dickinson

“Know you therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.”

God made a promise to Abraham: “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen.12:3). Later he repeated the promise, “because you have obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:18).

What of this promise? Was it fulfilled? Or is it yet to be realized in some material sense? Gross confusion prevails. The tragic result is that Christians look for a fulfillment which will not come, because they look for the wrong kind of promise. People keep getting this original promise to Abraham mixed up with the Law given to Moses and with the land of Canaan in which the Israelites established a nation.

But the promise to Abraham had nothing to do with the law nor with national Israel. Paul explained, “For not through the law was the promise to Abraham or to his seed that he should be heir of the world, but through the righteousness of Faith” (Rom. 4:13). Three things are revealed here: 1) That the promise has nothing to do with the law, 2) That it does have to do with inheriting the world, and not a mere fraction of it, and 3) The it is through faith, and not through racial descent.

Jesus said that Abraham “rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56, cf. 8:44). Obviously Abraham understood that the promise that he was to be the father of many nations and that all families should be blessed through him was a promise concerning Christ and the salvation he would purchase for believers. God was severe in teaching him the lesson, “in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Gen. 21:12) because Isaac was the son of “promise”, the son born by a miracle of God in response to Abraham’s faith. This “it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed” (Rom. 9:8). Paul again explains, “know you therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7). It is plain that the promise is to Christians, and not to the fleshly descendants, the Ismaelites, and the many tribes and nations that descended from Abraham and rebelled against God. Nor does the promise have anything to do with modern Israel, a nation that is officially and thoroughly anti-Christ. Paul declares, “Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He said not, and to seeds, as of many, but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). The promise God made to Abraham had to do with Jesus Christ and the redemption He made for believers, so that all who believe on Him are blessed.

“And if you are Christ’s, then are you Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29). The promise is a spiritual one, as demonstrated in Abraham himself. Scripture says of him: “he looked for the city which has the foundation, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). Of Abraham and the other patriarchs, the Bible says, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on

the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own. And if indeed they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better country, that is a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for He has prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:13–16).

The promise which Abraham has not yet received is that promise that he “should be heir of the world” (Rom. 4:13). This world is to be destroyed, as described by the apostle Peter, revealing that this earth is “stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (II Pet. 3:7). Then Peter adds, “But according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness” (II Pet. 3:13).

This is Abraham’s inheritance, the city with foundations laid, not by men’s hands, but by God, a heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. Christ is the “seed” of Abraham, and through Him all Christians are the children and seed of Abraham, and thus joint-heirs of the new creation. Thus the promise, yet to be realized by Abraham and all God’s children, is an eternal home for saints resurrected and made immortal, not the land of Palestine occupied by a certain few in the 20th century.

This has always been the hope of the true Israel, the children of God by faith. The apostle Paul preached the resurrection of the dead everywhere he went. He claimed to glory in only one thing, the gospel of Christ, which is the good news of Christ’s death and resurrection. For preaching this gospel he was persecuted by the Jews and finally imprisoned and sent in chains to Rome, where he declared, “because of the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20). Paul is the inspired apostle who wrote emphatically that there is “one hope” (Eph. 4:4). This hope, held by Abraham and all believers of all time, is the hope of immortality in the new creation, after the present world has passed away.

WHAT THEN OF THE “LAND PROMISES”?

Indeed, there was a promise to Abraham concerning the land where he sojourned. “In that day (not the same day God made the original promise) Jehovah made a covenant with Abraham, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the Euphrates” (Gen 15:18). This promise was completely fulfilled after the Israelites returned from Egypt. The book of Joshua describes the conquest of the land, and declares, “So Jehovah gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein...There failed nothing of any good thing which Jehovah had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass” (Joshua 21:43, 45). Under King David, the kingdom was expanded all the way to the river Euphrates (II Sam. 8:3). This is further verified in I Kings 4:23, 24.

The kingdom also embraced laws, generally known as the mosaic Law, initiated in the ritual of circumcision. This law, called the Old Covenant, began at Mt. Sinai, and was finished at the cross, some 1400 years later. It included circumcision, the observation of certain days, feasts and ceremonial sacrifices, involving the slaying of animals for atonement of sins. All of this is done away in Christ, for He is the “end of the law.” In His death he became the final and complete sacrifice, paying the penalty for sin once and for all in his own death (Heb. 10:10, 14). Furthermore, the Old Covenant being fulfilled, there is now no racial barrier to the Kingdom of God. Ancestry or genealogy have nothing to do with redemption in Christ. By his death for sin Christ has brought all

believers into the commonwealth, into His Kingdom (Eph. 2:12–19). “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for you are all one man in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s then are you Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:27–29).

The earthly kingdom which was the glory of David and Solomon, and which their fleshly descendants have endeavored to restore to this day, was part of the national covenant made with Moses. They so trampled underfoot the laws of God that He sent their enemies to take them captive into Assyria and Babylon. Prophets foretold a return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple. All of this was fulfilled. A remnant of all the tribes returned to their homeland, and a great temple was built. But again they refused to walk in the faith exemplified by Abraham. “Jesus said unto them, if you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham” (John 8:39, cf., 40-56).

Instead of believing on Christ, as Abraham and Moses did, even before He appeared in the flesh, they rejected Him. Jesus then said, “The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). Peter identifies the church as this nation: “you are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Pet. 2:9)

To the fleshly nation of Israel, Jesus said, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 24:1–2), and in a few years his prophecy was fulfilled to the letter when the Roman armies demolished Jerusalem in 70 AD.

As Christians our hope is not hinged on a piece of temporal land nor a fickle and rebellious ethnic group. Our hope is not in this earth, which is to perish, nor in worldly governments — no, not in our own government nor some super government. Our hope is in the coming of Christ to judge the world, to deliver Christians out of it, to change our bodies to glorious ones like His own and plant us in the “new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness.”

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