

The Promises To Abraham

Introduction. After the fall of man God promised that the seed of woman would bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). The Bible, from that point, is the revelation of God's fulfillment of that promise. Man became very wicked and God destroyed both mankind and animals in the Flood, but He saved a representative number of both man and animals (Genesis 6-9). After the Flood, the descendants of Noah settled the area known as the Middle East. The seed promise was continued through Shem (Genesis 9:26-27). The world went into idolatry, but God chose Abraham, of Shem, as the one through whom the seed of woman should come.

This lesson is important for two reasons. First, it is good for us to know more details in God's scheme of redemption. Second, the doctrine of Premillennialism depends heavily on one facet of the promises of Abraham. Premillennialism teaches that in the "end times" there will be a re-gathering of the Jews from the nations to the ancient land, a mass spiritual regeneration of the Jewish people, a restoration of Jerusalem as the principal city and her Temple as the spiritual center of the world and the reign of David's Son over the twelve reunited tribes dwelling in Palestine as the preeminent nation of the world. In this lesson we will consider the promises to Abraham as they pertain to these two reasons.

I. The Three Promises Made To Abraham

- A. These promises were made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. At Shechem, God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham (Genesis 12:6-7).
- B. The land promise takes the form of a covenant and is discussed in detail in Genesis 15.
 1. In v. 8, Abraham asks God how he would know that he would inherit the land. God then gave His answer.
 2. Abraham's seed was to sojourn and be afflicted in a foreign land, and after 400 years Abraham's descendants were to return to Canaan (vv. 13-14). Paul said it was 430 years after the promise to Abraham (Galatians 3:17).
 3. The seed of Abraham was to return to Canaan in the fourth generation (v. 16). This refers to the fourth generation of those that went down into Egypt (Exodus 6:16-20).
 4. The land could not be possessed until the iniquity of the Amorite was full (v. 16). The Amorite was one of the groups living in Canaan at the time of Abraham. By the time of the conquest the iniquity of the land was full (Deuteronomy 9:5).
 5. The extent of the land is defined as from the river of Egypt (Wadi el'Arish) to the river Euphrates. The peoples who inhabited the land at the time of Abraham are likewise listed (vv. 18-21).
- C. God restated the nation and land promises to Abraham in Genesis 17:1-9. The covenant of circumcision was given as a token or sign of the covenant made with Abraham. Through the centuries from the time of Abraham until the fulfillment, circumcision would be a reminder to the descendants of Abraham that God has promised them Canaan as an everlasting possession (cp. Joshua 5:2-9).

1. The term “everlasting,” “forever,” or “perpetual” is defined as “a long duration or antiquity.” The word can be used in the sense of unlimited duration, or in the sense of a cycle or an age.
 2. The term is used of many items in the Old Testament that clearly are not of unlimited duration: covenant (Exodus 31:16); incense (Exodus 30:8); sabbath observance (Exodus 31:17); passover (Exodus 12:14); Levitical priesthood (Numbers 25:13); burnt offerings (Exodus 29:42); washing of hands and feet (Exodus 30:21); the lamp in the tabernacle (Exodus 27:41); circumcision (Genesis 17:13); Canaan as a possession (Genesis 17:8).
 3. The New Testament shows that some of these items that were said to be “everlasting” have been done away. The priesthood, law (covenant), and circumcision have all been taken away (Galatians 5:1-4; Hebrews 7:11-12).
 4. The land of Canaan was to be an “everlasting” possession for the descendants of Abraham. Premillennialists make much of this point. The term “everlasting” must be used in the sense of a “long time” or “long duration,” a cycle or age. At any rate, the Jews did not possess the land for 70 years during the Babylonian captivity, and they were absent from the land for nearly 2,000 years from the Roman destruction of Jerusalem until May 14th, 1948.
- D. The promises were renewed to Isaac and to Jacob (Genesis 26:1-5; 28:3-4, 13-14).

II. The Fulfillment Of The Nation Promise

- A. As a result of a famine in the land of Canaan, the family of Jacob went down to the land of Egypt (Genesis 46:1-34). They had already been preceded by Joseph who rose to power in Egypt.
- B. While in Egypt the Israelites became slaves to the Egyptians (Exodus 1-5).
- C. God judged the land of Egypt and, under the leadership of Moses, delivered the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage (Genesis 15:14; Exodus 6-15). The exodus took place about 1446 B.C. (cp. 1 Kings 6:1).
- D. The Israelites came to Mount Sinai where God made a covenant with them as a nation (Exodus 19:4-6; 20:1-17; 24:1-8; 34:27-28).

III. The Fulfillment Of The Land Promise

- A. The covenant on the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 28-30).
 1. After 40 years of living in the wilderness, as a result of their unfaithfulness (Numbers 14:34), the Israelites came to the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 28-30). Here God made a covenant with them besides the covenant which He had made at Sinai.
 - a) The blessings and curses of the law are announced in Deuteronomy 28. If Israel obeys the will of the Lord there will be blessings for them. Israel's failure to obey will bring a host of curses, including captivity, on them.
 - b) The Israelites knew that they were about to enter the land of Canaan in fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham (Deuteronomy 1:1-8).
 2. At this point the reception of the land was unconditional. The conditions set forth in Genesis 15 had been fulfilled. The land was received by promise.

3. However, the retention of the land was conditional. It was based on continued obedience.
 4. The Lord set forth conditions on which the exiled Israelites might return to the land. They would have to return to the Lord in order for Him to return them to the land (Deuteronomy 30:1-10). This would be fulfilled in their return from the Babylonian captivity.
- B. The Israelites entered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua and conquered the land. God fulfilled His promise. Notice the following proofs of fulfillment:
1. Joshua (Joshua 21:43-45).
 - a) God gave the land.
 - b) Israel possessed the land.
 - c) Israel dwelt in the land.
 - d) Not one promise failed.
 2. The cities of refuge.
 - a) There were six cities of refuge (Numbers 35:9-15). There were three in trans-Jordan, with three more promised if God keeps His promise to give them all the land promised to the fathers (Deuteronomy 19:7-9).
 - b) Six cities were named in Joshua 20:7-9. This is evidence that God kept His promise.
 3. Solomon reigned over all the land (1 Kings 4:21).
 4. The Levites testified after the return from Babylonian captivity that God had performed His words (Nehemiah 9:7-9).
 5. The psalmist declared that God gave the land of the nations to Israel (Psalm 105:8-10, 42-44; cp. Deuteronomy 7:1; 9:1, 4-5).
- C. Israel in the land of Canaan.
1. Joshua continued to lead Israel until his death. At that time, some of the elders of Israel who had known all the works of God ruled the people (Joshua 24:29-31).
 2. Israel failed to obey the commands of the Lord by failing to drive out all the inhabitants of Israel, by becoming involved in the idolatry of the Canaanites and by intermarrying with the Canaanites.
 3. The book of Judges presents a series of cycles. But during the days of Samuel, the people requested a king like the other nations (1 Samuel 8:4-9, 19-20). The Lord had previously given instructions concerning a king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20).
 4. Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, was anointed to be king. He reigned 40 years (1050-1010 B.C.). David, of the tribe of Judah, was selected by God to reign after Saul. He also reigned 40 years (1010-970 B.C.). Solomon, the son of David, ruled over all of Israel until the time of his death in 931 B.C. At that time the kingdom of Israel was divided into two nations (1 Kings 12:1-33).
 5. As a political entity the northern kingdom, known as Israel, continued from 931 B.C. to 722 B.C. when the Assyrians came to destroy Samaria to take away the people as captives (2 Kings 17:1-41).
 6. The southern kingdom of Judah continued from 931 B.C. until the time of the Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. Thus, the curse of Deuteronomy 28-29 did come on the people (cp. Nehemiah 1:8-10).

- D. God had promised that a remnant would return from captivity.
 1. This was prophesied by Isaiah (1:9; 10:20-25). Those of both Israel and Judah were to return (Jeremiah 30:3-4; 50:3-4).
 2. The Lord had instructed Israel that after they were in captivity, if they returned to do the will of God, He would return them to the land (Deuteronomy 30:1-10). Such a remnant would have to live under the Law of Moses.
- E. A remnant did return.
 1. The first group returned under Zerubbabel in 536 B.C. (2 Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:3).
 2. The second group returned under Ezra in 458 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-11; 9:13-15; Nehemiah 1:3-11).
 3. The third group returned under Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in 444 B.C. (Nehemiah 1-13).
- F. Israel would never be a nation again, but would always exist as a people (Jeremiah 19:10-11; 30:11; 46:28).
- G. The Lord promised that He would recover a remnant of His people (Isaiah 11:11). The context of Isaiah 11 shows that this would take place in the Messianic age. The first time the Lord set His hand to recover a people was when He recovered His people from Egypt (v. 16). The second setting of His hand would be in Christ and the gospel (Romans 11:5).

IV. The Fulfillment Of The Seed Promise

- A. As stated earlier, after the fall of man, God promised that He would send the seed of woman to bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).
 1. The reference to the “seed of woman” is unusual, but takes on new significance when we realize that the Messiah was to be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:21-23).
 2. God’s Son was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4).
- B. The spiritual promise was made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-2. The word “seed,” which means “offspring” or “descendant,” is used again in Genesis 22:18. This prophecy is quoted twice in the New Testament.
 1. Paul makes it clear that the word “seed” was not being used in the plural, but in the singular with reference to Christ (Galatians 3:16).
 2. Peter said that the promise was fulfilled in Christ (Acts 3:25-26). The spiritual implication was in “turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”
- C. The promise is then traced through the seed of David (2 Samuel 7:11-14). Jesus is said to be the son (seed) of David, the son of Abraham, and to be virgin born in fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:1, 18-25).

Conclusion. God fulfilled His promises to Abraham. The return of some Jews to Palestine today and the state of Israel has nothing to do with the fulfillment of these promises and “proving” the doctrines of Premillennialism.

Jews and Gentiles may today be blessed alike through Christ. The gospel of Christ will save (Romans 1:16-17). There is no respect of persons with God (Romans 2:11; Acts 10:34). The examples of conversion in Acts show that the same was required of both Jews and Gentiles. All can be saved in Christ (Acts 15:7-9).