

God's Promises for You



God's Purpose Revealed In His Promises

The Bible gives a consistent message throughout its pages of the purpose of God. His plan is to fill the earth with men and women who show His character and give Him glory. He has given great promises which show the way this will be accomplished when His kingdom will be established in the earth.

In order for God's purpose to be achieved, He provided His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of Christ's life, death and resurrection men and women have a way of being part of God's great kingdom if they respond and believe in Him.

In this article we will look at two major promises given before Christ was born which all point forward to Him and His work.

THE PROMISE IN EDEN

Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden. Both they and the serpent were punished. Men and women would die, and would be unable to save themselves from this. But a ray of hope for man comes into this dark picture when God says to the serpent:

"I will put enmity (hatred, opposition) between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He (the woman's seed) shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).



A "seed" means a descendant or child, but it can also refer to the people associated with the particular "seed", i.e. we become the seed of Abraham if we are "in" Jesus by baptism (Galatians 3:27, 29).

The Seed of the Serpent

The serpent, because of his lie, came to represent a sinful way of thinking. The seed of the serpent refers to those with the family likeness of the serpent, those who distort God's Word, lying and leading others into sin. They allow these characteristics to rule their life. In the time of Christ the corrupt religious rulers were referred to as a "brood of vipers" (Matthew 3:7).

The Seed of the Woman

The seed of the woman refers to one who would bruise or crush the serpent's head, ie sin, dealing it a death-blow. This was a prophecy of Jesus Christ and his work:

- "Jesus Christ, who has (by the cross) abolished death (and therefore the power of sin - Romans 6:23), and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).
- "God, by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3; see also 1 John 3:5; Matthew 1:21).

Christ was 'wounded in the heel' through his death for three days. Yet His resurrection proved that this was only a temporary wound, compared to the death-blow that He gave sin.

What does this mean to us?

On the cross Jesus destroyed the power of sin in Himself. He has invited us to share in His victory. If we are "baptized into Christ" we can share in the promises about Jesus, like that in Genesis 3:15. No longer are they just interesting parts of the Bible, they are prophecies and promises which are made directly to us!

Although sin and death are still experienced by true believers, by being baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27-29), they can have forgiveness of their sins now and eventually be saved from death. God has promised a time when the righteous will be raised from the dead and given eternal life:

"The dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:52-54).

Jesus was the true 'seed of the woman', but we can be part of that seed of the woman too by being baptized into Christ. Our lives will then reflect the words of Genesis 3:15 - there will be a constant sense of conflict ("enmity") within us, between right and wrong. The great apostle Paul described a conflict between sinful thoughts and the love of God's ways that raged within him (Romans 7:14-25). But he concludes by saying:

"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25).

So right from the beginning God promised Christ as a Saviour. This incredible promise given to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden has been fulfilled in Christ, and we too can benefit from it.

THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

The Gospel preached to Abraham

The Gospel taught by Jesus and the apostles was also given in a series of promises to Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel. God, through the Scriptures, "Preached **the gospel** to Abraham" (Galatians 3:8).

If we can understand what was taught to Abraham, we will then have a very basic

picture of the Christian Gospel. There are other indications that the Gospel is not something which began at the time of Jesus:

"We declare to you glad tidings (the Gospel) - that promise which was made to the (Jewish) fathers, God has fulfilled" (Acts 13:32,33; see also Romans 1:1,2 Hebrews 4:2).

Two Themes The promises to Abraham have two basic themes:

1. Things about Abraham's seed (special descendant)
2. Things about the land which was promised to Abraham.

The New Testament comments on these promises. By letting the Bible explain itself, we can combine the teachings of both Testaments to give us a complete picture of the promises made to Abraham.

Abraham - a Man of Faith

Abraham originally lived in Ur, a prosperous city in what is now Iraq. An extraordinary call of God came to him - to leave that sophisticated life and embark on a journey to a promised land. This required faith because exactly where he was to journey was not made completely clear. It turned out to be a 1,500 mile journey. The land was Canaan - modern Israel.

During his life, God appeared to Abraham and repeated and expanded His promises to him. Those promises are the basis of Christ's Gospel, so that same call comes to true Christians as it did to Abraham, to leave the transient things of this life, and go forward in a life of faith, taking God's promises at face value and living by His Word.

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out (from Ur) to the place (Canaan) which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8).

By showing a similar faith and acting upon it, we can have the same honour as Abraham - to be called the friends of God (Isaiah 41:8), to find the knowledge of God (Genesis 18:17) and to have the sure hope of eternal life in the Kingdom. To truly believe in the Christian message we, too, must firmly know the promises to Abraham. Without them our faith is not faith. With eager eyes we should therefore read and re-read the dialogues between God and Abraham.

The Land

1. "Get out of your country. To a land that I will shew you" (Genesis 12:1).
2. Abraham "went on his journey. as far as Bethel (in Central Israel). And the Lord said to Abram. Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are - northward, southward, eastward, and westward: for all the land which you see I give to you, and your descendants forever. walk in the land. for I give it to you" (Genesis 13:3,14-17).

3. "The Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18.)
4. "I will give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession" (Genesis 17:8).
5. "The promise that he (Abraham) would be the heir of the world" (Romans 4:13).

We see here a progressive revelation to Abraham:

1. 'There is a land which I would like you to go to'.
2. 'You have now arrived in the area. You and your children will live here for ever'.
3. The area of the promised land was more specifically defined.
4. Abraham was not to expect to receive the promise in this life - he was to be a "stranger" in the land, although he would later live there for ever. The implication of this is that he would die and then later be resurrected to enable him to receive this promise.
5. Paul, under inspiration, saw the promises to Abraham as meaning his inheritance of the whole earth.

Abraham did not receive the fulfillment of the promises in his lifetime:-

"By faith he sojourned (implying a temporary way of life) in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents" (Hebrews 11:9).

Abraham "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13).

Notice the four stages:

1. Knowing the promises;
2. Being "assured of them";
3. Embracing them - by being baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27-29);
4. Confessing to the world by our way of life that this world is not our real home, but we are living in hope of that future age to come upon the earth:

God "gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But. He promised to give it to him for a possession" (Acts 7:5).

God keeps His promises. There will come a day when Abraham and all who have

those promises made to them will be rewarded:

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises. God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Hebrews 11:13,39,40).

All true believers will therefore be rewarded at the same point in time, i.e. at the judgment seat at the last day (2 Timothy 4:1,8; Matthew 25:31-34). In order to be judged, Abraham and others who knew those promises must be resurrected just before the judgment.

The Seed (offspring, or special descendent)

As with the promise of a seed in Genesis 3:15, this seed of Abraham applies primarily to Jesus and, secondarily, to those who are "in Christ" and therefore are also counted as the seed of Abraham:

1. "I will make you a great nation, I will bless you. and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:2,3).
2. "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever" (Genesis 13:15,16).
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3. "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them. So shall your descendants be. To your descendants I have given this land" (Genesis 15:5,18).
4. "I give to you and your descendants after you. the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Genesis 17:8).
5. "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies; In your seed all nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 22:17,18).

Again, Abraham's understanding of the "seed" was increased as God gave him further promises:

1. Firstly he was just told that somehow he would have an extraordinary number of descendants, and that through his "seed" the whole earth would be blessed.
2. He was later told that he would have a seed who would come to include many people. These people would spend eternal life, along with himself, in the land at which he had arrived, i.e. Canaan.
3. He was told that his seed would become as many as the stars in the sky. This may have suggested to him that he would have many spiritual descendants (stars in heaven) as well as many natural ones (as "the dust of the earth").

4. The previous promises were underlined with the additional assurance that the many people who would become part of the seed could have a personal relationship with God.

5. The seed would have victory against his enemies.

Notice that the seed was to bring "blessings" to be available to people from all over the earth. In the Bible the idea of blessing is often connected with forgiveness of sins. After all, this is the greatest blessing a lover of God could ever want. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Psalm 32:1).

The only descendant of Abraham who has brought forgiveness of sins to the world is Jesus, and the New Testament commentary on the promises to Abraham provides solid support:

"He (God) does not say, 'And to seeds', as of many (i.e. in the plural), but as of one (in the singular), 'And to your seed', who is Christ" (Galatians 3:16).

"...the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus (i.e. the seed), sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities" (Acts 3:25,26).

Notice here how Peter quotes and interprets Genesis 22:18:

- The seed = Jesus
- The blessing = forgiveness of sins.

Joining The Seed



The basic elements of the Gospel were understood by Abraham. But these vital promises were to Abraham and his seed, Jesus. Can anyone else be involved? Even physical descent from Abraham would not automatically make someone part of that one specific seed (John 8:39). To share these promises we have to become intimately part of Jesus. This is by baptism into Jesus (Romans 6:3-5); frequently we read of baptism into His name (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5).

"As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek (Gentile), there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's (by baptism into him), then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:27-29).

The promise of eternal life on earth, through receiving the "blessing" of forgiveness through Jesus is by being baptized into Christ, the seed, so that we can share the

promises made to him. Romans 8:17 calls us "joint heirs with Christ".

The blessing was to come on people from all parts of the earth, through the Christ's work. The seed was to become a world-wide group of people, like the sand of the shores and the stars of the sky.

In Summary

We can summarize the two strands of the promises given to Abraham:

1. The Land

Abraham and his seed, Jesus, and those in Him will inherit the land of Canaan and by extension the whole earth, and live there for ever. In this life they would not receive it, but would do so when Jesus returns.

2. The Seed

This was primarily Jesus. Through Him the sins ("enemies") of mankind would be overcome, so that the blessings of forgiveness would be made available world-wide.

By baptism into the name of Jesus we become part of the seed and share in the promises to Abraham.

The Hope of Israel

Paul could define his hope as "the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20). The true Christian hope is the original Jewish hope, the promises made to Abraham the father of the Jewish people (see also John 4:22).

The Early Christians Preached:

1. "The things concerning the Kingdom of God and
2. The name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12).

These were the very two things explained to Abraham under slightly different headings:

1. Promises about the land and
2. Promises about the seed. The good news about this Kingdom which was preached to Abraham played a big part in the early preaching of the Gospel. (Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31).

A Life of Faith

Just technically being Abraham's seed through baptism does not mean that we are acceptable with God. The Israelis are Abraham's seed naturally speaking, but this

does not mean that they can be saved without being baptized and conforming their lives to Christ and the example of Abraham (Romans 9:7,8; 4:13,14).

The "seed" must have the characteristics of its ancestor. If we are to be the true seed of Abraham we must therefore not only be baptized but also have a very real faith in God's promises, just as he had.

(Abraham) "the father of all those who believe. who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had" (Romans 4:11,12; see also Galatians 3:7).

Real faith must then show itself in action, otherwise, in God's eyes, it isn't faith (James 2:17).

Personal Testimonies 1

As a Jew I always assumed I was automatically one of the chosen people. Now I see there are two sides to this question. Yes, the literal children of Abraham are the witnesses to God's existence. But I had never really thought about whether or not I had a personal hope of eternal life. I was just amazed to realize that eternal life was promised in the Old Testament! I saw an advertisement in a newspaper, and wrote off for the literature. I didn't do much about it until I was invited to a Bible study week and for some reason I felt I should go.

There I understood that I really must be baptized because this is the way to personally be in Christ, to have the hope of Abraham, which is resurrection when Jesus returns. And then, eternal life in this dear land, of Israel / Palestine. I hope that I stopped being so proud and somehow against Arab people. I see that the hope of that eternal life here in the land is for all people everywhere. It has made me a lot softer, and more concerned for other people, as well as giving me the personal hope to look forward to beyond this life!

Personal Testimony 2

I thought all the stuff about the Old Testament was irrelevant. I considered myself a Christian, and had read a bit of the New Testament. When I started to see the connections between them, this is what made me realize that the whole Bible really is the words of God to me! It's been great to learn how all the doctrines come together - that the Bible is inspired by God and without error and contradiction. The promises to Abraham are all about the hope of life, salvation on the earth not in Heaven, and the need for baptism to become the seed of Abraham.

If you would like to find out more about the Bible's message for you, then please go to our website and explore the True Bible Teaching concerning the Purpose of Almighty God with this earth and your opportunity to be a part of it.

www.truebibleteaching.co.nz