

THE JEWS, GOD'S PEOPLE

In the last lesson we learned about the promise made to Abraham. He was a remarkable man. When he was 70 years old, God spoke to him in a dream. He told him to leave his family in the city of Ur where he lived. He told him to make a journey to another country, which God would show him. He travelled over 1200 miles until he came to the land of Canaan. God told him that he and his descendants would inherit the land. These descendants of Abraham are the Jews.

Genesis 13:14-17

"Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.

I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

When Abraham died he did not own the land. In fact he had to buy a piece of ground for a burial plot. He did not live to see his descendants become a great nation as God had promised. He and his wife, Sarah, had only one son. His name was Isaac.

Isaac had two sons called Esau and Jacob. Esau was not interested in God. Jacob was a faithful man who wanted to learn about the promises. God repeated them to him and changed his name to Israel which means 'a prince with God'.

Israel had 12 sons and his favourite was called Joseph. When he was only 17, his brothers attacked Joseph. They were jealous of him and sold him as a slave. He was taken into the country of Egypt where he became a great man. He was in charge of the entire kingdom and looked after it for the king of Egypt.

Later there was a famine in Canaan and Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food. Joseph told them who he was and invited them all to come and live in Egypt. So Israel and all his family went to live there.

God began to fulfil his promise to them and they had many children. The king of Egypt was afraid of them and turned them into slaves. There was now a great number of them, like the dust of the earth. They still did not have their own land. They prayed to God and he remembered what he had promised them.

Exodus 2:23-24

'During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.

God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.'

God spoke to one of the Jews, a man called Moses. He sent him to the king of Egypt to demand that the king let the children of Israel go free. God wanted them to go back to the land of Canaan. Then he would give them the land as he had promised.

Exodus 3:6-8

'Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.'

The story of how God forced Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to let Israel go is one of the great stories in the Bible. You should read it for yourself in Exodus chapters 6 to 14. Israel went into Egypt as a family of 70 people and came out a great nation of 600,000 men with women and children.

They had a difficult journey through a desert before they reached the promised land. God said that he would be with them in the journey. He gave them food every day. He gave them water to drink when they were thirsty. He gave them his laws to live by and told them that he would bless them if they kept them. God wanted them to be his special people.

Sadly they did not believe God. Because of this all the adult men and women who came out of Egypt died in the desert. Only their children entered the land of Canaan which God had promised to Abraham. He now called it the land of Israel.

Many years later, Israel had a king called Solomon. He was the son of David, the king who received promises from God. Solomon was the most successful king who ever reigned over Israel.

1 Kings 4:20-21,25

'The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life...'

'During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig-tree.'

God gave Solomon special gifts to help him rule over Israel.

1 Kings 4:29-31

'God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.'

'Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than any other man.'

God began to fulfil his promises to Israel. Sadly Solomon was not faithful to God. Other kings followed him. Some of these were wicked and disobeyed God. He punished them by sending other countries to fight against them.

Finally God sent His son, Jesus Christ, to ask Israel to repent and to turn back to him. When they crucified Jesus, God was very angry and nearly destroyed them completely. He sent a fierce nation called the Romans to invade Israel and to take the Jews into captivity again. They stayed out of the land for nearly 1900 years. But God never forgot his promises to his people, Israel.

Jeremiah 30:10-11

"So do not fear, O Jacob my servant; do not be dismayed, O Israel," declares the LORD. "I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and security, and no-one will make him afraid."

"I am with you and will save you," declares the LORD. "Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished."

Within the last 50 years, many Jews have returned to the land that God promised them. In 1948 the State of Israel was formed. This is a great sign to us. It reminds us that God never forgets his promises to his people. Jesus Christ will return to rule over the whole earth from Jerusalem. Then Israel will have peace and safety forever.

Questions

- 1 What is the name of God's people?
- 2 Who was asked to leave the city of Ur?
- 3 Who became a great ruler in Egypt?
- 4 Why did God become very angry and nearly destroy Israel?
- 5 When will the promises to Israel be completely fulfilled?
- 6 Who was the most prosperous king to rule over Israel?