



GOD'S PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

Reading: Genesis 13

The friend of God

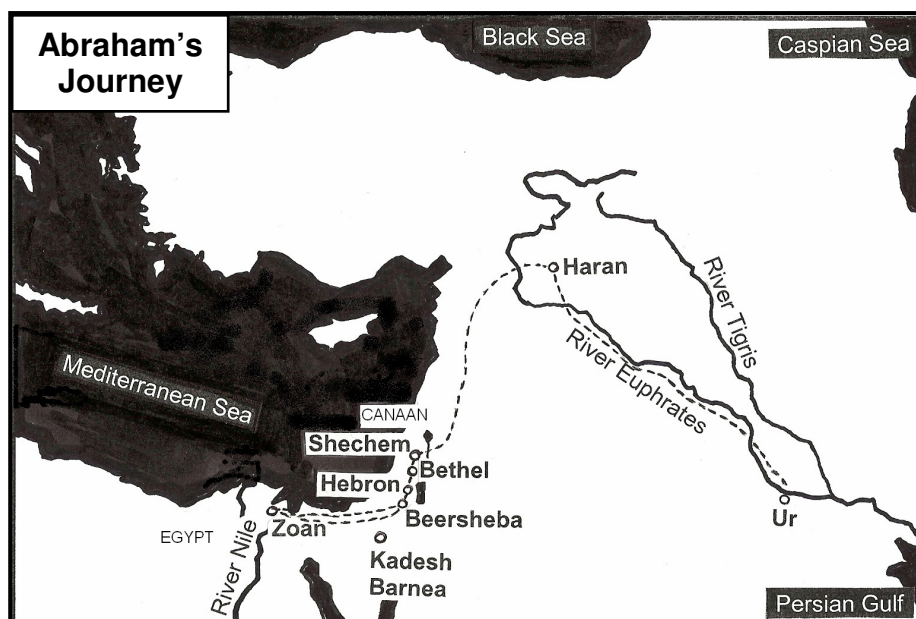
It is amazing that a man can be described as the friend of God, but this is how the Bible describes Abraham (Isaiah 41:8) because of his remarkable faith. He was first called Abram and he lived in the town of Ur about 2,000 years before Jesus was born. Ur was situated in the land of Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), about 1,000 kilometres east of Canaan (Israel). The people of Ur did not know about the true God and worshipped many false gods. The ruins of a temple built to a moon god have been found there.

A message from God

One day Abraham received a message from the Almighty God. God told Abraham to move from his home and his family and go to a country that God would show him:

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you’ ” (Genesis 12:1).

Abraham obeyed God. The New Testament tells us that Abraham “went out, not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham’s faith in God was so strong that he obeyed and left his home, not knowing where God would eventually settle him. Abraham was a man of such faith and obedience that God describes Himself as “*the God of Abraham*” (Exodus 3:6).



With this command to leave Ur, God made these promises to Abraham, explaining that He had a purpose with him:

“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2,3).

These are amazing words. God promised to make Abraham’s descendants into a great nation. This is the first of several great promises that God made to Abraham. God also said that through Abraham all families of the earth will be blessed – clearly it is important that we understand these promises.

More wonderful promises

Abraham travelled first to Haran and then on to Canaan (Israel). He reached Canaan with his wife, Sarah (first called Sarai), and his nephew, Lot. Genesis 13 describes how Abraham then separated from his kindred (Lot). Lot chose the best of the land for his flocks and herds and Abraham was left to find pastures in the more barren parts of the country. However, God was with Abraham and, because of Abraham’s total obedience, added more promises to those made in Ur:

“The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, ‘Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northwards and southwards and eastwards and





westwards, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring for ever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you’ ” (Genesis 13:14-17).

The land that God showed Abraham was the land of Canaan. A careful reading of this passage shows that God promised Abraham the land **for ever**. This passage also says that the land would be given to Abraham’s offspring, so this offspring would share the land with Abraham.

The promised child

God had promised to make Abraham’s descendants into a great nation. He had also promised that Abraham’s offspring would share the land of Canaan with him for ever. But Abraham had no children, and so in Genesis 15:4 God promised him a son through whom these promises would come to pass (be fulfilled).

However, Abraham and Sarah were growing older and no child was born to them. Romans 4:18-22 tells us that it was not possible for Abraham and Sarah to have a child, yet Abraham trusted God. Abraham was about 100 years old and his wife about 90 when at last the promised son, Isaac, was miraculously born. However, before Isaac’s birth, Abraham had taken Hagar, Sarah’s servant, for a wife. She gave him a son called Ishmael. God said that Ishmael would be blessed and have many descendants – many of the Arab nations are descended from him. But the Bible is clear that God’s promises to Abraham would be fulfilled through Isaac (Genesis 17:15-21).

Genesis 22 shows us more about Abraham’s remarkable faith. As a test of faith, God told Abraham to kill his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice, although the promises were to be fulfilled through Isaac. Abraham knew that God would keep His promises and so he was even prepared to offer up his beloved son, believing that God would raise him from the dead. We are told this in the New Testament:

*“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ **He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead ...**” (Hebrews 11:17-19).*

God was again pleased with Abraham’s faith and obedience. Just as Abraham was about to offer his son, God provided him a lamb to sacrifice instead (Genesis 22:1-14). This pointed forward to the Lord Jesus as *“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). In Genesis 22:15-18 we read about the promises that God made to Abraham following this test of faith. They include this important promise, which is similar to one made in chapter 12:

“... and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (verse 18).

| SOME OF GOD’S PROMISES TO ABRAHAM | |
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| REFERENCE | PROMISE |
| Genesis 12:2; 13:16 | Abraham’s descendants to become a great nation. |
| Genesis 13:15; 15:7,18; 17:8 | Abraham and his offspring to inherit the land of Israel (Canaan) for ever . |
| Genesis 12:3; 22:16-18 | The whole world to be blessed through Abraham and his offspring. |

Understanding the promises

1. Abraham’s descendants to become a great nation – The Bible is clear that the Jews are descendants of Abraham (see Abraham’s family tree in Lesson 10). The Jews are the great nation promised to Abraham.

2. Abraham and his offspring to inherit the land of Israel (Canaan) for ever – Acts 7 tells us that Abraham never received the land he was promised – and because Abraham is dead, he certainly could not inherit it for ever! But God never breaks His promises. To





possess the land for ever, Abraham needs to live for ever. So God was promising Abraham resurrection from the dead and immortal life. Jesus confirms that Abraham will be given a place in God's kingdom (Luke 13:28). Then Abraham will receive the land that he was promised.

When Abraham was promised the land, God ended the promise with the words: *“Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you”* (Genesis 13:17). God was **not** promising immortal life in heaven but in the land which Abraham saw and walked through – the land we now call Israel.

The promise of immortal life on earth also applies to Abraham's offspring. We talk of one sheep and many sheep, not many 'sheeps'! Similarly, the word 'offspring', like the word 'seed' in older English versions of the Bible, can mean one descendant or many descendants. In some passages it clearly refers to the fact that Abraham would have many descendants (children, grandchildren, great grandchildren etc.) but in others the word refers to just one person. Galatians 3:16 says:

“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring’, who is Christ.”

We are told here that the special (singular) descendant in some of the promises is the Lord Jesus Christ. The promise that Abraham and his offspring would live for ever in the land of Israel therefore also applies to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only through this special 'son' of Abraham that these promises can be fulfilled. Abraham can only be raised from the dead to live for ever because the Lord Jesus conquered sin and death.

The fact that the Lord Jesus is descended from Abraham is so important that it is recorded in the very first verse of the New Testament: *“Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham”* (Matthew 1:1).

3. The whole world to be blessed through Abraham and his offspring – Another example of where the word 'offspring' refers to one person, the Lord Jesus, is in this promise from Genesis 22:18. The apostle Peter quotes this verse when preaching to the Jews and explains this promise:

“You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ God, having raised up his servant (Jesus Christ), sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness” (Acts 3:25,26).

The apostle Peter says:

- all families of the earth can be blessed through Abraham's offspring
- the offspring that brings the blessing is Jesus Christ (see earlier verses in Acts 3)
- Jesus Christ brings the blessing of forgiveness of sins
- the offer of forgiveness was first made to the Jews, but then extended to *“all the families of the earth”*.

The blessing that the Lord Jesus brings is forgiveness of sins. This is the Gospel message taught by Jesus. Galatians 3:8 shows that Abraham knew the Gospel and believed it!

Galatians 3:7-9 Know then that it is **those of faith who are the sons of Abraham**. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, **preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham**, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Abraham's spiritual descendants – how we can share in the promises

Although the Jews are Abraham's natural descendants, baptized believers from all nations can also be his children – his spiritual descendants – and so share in the promises:

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, 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, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:27-29).

We also need to follow Abraham’s example of faith and obedience (Galatians 3:7-9). Thus we can become part of the many offspring of Abraham – his spiritual descendants – who will join with him and live for ever in the promised kingdom on earth when Christ Jesus returns.

The hope of the Gospel is built upon the promises that God made to Abraham, through which people from all nations can be blessed in Christ.

| GOD’S PROMISES TO ABRAHAM – FULFILMENT | |
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| PROMISE | FULFILMENT |
| Abraham’s descendants to become a great nation. | Abraham’s natural descendants through Isaac and Jacob are the Jews, but true baptized believers from all nations can be Abraham’s spiritual descendants. |
| The whole world to be blessed through Abraham and his offspring. | Forgiveness of sins through the Lord Jesus Christ. |
| Abraham and his offspring to inherit the land of Israel (Canaan) for ever. | Resurrection from the dead for Abraham and his faithful descendants, whether Jews or Gentiles. Immortal life in God’s kingdom on earth, with the Lord Jesus Christ. |

Summary

1. Abraham was told by God to leave Ur and go to a country that God would show him.
2. This country was the land of Israel. God promised that Abraham would possess it for ever.
3. God also promised that Abraham would have a son and that his descendants would become a great nation.
4. God promised that Abraham’s special descendant would share the land with Abraham and be a blessing to all nations. The New Testament shows that this special descendant is the Lord Jesus Christ, who brings forgiveness of sins.
5. If we belong to Christ (through belief and baptism), we are counted as children of Abraham, and may share the promises made to him.

Verses to learn: Galatians 3:27-29

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, 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, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

Verses to read:

Psalm 105:8-11

He remembers his covenant for ever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.”

Also read Romans 4.

