



## **ABRAHAM—THE FRIEND OF GOD**

### **Reading: Genesis 12-13**

Abraham is one of the most significant figures in the Bible. The record of his life is covered from Genesis 11:26 to 25:10. The importance of his life emerges as we read through these chapters and note not only the outstanding faith of this remarkable man, but also the promises that God made to him. Though these promises were made specifically to Abraham, God in His grace is willing to extend the same blessings to all who understand and believe as he did. We will see the importance of these things as we read through his life and consider these promises.

Because of Abraham's faith we find that he was given the title "*the Friend of God*" (James 2:23). Apart from the details that are given of his life and other references to him in the Old Testament, there are over 70 occasions where he is mentioned in the New Testament. The Gospel taught in the New Testament cannot be understood without knowing the promises that God made to Abraham. In fact the Gospel that the Lord Jesus Christ taught is bound up with God's promises to Abraham: "*The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen (Gentiles) through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed*" (Galatians 3:8). The word "justify" means "to forgive sins".

### **The Call of Abraham (Genesis 11:27-32)**

We first notice that Abraham's original name was Abram (Gen 11:27). His name was changed by God for a specific reason, as we will see when we come to Genesis 17:5. He lived in Ur, an important city in Chaldea on the Euphrates River, near its mouth. Archaeologists who have researched the area tell us that Ur was a highly developed city in Abram's day providing all that was considered modern and necessary for very comfortable living.

### **Verse 30**

**"But Sarai was barren; she had no child"** Abram had married Sarai his half sister (Genesis 20:12). The fact that she was unable to bear children is impressed upon our minds early in the account of their lives. This becomes a very important point in God's dealings with them. We will find that Sarai has her name changed to Sarah at the same time as Abram's name is changed to Abraham (Genesis 17:15).

### **Verse 31**

**"they went forth...from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan"** The reason for this journey was that God had spoken to Abram instructing him to leave Ur (Acts 7:2-4). They travelled as far as Haran where they stayed until his father Terah died, and after that Abram continued his journey into Canaan.

### **God Promises to Bless Abram (Genesis 12:1-3)**

#### **Verse 1**

**"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee"** In Ur Terah had served "*other gods*". God was calling Abram out of this environment, where idolatry was practised not only by all around him, but also in his very household (Joshua 24:2-3).

Any who choose to obey God and follow Christ must separate themselves from all that can hinder their total commitment (Matthew 19:27-30; 2 Corinthians 6:17-18). In faith, convinced that the living God had spoken to him, Abram set out in obedience to God's command (Hebrews 11:8).

#### **Verse 2**

**"I will make of thee a great nation"** The nation God is speaking of is the nation of Israel, of which Abraham is the father. It became a great nation in the days of its most illustrious kings, David and Solomon but, because of disobedience, the Kingdom was eventually destroyed and the Jews driven out of their land by the Romans in AD 70. After centuries of dispersion they began to return little by little to their homeland. It is one of today's modern miracles that Israel was



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declared a nation in 1948. Since then the Jews have continued to return to their land from many countries.

The people of Israel will only be fully regathered after the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth (Ezekiel 37:21-23). They will be educated in the truth of the promises made to Abraham and see their fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ. After they have recognised the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah, they will have to change their ways entirely (Zechariah 12:10; Ezekiel 36:24-26). Only then will they inherit the land promised to Abraham and live under the rulership of Christ, as will all other nations (Jeremiah 30:10-11; 31:31-34; 33:15-21; Ezekiel 37:21-28; Romans 11:1, 14-28).

**“I will bless thee, and make thy name great”** Although God did bless Abram during his life, this promise has yet to be completely fulfilled at the return of Jesus Christ (Matthew 8:11).

#### Verse 3

**“I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee”** History has shown this to be true, both in the life of Abraham himself, and his descendants, the people of Israel. Babylon and Edom are two ancient nations that were punished by God because they persecuted the Jews. In modern times Hitler’s attempt to exterminate the Jews ended in failure and the defeat of Germany in 1945.

**“in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”** This is the most important point of these promises. Through Abraham **all families of the earth** will be blessed by God. The apostle Paul states that this is the essence of the Gospel: *“The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed”* (Galatians 3:8). The blessing is offered to both Jew and Gentile. But how can this be so? As we follow through God’s dealings with Abraham we will see what this blessing is, and how God has made it available to all mankind through faith in Jesus Christ.

#### **Abram Journeys to Canaan (Genesis 12 - 13:4)**

In obedience to God, Abram left Haran and commenced his journey to the land which God would show him. With him went Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, together with their servants and their substance. Abram was now 75 years old.

He arrived at Sichem (Shechem), in the heart of the land of Canaan, and there God spoke to him saying, **“Unto thy seed will I give this land”** (v7). Abram was now aware that the land that he had been promised was the land of Canaan, or Israel, as we now know it.

Notice that **God promised the land to his seed**. This would present a question to the mind of Abram for we remember that Sarai was barren (11:30), and he had as yet no seed. In response Abram built an altar and worshipped God there (v7).

From Sichem he continued south to Bethel and then, because of famine, he journeyed further south into Egypt. Later when he returned he pitched his tent between Bethel and Hai, or Ai (Genesis 13:3-4).

#### **Abram and Lot Separate (Genesis 13:5-13)**

God blessed Abram just as he had promised. He was now very rich *“in cattle and in silver and gold”* and Lot too had been blessed while he was with Abram (Genesis 13:2,5-6). However this very increase in cattle caused strife between their herdmen, which was resolved by Abram suggesting that they part company.

Abram gave the choice of land to Lot, who elected to take his company down to the lush plain of the Jordan River, near to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. We will see as we progress through the life of Abram what disastrous effects this move to Sodom had upon the family of Lot. We are told that *“the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly”* (v13).

#### **Abram is Promised THE WORLD (Genesis 13:14-17)**

After Lot had left, God spoke again to Abram. This time we have **one of the most important promises in the Bible**. Abram was told to look from the heights of the hill country near Bethel where he stood, to the north, south, east and west, as far as the eye could see. From that vantage point he would have taken in quite a panorama of the land. God then spoke to him.



**Verse 15**

“For all the LAND which thou seest”

Although what he could see would have been extensive, the promise was not limited only to this land. The apostle Paul later comments that he was in fact promised “the world” (Romans 4:13).

“To THEE will I give it” God promised Abram that he would inherit the land himself.

“And to THY SEED” God had already promised the land to his seed (12:7). We now realise that both Abram and his seed would inherit the land.

“for ever” Here is the key to the understanding of this promise. How could a mortal man inherit a land “for ever”? The only possible answer is that he must be raised from the dead and given immortality.

**The Meaning of this Wonderful Promise Revealed in the New Testament**

Rather than speculate on the meaning of this promise, we shall consider the way that it is explained in the New Testament. Paul in fact devotes a whole chapter in his letter to the Galatians to explain the importance of this promise.

**Galatians 3:16** Here Paul directs his readers to this promise in Genesis 13:15: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made”. He then makes this point: “He saith not, And to seeds, as of many”; that is, God did not say that He had made these promises to many “seeds”, or descendants of Abraham, “but as of one”, that is, to one specific “seed”. Paul is showing that a careful reading of the Bible reveals that God has promised the land to Abraham and to one specific seed, or descendant. He now explains who that one seed is: “And to thy seed [singular], which is Christ”.

We now understand that God promised the land to Jesus Christ and to Abraham for ever. How can it be possible for Abraham who is dead to inherit it? For this promise to be fulfilled it is necessary for him to be raised from the dead and given immortality. This is exactly the way that Paul interprets the promises: “I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto the fathers...why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:6-8; cp Luke 13:28-29).

**Paul Further Expounds this Promise in Galatians 3:26-29**

Paul now shows how that we can share in the hope of the promise that God made to Abraham.

**Verse 26** We can also become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (v26).

**Verse 27** Our faith motivates us to obey God’s commandments. The first thing we must then do is be baptised. Baptism is the way by which we identify with Christ (Mark 16:15-16). We lose our old identity and “put on Christ”. God sees us then as “in Christ” (cp Romans 6:3-8; Galatians 2:20).

**Verse 28** Paul shows that no matter what race, rank or gender, all have equal status in Christ through baptism. So God has made provision for a whole multitude, collectively, to become “ONE in Christ Jesus”.

**Verse 29** “and if ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed” By baptism into Christ, we become incorporated into that one seed of Genesis 13:15. Though not Abraham’s natural descendants, we become his “seed” by faith and baptism.

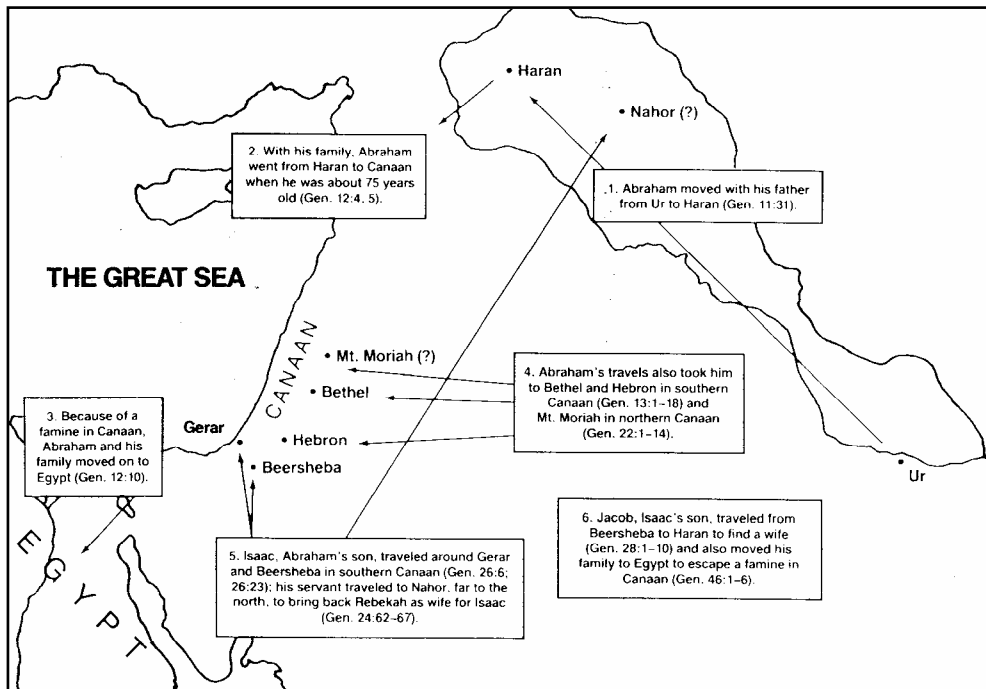
“and heirs according to the promise” Now we see how this great promise can include us. Through the Lord Jesus Christ we become heirs of the promises which he will inherit.

**Further References to this Promise**

- Christ spoke of Abraham being in the Kingdom of God on earth when he returns to set it up (Luke 13:28-29).
- Christ shows that Abraham will certainly rise from the dead (Luke 20:37-38).
- Stephen states that Abraham has not yet received his promised inheritance of the land (Acts 7:5). Its fulfilment must then still be future.



**Abraham's Journeys**



**Summary Points**

1. We are introduced to Abraham when he is called by God to leave his home city of Ur and go to a land that God would show him (**Genesis 12:1-3**).
2. In calling Abraham God had a special purpose with him: *"in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"*. This is the basis of the Gospel. (**Galatians 3:8**).
3. God later promised Abraham: *"All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever"* (**Genesis 13:14-17**). God was promising Abraham and his seed eternal life on the earth (**Luke 13:28-29**).
4. The seed promised to Abraham is the Lord Jesus Christ (**Galatians 3:16**).
5. By baptism into Jesus Christ we too can become heirs of the promise of eternal life on earth with Christ and Abraham (**Galatians 3:26-29**).
6. Abraham will be raised from the dead to receive these promises (**Acts 26:6-8**).

**Lesson 8 - Questions**

1. Where in the New Testament do we read about the Gospel being preached to Abraham?
2. What was the land that Abraham left to journey to Canaan?
3. While Abraham was living in Ur what did God tell him to do?
4. When God said to Abraham *"I will make of thee a great nation"*, what nation was He referring to?
5. What was the promise that God gave to Abraham in Bethel after Lot had left him?
6. The land Abraham saw was promised to him and his *"seed"*. Who is that seed?
7. Has this promise to Abraham been fulfilled yet?
8. When will Abraham receive the land he was promised?
9. How can we share that great promise made to Abraham?