

Class Notes for Week 1 – Promises in Eden and to Abraham

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 2 Peter 1:4

1. The need for promises in Eden

Like all of creation, Adam and Eve were created “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Even so, they still had freewill and thus could make bad decisions. It was in this situation that they were placed under a law by God, who told them that if they ate of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would surely die.

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Genesis 2:16-17

They chose to disobey God’s words and to believe the serpent who had told Eve that they would not die – in direct opposition to what God had said. "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die." Genesis 3:4

The result was that they became dying creatures from that time forward, and this is the reason we all die, for Adam and Eve gave birth to a race of individuals like themselves. So, whilst knowing good from evil, all people are now prone to choose the evil and suffer the consequence, which ultimately is death.

It is in this hopeless situation that God makes His first promise to a dying race. He promises to send a Savior – styled “the seed of the woman”, who would crush “the serpent”, the symbol of rebellion and sin. The promise is given in Genesis 3:15 and we will look more closely at this in Week 3 of these seminars.

The expression of God’s gracious intention to save sinful men and women begins in Scripture immediately after the Fall of Adam and Eve, in this pronouncement: “I will put enmity between thee [the serpent] and the woman [Eve], and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). Although enigmatic, these words foretell of a conflict between good and evil that would be resolved by the victory of a Saviour provided by God, the promised seed (or descendant) of Eve.

2. Promises to Abraham and Sarah

You may wonder why promises made by God to a man 4000 years ago should be of any interest to us today. The reason is that, even though we live so long after the promises were given, we ourselves can inherit them with Abraham, and that includes receiving eternal life. It is therefore very important for us to read the Bible which tells us, not only about Abraham and God’s promises to him, but also how we can inherit the same promises, and live for ever.

Abraham (originally Abram) was called by God, in about 2000 B.C., to leave his home in Mesopotamia to journey to Canaan, which was to become known as the Promised Land. The promises God made to him were amazingly wide in scope:

“I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great . . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:2,3)

“Lift up now thine eyes, and look . . . for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever” (Genesis 13:14,15)

“Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be” (Genesis 15:5).

The promises were eventually related to Abraham's true wife Sarah, so that Isaac became the son of promise, and not Ishmael, who was born to Abraham through Hagar, the Egyptian bondmaid.

"And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." (Genesis 17:19)

The full scope of the promises is then seen when we notice the change in the personal pronoun from a plural, numerous, "seed" or offspring, to an offspring or seed that is singular... "the gate of HIS enemies":

"Thy seed shall possess the gate of **his** enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:17,18).

Abraham's belief in these promises from God was "counted . . . to him for righteousness", in other words, his sins were forgiven because of his faith (See Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23). Abraham then becomes a model for us to follow. We too must believe so that our faith can be counted to us as righteousness, and our sins can be forgiven!

These promises once again focus on the promised seed, descended from Abraham, eventually revealed as the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). The multiplication of that seed "as the stars of heaven" refers to the multitude of people of all ages and all races who would gain salvation through Jesus, by believing the same promises (Daniel 12:3; Hebrews 11:12,13).

God endorsed His promises to Abraham by covenants, first a covenant for the land of Israel (Genesis 15:18) and then one with his seed, that He would be their God. This was marked in Abraham's natural descendants, the nation of Israel, by the rite of circumcision (Genesis 17:1-14). Finally, God sealed all His promises and covenants with a solemn oath:

"By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD . . . that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven . . . and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:16-18).

These promises, subsequently reiterated to Isaac and Jacob (later named Israel), are the very foundation of the gospel of salvation (Galatians 3:8,9). They require that Abraham and all the faithful must rise from the dead, as Jesus did, in order to receive them, since the promises imply eternal life (Acts 24:14,15; 26:6-8).

"And 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. So, then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (Galatians 3:8-9).

Somewhat surprisingly when Abraham died, he still did not possess the land. God had several times promised it to him, personally, as well as to his descendants. Yet, as the martyr Stephen recounts, God "gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length" (Acts 7:5). He died in a tent, with not even a house to his name. Yet Abraham's confidence in God could surmount even this final obstacle. Along with his wife and children, says the writer to the Hebrews, he "died in faith not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar" (Hebrews 11:13).

You can see now why Abraham is called "father of the faithful". God had brought him to the promised land. God had given him a son. If God said he would inherit the land, he believed he would, even though he had to die. If we have the same faith as Abraham and demonstrate our faith by what we do in obedience to God, just as Abraham did, then we can also be the inheritors of God's exceeding great and precious promises.

Our hope is that you will learn about these promises of God; that you will manifest the same faith and obedience as Abraham did and so that when Jesus comes you will inherit the marvellous blessings contained in his God's promise to Abraham and his seed.