

END-TIMES ISSUES

#25 Abrahamic covenant and Abraham's offspring (1).

Different issues in the Abrahamic covenant(s).

TODAY

- ☞ The BASIS of the covenant.
- ☞ 1. LAND issues.
- ☞ 2. OFFSPRING, "seed."
- ☞ 3. A general focus on BLESSINGS (and cursings).
- ☞ 4. A special focus on WORLDWIDE BLESSINGS. (This includes what Jesus would do.)

[TODAY]

Then the LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your kindred, and your father's household, and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you; and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

Genesis 12:1-3 (BSB)

(ONE ASPECT OF THIS INVOLVES OFFSPRING.)

It seems that, as Abraham's faith kept growing stronger, the covenant kept growing greater!

He TRUSTED God to keep his "impossible" promises.

- ☞ This led to **trusting** that God could raise the dead:
 - ☞ Isaac (had he been sacrificed): He would have been raised, so God could fulfil his promise to give *offspring through Isaac*.
 - ☞ Abraham (who died before God's promises were fulfilled): He will be raised, so God can fulfill his promise to give the *land to Abraham forever*.

As Abraham's trust expanded, so did the promises of the covenant.

EXAMPLES:

- ☞ God expanded the "**land**" promise: ☞ Canaan ... the earth ... the New Jerusalem (and the world that contains it).
- ☞ God expanded the "**offspring**" promise: ☞ Isaac ... many/all nations. Also, physical offspring ... Messiah ... spiritual offspring.

Today's focus: The "offspring" issue:

Even when it was a clash between:
 > God's promise < vs. < a hopeless situation <

★ ☞ Abraham trusted God. ★

Against all hope, Abraham in hope **believed** ... Without weakening in his **faith**, he acknowledged [his *inability* to have offspring]. Yet he **did not waver through disbelief in the promise of God**, but was **strengthened in his faith** and gave glory to God, being fully **persuaded** that God was able to do what He had promised.

Romans 4:18a, 19a, 20-21a (BSB)

The result? ① Isaac was born; ② Ultimately, the covenant expanded to include *all people* who are saved!

[Abraham] is **our father** in the presence of God, in whom he believed, ...

THIS INCLUDES US!

Romans 4:17b (BSB)

The growing of Abraham's trust:

- It began here, when God said ...

"I will make you into a **great nation**, ... and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

Genesis 12:2a, 3b (BSB)
- As God gave him more details, his faith grew ...

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

Genesis 13:16 (BSB)
- You will be the father of **many nations**. ...

I will make you **exceedingly fruitful**; I will make **nations** of you, and **kings** will descend from you.

Genesis 17:4b, 6 (BSB)

He trusted God, even though he still didn't hadn't received any of the promised offspring!

- Then God gave Abraham even more specific details... about the promised offspring that *he still didn't have!*

But God replied, "Your wife Sarah will indeed bear you a **son**, and you are to **name him Isaac**. I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. ... **I will establish My covenant with Isaac**, ... next year"

Genesis 17:19, 21 (BSB); a similar passage in Genesis 21:12.
- Abraham would have other offspring who would also result in peoples and nations. *But the covenant was not made with them.*

As for **Ishmael**, I have heard you, and **I will surely bless him**; I will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He will become the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation.

Genesis 17:20 (BSB); a similar passage in Genesis 21:13.

(In Genesis 25:1-6, we also read about the offspring of Keturah (a second wife, after Sarah died).)

Isaac's birth was the fulfillment of one of God's promises... but also an opportunity for even greater trust in God!

☞ **The birth of Isaac: Based on *promise*, NOT *physical ability*:**

- ☞ God waited until Abraham and Sarah were no longer physically capable of having children... so they would have to *trust* God to keep his promise.
- ☞ This is in contrast with Abraham's son Ishmael (born 14 years earlier; mother = Hagar), who was born by means of natural processes.

☞ **The "almost-sacrifice" of Isaac: Abraham believed that God would still keep his promise, even if it meant raising Isaac back to life:**

- ☞ God promised that Abraham's descendants would be through Isaac. Then he told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to him.
- ☞ Once Abraham had demonstrated his faith that God would keep his promise (⇒ knife raised, ready to plunge), God provided a substitute for the sacrifice (Genesis 22:13-14).

The New Testament uses these events to teach us about our salvation! 7

From Abraham... to the nation of Israel.

☞ **The covenant was confirmed with *Isaac and Jacob*.**

- ☞ It was because of Abraham's trust and obedience. (And like Abraham, *they also trusted God* – Hebrews 11:17, 20-21.)

"I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations of the earth will be blessed, **because Abraham listened to My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.**"

Genesis 26:4-5 (BSB)

☞ **The nation of Israel was chosen because of God's love for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**

- ☞ It *wasn't* because of their own righteousness... because they *weren't* righteous – Deuteronomy 9:5-6.

Yet the LORD has set His affection on your fathers and loved them. And He has chosen you, their descendants after them, above all the peoples, even to this day.

Deuteronomy 10:15 (BSB)

What "people promises" were given to the patriarchs?

They can be grouped into three categories:

1. *Many "seed"* (offspring, descendants).
2. *Nations and kings* included among the "seed."
3. *Blessings* for all other peoples/nations.



Issue to consider: The word "SEED."

- This word is used as *both* singular and plural. The context can help us determine which is meant (or if *both* are included).
- It is often translated as "offspring" (singular or plural) or "descendant(s)."

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Promise # ① – Many descendants/offspring.

All of the patriarchs: (They were all told basically the same thing.)

- Like the *dust* of the earth, uncountable – Genesis 13:16 (Abraham); Genesis 28:14 (Jacob).
- Like the *sand* on the seashore, too many to count – Genesis 22:17 (Abraham); Genesis 32:12 (Jacob).
- Like the *stars* in the sky, uncountable – Genesis 15:5 (Abraham); Genesis 22:17 (Abraham); Genesis 26:4 (Isaac);
- Exceedingly *fruitful* – Genesis 17: 6 (Abraham).
- *Spread out* in all directions – Genesis 28:14 (Jacob).

Other observations:

- Moses applies this to all three patriarchs – Exodus 32:13.
- Later, Israel would be judged for sin, and only a "remnant" would turn back to God – Isaiah 10:20-22; Romans 9:27.
- Various N.T. passages focus on the concept of being a "son/child of Abraham." All people who have *his* type of faith are included!

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Promise # ② – Nation(s), kings coming from the patriarchs:

ABRAHAM (and Sarah): (Many nations/rulers.)

- I will make you into a great *nation* – Genesis 12:2.
- A great and powerful *nation* – Genesis 18:18.
- I will make *nations* of you – Genesis 17: 6.
- Sarah will be the mother of *nations* – Genesis 17:16.
- You will be the father of *many nations* – Genesis 17:4.
- I have made you a father of *many nations* – Genesis 17:5.
- *Kings* will descend from you – Genesis 17: 6.
- *Kings* of peoples will descend from [Sarah] – Genesis 17:16.

Other observations:

- In this matter, what Abraham was promised appears to be *greater than* what the other patriarchs were promised.
- "I have made you a father of many nations." The N.T. tells us that, in Christ, this includes all who have *Abraham's type of faith in God* – Romans 4:16-18.

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ISAAC (and Rebekah): (Two nations.)

- *Two nations* are in [her] womb, two peoples ... – Genesis 25:23.

JACOB: (A company/group of peoples.)

- Isaac's blessing on Jacob: May God Almighty [make you] a *company of peoples* – Genesis 28:3.
- And God said... A nation – even a *company of nations* – shall come from you – Genesis 35:11.
- [God] told me, ... I will make you a *multitude of peoples* – Genesis 48:4.
- *Kings* shall descend from you – Genesis 35:11.

Other observations:

- Unlike Abraham, the focus of the promises to Isaac and Jacob appears to be about their own *physical* offspring.
- Other offspring, such as Ishmael (Genesis 17:20; 21:13, 18) and Esau (Genesis 25:23), would also become nations. (*But only Isaac and Jacob would be children of the covenant.*)

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Promise # ③ – Blessings for all other peoples/nations:
(A common theme with all the patriarchs.)

ABRAHAM:

- All the families of the earth will be blessed through you – Genesis 12:3.
- Through [Abraham] all the nations of the earth will be blessed – Genesis 18:18.
- Through your offspring all nations of the earth will be blessed – Genesis 22:18.

ISAAC:

- Through your offspring all nations of the earth will be blessed – Genesis 26:4.

JACOB:

- All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your offspring – Genesis 28:14.

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Other observations:

- Peter says that *all* peoples on earth will be blessed through Abraham's offspring – Acts 3:25. The Jews were "first in line" to receive this blessing, if they would be willing to turn from their sins.
- Paul points out that this promise about "all nations being blessed" includes *the salvation of the Gentiles*.

A later blessing that appears to point to Jesus.

- Jacob blesses Judah with a promise that may be messianic. The "scepter" may point to a future ruler, perhaps Christ.
- (Balaam, a false prophet overpowered by God, appears to say something similar.)

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; the nations will obey him.
Genesis 49:10 (NET)

A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.
Numbers 24:17b (NIV)

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"People promises" related to their physical offspring.

Israel (= under the Covenant) – the "promised seed"; the primary O.T. focus; chosen because of God's promises to the patriarchs.

- ✓ Most passages focus on Israel as a nation that contains saved and unsaved individuals, under the Mosaic ("Old") Covenant.
- ✓ Some passages emphasize the saved Jews of that nation.
- ✓ Some passages focus on a specific individual (the Messiah).
- ✓ New Testament passages often refer to saved Jews and Gentiles, brought together under the New Covenant – together being the "children of Abraham."

Other physical offspring (= NOT under the Covenant) – NOT the "promised seed"; includes: ① from Abraham – the Ishmaelites (mother = Hagar) and Midianites (mother = Keturah); ② from Isaac – the Edomites (from Esau); and ③ a few others (from Keturah).

- Some of these had offspring who became kings or nations.

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Concerning Israel, the promised offspring of the patriarchs:

They had to choose... they chose wrongly.

Moses affirmed God's promise to the patriarchs.

- When the nation rebelled, why shouldn't God totally destroy them? *Because of his promise to the patriarchs!*

Remember Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, to whom You swore by Your very self when You declared, **'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give your descendants all this land that I have promised, and it shall be their inheritance forever.'**

Exodus 32:13 (BSB); affirmed by God in Exodus 33:1.

Many passages that focus on the "people" issue also mention the "land" and "forever" issues. We may try to separate them when discussing a specific topic; but ultimately, these concepts can't really be separated!

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God did not choose Israel because they deserved it, but because of his relationship with the patriarchs and his promise to them.

- It was because of his oath/promise/covenant to their ancestors – Exodus 32:13 (on the previous slide), and many other passages.
- It was because of his love for the patriarchs.

Because **He loved your fathers, He chose their descendants** after them [= Israel] ...
Deuteronomy 4:37a (BSB)

Yet **the LORD has set His affection on your fathers and loved them.** And He has chosen you, their descendants after them, above all the peoples, even to this day.
Deuteronomy 10:15 (BSB)

The nation of Israel didn't *deserve* this; for the people had a tendency to be *wicked* – Deuteronomy 9:5.

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✦ With the blessings of the covenant come obligations. ✦

They needed to obey God, if they wanted to stay in the land.

Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today, ... **so that you may live long in the land** the Lord swore to your ancestors to give to them and their descendants, ...
Deuteronomy 11:8a, 9a (NIV)

- If they wanted to live, they needed to "choose life" – Deuteronomy 30:19-20.
- If they chose to disobey, there would be horrible consequences – curses and plagues – Deuteronomy 28:45-48, 58-59 (and context).

God knew they would choose disobedience, so he gave Moses a song that would "witness" against them – Deuteronomy 31:21+. (The song is in chapter 32.)

- He also told of a *future* day, when he would change people's hearts – Deuteronomy 30:6. (This is a reference to the New Covenant.)

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Israel, the "offspring" of the patriarchs: Going from bad to worse!

Even before God led them out of Egypt, they were already living in rebellion against God! The only reason he *didn't* kill them *even then* was because it would be a smear on *his own* reputation: *Doing so would have broken the promise he made to their ancestors.*

"On the day I chose Israel, I swore with uplifted hand to the descendants of Jacob ... that I would bring them out of Egypt ... And I said to them, "Each of you, **get rid of the vile images** you have set your eyes on, and **do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt.** I am the Lord your God." " "

" But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; **they did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.**

So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and spend my anger against them in Egypt. But **for the sake of my name**, I brought them out of Egypt. I did it to **keep my name from being profaned in the eyes of the nations.** " "

Ezekiel 20:5b, 6b,7-9 (NIV); this was God speaking through the prophet Ezekiel.

Rejecting God had consequences. God's blessings will not remain very long in a place where God himself is not welcome.

- Being put to death in the wilderness (on the journey to Canaan); being scattered among the nations (in the centuries after they reached the promised land) – Psalm 106:24-27.
- Both king and people receiving all the judgments God warned them about – Jeremiah 36:31.
- Cast out of God's presence – 2 Kings 17:16-20; Jeremiah 7:16.
- Like a cut-down tree; only the "stump" remains – Isaiah 6:13.

If only they had obeyed!

"If you had obeyed me, you would have had as **many children** as there are **grains of sand.** And they would always have been mine and **would never have been destroyed.**"

Isaiah 48:19 (BSB)

- As it is, only a *remnant* will be saved – Isaiah 10:21; Romans 9:27; etc.

All hope is not lost; God is planning a wonderful future for them!

It will be under the New Covenant, which changes people's hearts.*

- God will bring back the "remnant" to Israel – Isaiah 65:8-9. (The wicked will be destroyed – vs. 11-12.)
- They will be brought back, rescued from captivity and exile – Isaiah 43:5; Jeremiah 23:5-8; 30:8-11; 46:27-28.
- They will be "planted" in the land – Jeremiah 31:27 (under the New Covenant – vs. 31-34).
- Their boundaries will be extended – Isaiah 54:3.
- There will be a "peaceful kingdom," as well as a new heaven and earth – Isaiah 65:17-25; 66:22.
- Other nations will recognize them as the people the Lord has blessed – Isaiah 61:9.

* Some of these passages may have had a *partial* fulfillment in times past... though the *complete* fulfillment remains in the future.

Glorious is the future of Israel, the physical "seed" of Abraham!

But it is only under the New Covenant that this will happen.

This is the same New Covenant that is now bringing Gentiles into the Kingdom of God, and is turning them into children of Abraham!

(We will look more into this issue, next time.)

God's promises about Israel and the New Covenant are *more certain* than are the laws of nature – Jeremiah 31:35-37 (spoken by God, immediately after introducing the New Covenant); also Jeremiah 33:25-26.

Our MISSION:

Pursue the type of FAITH that Abraham had!

The blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant are much greater than we might first think. They impact everyone on earth who has the type of faith that Abraham had. Abraham trusted God, even when the blessings were nowhere in sight... and that's all that mattered!

(Our topic next week) ➔ Israel failed; Jesus succeeded.

Through Jesus, we can become Abraham's offspring in a more glorious way than by merely being of *physical* descent. And this is true whether we happen to be Jew or Gentile!

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