

### Article 3

#### The Call of Abraham : The Promise to Abraham

In studying this promise, two portions of Scripture must ever be kept in mind. The first is in the words of Jesus: *"Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of Me."* *"If ye believed Moses, ye would believe Me; for He wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?"* John 5.39,46,47, R.V

The only Scriptures in the days of Christ were the books now known as the Old Testament; these testify of Him. They were given for no other purpose. The Apostle Paul wrote that they are able to make men wise unto salvation, through faith, which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3.15); and among those writings the books of Moses are especially pointed out by the Lord as revealing Jesus. He who reads the writings of Moses, and the entire Old Testament, with any other expectation than to find Christ, and the way of life through Him, will utterly fail of understanding them. His reading will be in vain.

The other text is 2 Corinthians 1.19,20: *"For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Sylvanus and Timothy, was not yea and nay, but in Him is yea. For how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea; wherefore also through Him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us."* No promise of God has ever been given to man except through Christ. Personal faith in Christ is the one thing necessary in order to receive whatever God has promised, God is no respecter of persons: He offers His riches freely to everybody; but no one can have any part in them except as he receives Christ. This is perfectly fair, since Christ is given to all if they will but have Him.

With these principles in mind, we read the first account of the promise of God to Abraham. *"Now the Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."* Genesis 12.1-3 R.V.

At the very outset we may see that this promise to Abraham was a promise in Christ. The Apostle Paul writes: *"The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached beforehand the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham."* Galatians 3.8,9 R.V. From this we learn that when God said that in Abraham all the families of the earth should be blessed, He was preaching the Gospel to him. The blessing that was to come upon the people of the earth through him could be enjoyed only through faith.

## ABRAHAM AND THE CROSS

The preaching of the Gospel is the cross of Christ. Thus the Apostle Paul says that he was sent to preach the Gospel, but not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. And then he adds that the preaching of the cross is the power of God to them that are saved. 1 Corinthians 1.17,18. And this is but another way of saying that it is the Gospel, for the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Therefore since the preaching of the Gospel is the preaching of the cross of Christ (and there is no salvation by any other means), and God preached the Gospel to Abraham when He said, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed," *it is very clear that in that promise the cross of Christ was made known to Abraham, and that the promise thus made was one that could be gained only through the cross.*

This fact is made very clear in Galatians 3. Following the statement that the promise of blessing is to all the nations of the earth through Abraham, and that they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham, are the words, "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree; that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*" Galatians 3.13,14. *Here we have it stated in the most explicit terms that the blessing of Abraham, which was to come on all the families of the earth, was to come only through the cross of Christ.*

This is a point that needs to be well fixed in the mind at the very beginning. *All the misunderstandings of the promises of God to Abraham and his seed have arisen through a failure to see the Gospel of the cross of Christ in them.* If it be continually remembered that all the promises of God are in Christ, to be enjoyed only through His cross, and that consequently they are spiritual and eternal in their nature, there will be no difficulty, and the study of the promise to the fathers will be a delight and a blessing.

We read that Abraham, in obedience to the call of the Lord, went forth from his father's house, and from his native land. "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land; and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east; and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called on the name of the Lord." Genesis 7.5-8

It is best for us to perceive the real meaning of God's promises and dealings with Abraham from the very start, and then our subsequent study will be easy, since it will be but the application of

these principles. In this last scripture there are a few subjects introduced, which occupy a very prominent place in this study, and so we will note them here. First,

### THE SEED

The Lord said to Abraham, after he had reached the land of Canaan, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." If we but hold to the Scriptures we shall not have a moment's difficulty in ascertaining who the seed is. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to *thy seed, which is Christ.*" Galatians 3.16. This ought forever to settle the matter, so that there could be no dispute about it. *The seed of Abraham, to whom the promise was made, is Christ. He is the heir.*

But we also may be joint-heirs with Christ. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3.27-29

Those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, and are therefore one in Him. So when it is said that Christ is the seed of Abraham, to whom the promises were made, all who are in Christ are included. But nothing outside of Christ is included in the promise. To say that the inheritance promised to the seed of Abraham could be possessed by any except those who were Christ's through faith in Him is to ignore the Gospel, and to deny the word of God. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature." 2 Corinthians 5.17. Therefore since the promise of the land was to Abraham and His seed, which is Christ and those who have put Him on by baptism, and who are therefore new creatures, it follows that the promise of the land was only to those who were new creatures in Christ—children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. This again is additional evidence that all the promises of God are in Christ, and that the promises to Abraham can be shared only through the cross of Christ.

Let this principle, therefore, never for a moment be forgotten in reading about Abraham and the promise to him and his seed, —that the seed is Christ and those who are in Him. This and nothing else.

### THE LAND

Abraham was in the land of Canaan when God said to him, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." Turn now to the words which the martyr Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, his face shining like that of an angel, said to his persecutors: "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he dwelt in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then came he out of the land of the

Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran;<sup>1</sup> and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land wherein ye now dwell.” Acts 7.2-4

This is but a repetition of what we have already read in Genesis 12. Now read the next verse: *“And He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on; yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.”*

We learn here that although it is sometimes merely stated, “Unto thy seed will I give this land,” Abraham himself was always included in the promise. This is made very evident in the repetitions of the promise that follow in the book of Genesis.

But we learn more, and that is that Abraham actually received no inheritance of land. He had not so much of the land as to set his foot on; yet God had promised it to him and to his seed after him. What shall we say to this? —That the promise of God failed? —Not by any means. God “cannot lie.” “He abideth faithful.” Abraham died without having received the promised inheritance, yet he died in faith. *We must therefore learn from this the lesson that the Holy Spirit wished the Jews to learn, namely, that the promised inheritance could be received only through Jesus and the resurrection.* This also is made very clear by the words of the Apostle Peter: —

*“Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”* Acts 3.25,26

*The blessing of Abraham, as we have learned, comes on the Gentiles, or all the families of the earth, through Jesus Christ and His cross; but the blessing of Abraham is connected with the promise of the land of Canaan. That also was to be possessed only through Christ and the resurrection.* If it had been otherwise, Abraham would have been disappointed, instead of dying in full faith of the promise. But this also will appear more plainly as we proceed.

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<sup>1</sup> \*Haran. The Hebrew letter beginning this name is a guttural, difficult to represent by Roman letters, and difficult for English people to pronounce. It is much like the German *ch*. In the English Bible it is sometimes represented by the letter “H” and sometimes by “Ch.” Compare the proper name “Rachel” in Jeremiah 31.15 and Matthew 2.18.