

God's Promises to Abraham

Abraham's Background

Abraham lived about 4000 years ago (approx. 2000 BC). He lived in a place called Ur. Ur was a very civilized city for its time, located in what is now Iraq, not far from Kuwait. The people had running water in their homes, a code of laws, public schools, financial institutions, shops, and a social structure. They also worshipped idols - the city's patron deity was Nanna, the moon god. But Abraham worshipped the one true God. Abraham's wife was Sarah, his father was Terah and he had a nephew called Lot.

Abraham's name was initially Abram, meaning 'father of height'. God changed it to Abraham, meaning 'father of a multitude'. Sarah's name, initially Sarai, was changed by God to Sarah meaning 'princess'. Gen. 17: 15-16.



Why Abraham is so important

Abraham is a key character in Scripture. Fourteen chapters describe the life of Abraham - Genesis 11:26 to 25:11. In a book as succinct as the Bible, this is an impressive amount. There are approximately 147 other references to him in other parts of the Bible. On 3 occasions, Abraham is called 'the friend of God' - 2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8 & James 2:23 - an honour very rarely bestowed.

James 2:23

*“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’. And he was called **the friend of God.**”*

God wants us to trust him. Abraham is notable for believing God - even when the things told him by God, were humanly **impossible**. Abraham (Abram) was an old man and his wife Sarah (Sarai) was unable to have children. She was also old - past the age of being able to bear children, but God promised Abraham that he would have many descendants. God was so pleased with Abraham for believing this seemingly impossible thing, that He counted Abraham's belief as righteousness.

It wasn't just belief that made Abraham so special in God's sight; it was belief that resulted in **actions**. For example, after waiting so long for the birth of the promised son, when Isaac had grown into a young man, God told Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. Abraham's faith in God was so strong that he believed God would raise Isaac from the dead to fulfil the other promises that God had made him (Hebrews 11:17-19). Powerful faith such as this is a rare and notable thing. God uses Abraham as an illustration of how **our faith** should be. Galatians 3:6-9

*“Thus Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’ So you see that it is **men 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 men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.”

This is a key passage. It explains that the **gospel** was preached to Abraham in the promise - **‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’** How was this promise ‘the gospel’? The gospel is the “good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12) So therefore the promise to Abraham was the gospel.

The apostle Paul explains in Galatians 3 how people from all nations can become Abraham’s offspring and inherit the promises to Abraham, by being baptised into Jesus Christ.

What were God’s Promises to Abraham?

God appeared to Abraham when he lived in Ur, and told him to leave his country and his kindred and his father’s house and go to a land that God would show him.. God made the first of a number of promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3):

1. God would make Abraham a **great nation**
2. He would **bless** Abraham
3. He would make Abraham’s **name great**
4. Abraham would be a **blessing**
5. God would **bless those who blessed** Abraham and **curse those who cursed** him
6. In Abraham, **all the families of the earth** would be blessed

The angel of the LORD appeared to Abraham on six other occasions, with further promises from God:

1. At the oak of Moreh **at Shechem** (Gen. 12:7)
 - *“To your **offspring** I will **give this land.**”*
2. **Between Bethel & Ai** after Lot had separated from Abram (Gen 13:14)
 - God promised Abraham and his descendants **all the land which he could see.**

- God told Abraham to walk through the **length and the breadth** of the **land**, for He would **give it to him.**
 - Abraham’s descendants would be as **numerous** as the dust of the earth and the stars in the heavens.
3. **After rescuing Lot** and others from Chedorlaomer’s confederacy (Gen 15:1 & 5)
 - God was Abraham’s shield & **his reward would be great.**
 - Abraham’s descendants would be as **numerous** as the stars in heaven.
 4. Abraham **sacrifices to God** (Gen 15:7, 13-16 & 18-21) and is told:
 - God would give his descendants **the land** from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates river, the land of the Kenites, the Kennizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorite, the Canaanites, the Gergashites and the Jebusites.
 5. **When Abram was 99 years old** (Gen. 17:1-2 & 4-14, 15-16, 19-21)
 - *“I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an **everlasting covenant**, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And **I will give** to you, and to your descendants after you, the **land of your sojournings**, all the land of Canaan, **for an everlasting possession**; and I will be their God.”* Gen 17:7-8
 - God would make Abraham the **father of many nations**, and kings would come forth from him.
 6. When God commanded Abraham to **offer Isaac as a burnt offering** (Gen 22:2, 12, 16-18)
 - Abraham’s seed [ie Jesus] would possess the gate of his enemies and by his seed,] all nations of the earth would bless themselves.

Gen 22:16-17 *“blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the shore of the sea. And **your Seed** shall possess the gate of **His** enemies. And in your **Seed** shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed My voice.”* LITV

The Implications of the Promises

1. God promised Abraham and his descendants all the land which he could see and He told Abraham to walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for He would give it to him. Implication:
 - The land Abraham was being given by God, was **here on earth** - not in heaven. Abraham was to walk through the length and breadth of the land. It was this **physical literal land**, now called Israel, that God was promising Abraham.
2. God would **bless those who blessed Abraham** and **curse those who cursed him**. Implication:
 - Throughout history, those who bless Abraham and/or his descendants, are blessed. Those who curse them, are cursed. One example is Germany after the Holocaust perpetrated against Jews by Hitler and the Nazis. By the end of WW2, Germany was ruined financially, but the German people felt remorse at what their country had done to the Jews, so although they couldn't afford it, they made huge reparation payments to the newly formed country of Israel. After this, the German economy boomed, and Germany is now a very wealthy country, despite being decimated by the war.
3. Abraham's descendants would be as **numerous as the dust of the earth and the stars in the heavens**.
 - Possibly the sand is a reference to the Jews, the literal descendants of Abraham and the stars are a reference to the spiritual descendants of Abraham, be they Jews or gentiles.

4. God would give Abraham's descendants **the land** from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates river, the land of the Kenites, the Kennizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorite, the Canaanites, the Gergashites and the Jebusites. Implication:

- Notice the very literal language describing the land promised to Abraham - the land where all these tribes and nations lived, with the boundaries of rivers mentioned. This promise is not referring to somewhere in heaven, but here on this earth.

5. *“I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And **I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.**”* Genesis 17:7-8. Implication:

- The everlasting possession of the land is stressed, implying everlasting life to Abraham and his descendants, to possess the land.

Today, Israel is hardly a godly nation. In fact they are a very atheistic nation. But we know from Romans 11 that this will change and Israel will once again seek the Lord their God. Read the whole of this chapter, it is all relevant. Romans 11:25-28 (Paul writing to Gentile believers)

*“Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, **until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved** [i.e. natural Israel and spiritual Israel]; as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’; ‘and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’ As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of **their forefathers.**”*

This passage is saying that when the full number of the

Gentiles come to God, then God will save natural Israel. And it is not for their sakes that God will do this, but for their forefathers sakes. That is, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - the men God made His wonderful promises to.

- Again, Genesis 17 is emphasising **where** the promised land would be - *“the land of **your sojournings**, all the land of Canaan”*
6. Abraham’s seed would possess the gate of his enemies and by his seed all nations of the earth would bless themselves. Gen 22:16-18 *“blessing I will bless you and multiplying I will multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore. And **your Seed** shall possess the gate of **His enemies**. And **in your Seed** shall all the nations of the earth **be blessed** as reward in that you have obeyed My voice.”*

Implications:

- This is a very important passage, because it identifies **who** these promises to Abraham really focus on. They all apply to Abraham of course, and also to his literal descendants the faithful Jews and also to his spiritual descendants - the faithful Christians. But the ultimate focus of these promises is on **Jesus Christ**. Remember what Matthew 1:1 says? *“The book of the genealogy of **Jesus Christ**, the son of David, **the son of Abraham**.”*
- Notice that Genesis 22:17-18 speaks of Abraham’s seed as possessing the gate of **His** enemies. This is singular, referring to one person. And that person is Jesus Christ. We know this because of Paul’s words in Galatians 3:16:

*“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ **who is Christ**’ ”.*

So Jesus is this seed who will possess the gate of his enemies and the seed through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

In the days when these promises were given, if you possessed the gate of your enemies, you had power and control over the city. This is saying that Jesus will conquer the world and will rule over those who oppose him and that through Jesus all nations will be blessed. Of course, the ultimate enemy Jesus has to conquer is sin and death. He conquered it on a personal level at his first coming. (see John 16:33 & Rev 3:7) He will conquer it globally by the end of his reign at his second coming. 1 Corinthians 15:24-26:

*“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For **he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet**. The last enemy to be destroyed is **death**.”*

How do we know these promises haven’t been fulfilled?

Some say that these promises to Abraham have been fulfilled and no longer have further application. But Abraham **didn’t** receive what was promised to him. God promised him the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, but he wasn’t given any of it. In fact, he had to buy some land to buy Sarah his wife. (See Genesis 23) Stephen, speaking of Abraham in Acts 7:5 says

*“And God gave him **no inheritance** in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, **He promised to give it to him for a possession** and to his descendants after him.*

Scripture is clearly saying that these promises **still** need to be fulfilled.

Hebrews 11:8-16 also shows how Abraham hasn’t **yet** received what was promised. Verse 13

*“These all died in faith, **not having received the promises**, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced*

them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

Abraham **will receive the promises** made to him by God - at the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. The last 2 verses of Hebrews 11, tell us

*“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, **did not receive the promise**, God having provided something better for us, that **they should not be made perfect apart from us.**”*

So Abraham **will** receive what was promised to him, but at the resurrection at the return of Jesus. Revelation 11:18

*“The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for **rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.**”*

How these promises affect us

These promises are very relevant to us, because the faithful are the spiritual seed of Abraham, as Galatians 3:27 & 29 points out:

*“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ... And **if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.**”*

If we belong to Christ, we automatically become Abraham’s offspring and become heirs of the promises God made to Abraham. To become heirs to these amazing promises God made to Abraham, is a staggering thing - promises that reflect the respect and love God has for people who **believe what He says**. Romans 4:3

*“Abraham **believed** God, and it was accounted to him for **righteousness.**”*

And again, Galatians 3:6-9

*“Thus Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’ So you see that **it is men 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 men of faith are blessed with Abraham** who had faith.”*

These verses tell us:

- Abraham **believed** God
- **Faith** (or belief) is counted as righteousness
- The **gospel** was preached to Abraham
- Faithful people are counted as **Abraham’s heirs**
- Faithful men are blessed with faithful Abraham

What should our response be?

The promise of eternal life on earth is an awe inspiring promise. The steps to become part of these promises are very simple - Romans 4:13 & 16 & 20-25

*“The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they **should inherit the world**, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ... it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to **all his descendants** – not only to the adherents of the law but also to **those who share the faith of Abraham**, for he is the father of us all, ... No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew **strong in his faith** as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was ‘reckoned to him as righteousness.’ But the words, ‘It was reckoned to him,’ were written not for his sake alone, but **for ours also**. It will be **reckoned to us who believe in him** that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”*

So **how** do we become sons of Abraham and share in these wonderful promises God is offering? Jesus says “*He who **believes** and is **baptized will be saved***”. And remember again the words of Paul in Galatians 3:27 & 29:

*“For as many of you as were **baptized in Christ** have **put on Christ** ... And if you **are Christ’s**, then you are **Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.**”*

Brief summary:

- Believe the true gospel
- Be baptised into Jesus Christ
- Rise to a new life serving God and not sin

Then we belong to Jesus and are counted as Abraham’s offspring and heirs of the promises God made to Abraham. If we remain faithful, when Jesus returns, he will give us eternal life to serve God forever. The choice is ours.

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