

THE PROMISES OF GOD TO ABRAHAM

I. Preliminary considerations

- A. Hermeneutic principles - how are we to go about interpreting the Scriptures; what are the basic criteria for interpretation?
1. Literal interpretation - We hear many teachers talking about interpreting the Scriptures "literally."
 - a. This is an ambiguous and ill-defined term.
 - b. Too often "literalism" becomes strict and rigid "letterism"
Rom. 2:29 - "circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter"
II Cor. 3:6 - "a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."
 - c. Literal interpretation is "according to the literary intent of the author of the literature, and the literary genre he is employing"
 - (1) Both physical or figurative meanings can be literal
 - (2) What God has says often had double entendre
natural, physical/spiritual
direct/indirect
earthly/heavenly
self-evident/figurative or metaphorical
plain/pictorial, illustrative, analogical
 - (3) It is inaccurate to assert that only the physical, natural and earthly is literal. (Same mistake as naturalism, scientism, evolutionary theory.)
 2. Types - Typological interpretation
 - a. What happened in the Old Testament was often a pictorial pre-figuring of what God was going to do in the new covenant in Jesus Christ.
 - b. Persons, objects, events, activities were placed in a parallel correspondence pointing to fulfillment in another way.
 - (1) Adam/Christ
 - (2) Creation/new creation
 - (3) Exodus/deliverance from sin
 - c. Such typological interpretation cannot be subjective and arbitrary resemblances; such is allegorism.
 - d. Biblical statements of type
 - (1) Shadows
Col. 2:17 - "food, festival, Sabbath...shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."
Heb. 8:5 - "priests according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things"
Heb. 10:1 - "the Law has only a shadow of the good things to come"
 - (2) Symbol
Heb. 9:9 - "outer tabernacle is a symbol for present"
 - (3) Copy
Heb. 8:5 - "copy of the heavenly things"
Heb. 9:23,24 - "copies of things in the heavenlies"
"a holy place..a mere copy of the true one"
 - (4) Examples

I Cor. 10:6 - "these things happened as examples"

I Cor. 10:11 - "these things happened as an example"

3. Christocentric interpretation.

a. All Scripture must be interpreted in reference to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

(1) John 5:39 - "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me"

b. The Old Testament must be interpreted by the New Testament.

B. Conditional relationships between God and man

1. God created man as choosing creature

a. Man is not an automaton

b. God respects the freedom of choice in man

c. God does not act in deterministic imposition or unconditional election.

2. God selected the Jewish people

a. Not arbitrary favoritism

Acts 10:34 - "God is not one to show partiality"

b. Not selected to be physical, racial and national "chosen people"

c. Jewish people selected and chosen to be the "picture-people" of God's "chosen people" in Christ.

Col. 3:12 - "those who have become chosen of God"

d. No unconditional selection of Jewish people

3. God's agreements with men

a. Covenants - agreements, contracts, testaments

(1) "This is what I am going to do; this is what you are responsible for."

(2) God always works with men in grace/faith

b. God's promises and covenant with Abraham were not unconditional

(1) Gen. 12:1,4 - "Lord said, 'Go forth..' Abram went forth..." - Obedience.

(2) Heb. 11:8 - "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out"

(3) Rom. 4:13 - "For the promise to Abraham...was through the righteousness of faith"

c. The Jewish peoples developed a selfish pride and arrogance wherein they thought that God's promises and covenant with them was "unconditional" and "everlasting."

(1) That is why they were instrumental in seeking Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus did not accept or propagate their nationalistic and racial Messianic expectations.

(2) That is why Paul was imprisoned at the instigation of the Jews.

Acts 26:6,7 - "I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers...being accused by the Jews."

Acts 28:19,20 - "when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar. I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel."

(3) Meaning of "everlasting" and "forever" -

- (a) Gen. 13:15; 17:7,8
- (b) Not necessarily infinity
- (c) "unto the ages;" a long time
- (d) Gen. 17:13 - "everlasting covenant" of circumcision has been superseded
- (e) Exod. 40:15 - "everlasting priesthood" superseded; Heb. 7:24

II. The Biblical texts

- A. It is important to get the big picture of God's perspective.
- B. The Bible does not start with Genesis 12.
 - 1. It is not primarily a narrative of physical Jewish fulfillment and restoration.
 - 2. It is over-all a narrative of mankind's fall into sin and the spiritual restoration of mankind in Jesus Christ.
 - 3. The Messianic restoration of mankind is the primary focus, not Judaic restoration.
- C. Some of the Biblical passages relating to God's promises to Abraham
 - 1. Gen. 12:1-7
 - 2. Gen. 13:14-16
 - 3. Gen. 15:1-7, 13,14,18
 - 4. Gen. 17:1-8
 - 5. Gen. 18:18
 - 6. Gen. 22:16-18

III. The Promises of God

- A. The seed promise; the off-spring promise; the descendancy promise.
Too numerous to count.
Gen. 12:7 - "To your seed I will give this land"
Gen. 13:15,16 - "I will give the land to you and your seed forever. I will make your seed as the dust of the earth"
Gen. 15:5 - "Count the stars,...so shall your seed be"
Gen. 15:18 - "to your seed I have given this land"
Gen. 17:7,8 - "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed throughout their generations..."
Gen. 22:17 - "I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies"
- B. The nation promise
Gen. 12:2 - "I will make you a great nation"
Gen. 17:4,5 - "You shall be the father of a multitude of nations"
Gen. 18:18 - "Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation"
- C. The land promise
Gen. 12:7 - "To your seed I will give this land"
Gen. 13:14,15 - "all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your seed forever"
Gen. 15:7 - "give you this land to possess it"
Gen. 15:18 - "to your seed I have given this land"
Gen. 17:8 - "I will give to you and to your seed, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession"
- D. The blessing promise
Gen. 12:2,3 - "I will bless you...and so you shall be a blessing; and I will

bless those who bless you...and in you all the families of the earth
 shall be blessed'
Gen. 18:18 - "in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed"

IV. The Fulfillment of the Promises

- A. Natural and physical fulfillment...
1. of the seed promise
 - a. Abraham's faith tested
Gen. 22:2 - "Take now your only son, and offer him as a burnt offering"
 - b. Attestation of fulfillment
Deut. 1:10 - "The Lord has multiplied you, and behold, you are as the stars of heaven for multitude"
I Kings 4:20 - "Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore in abundance"
II Chron. 1:9 - "Thou hast made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth"
Neh. 9:23 - "Thou didst make their sons numerous as the stars of the heaven"
Heb. 11:12 - "there was born of one man...as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand by the seashore"
 2. of the nation promise
 - a. delay of 400 years in fulfillment
Gen. 15:13 - "your seed will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years"
 - b. place of fulfillment
Gen. 46:3 - "do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there"
 - c. attestation of fulfillment
Deut. 4:6,7 - "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God?"
I Chron. 17:21 - "what one nation in the earth is like Thy people Israel...driving out nations before Thy people"
 - d. eventual destruction of the nation through unbelief and disobedience
Matt. 21:43 - "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it"
 3. of the land promise
 - a. Attestation of fulfillment
Josh. 2:9 - "the Lord has given you the land"
Josh. 21:43 - "the Lord gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it." cf. I Kings 4:21,24
Neh. 9:7,8 - "Thou didst make a covenant with Abraham to give him the land...and Thou hast fulfilled Thy promise, for Thou art righteous."
Neh. 9:23,24 - "Thou didst bring them into the land which Thou hadst told their fathers to enter and possess..."
 - b. Did not enter the land of rest
Deut. 12:9 - "you have not as yet come to the resting place"

- and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you"
- Heb. 3:18,19 - "they should not enter His rest...because of unbelief"
- c. Only intended only to be strangers, pilgrims and sojourners
 Gen. 17:8 - "the land of your sojournings"
 Lev. 25:23 - "the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me."
 Heb. 11:13,16 - "they were strangers and exiles on the earth...desiring a better country, a heavenly one"
- d. Later cast out of the land
 Deut. 4:26 - "You shall surely perish quickly from the land..be utterly destroyed"
 Deut. 6:14,15 - "He will wipe you off the face of the earth"
 Deut. 28:63,64 - "you shall be torn from the land"
 Gal. 4:30 - "cast out the bondwoman"
4. of the blessing promise
- a. God blessed Abraham
 Gen. 24:35,36 - "The Lord has greatly blessed my master, Abraham"
 Isa. 51:2 - "Look to Abraham...I blessed him and multiplied him"
5. Abraham received the natural fulfillment of all the promises
 Josh. 21:45 - "Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass"
 Josh. 23:14 - "all of God's good words have been fulfilled, not one of them has failed."
 I Kings 8:56 - "The Lord has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise"
 Heb. 6:15 - "he obtained the promise"
- B. Spiritual fulfillment...
1. of the seed promise
- a. Jesus is the "seed" of Abraham
 (1) "seed of the woman" - Gen. 3:15
 (2) Paul views Heb. singular "seed" as a collective noun with both singular and plural implications
 Gal. 3:16 - "He does not say "seeds", as referring to many, but rather to one,..that is Christ"
 Gal. 3:19 - "the seed to whom the promise had been made"
- b. Christians who are "in Christ" are spiritual descendants of Abraham
 Rom. 4:16 - "the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all"
 Rom. 9:8 - "it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants"
 Gal. 3:7 - "those who are of faith are sons of Abraham"
 Gal. 3:29 - "if you belong to Christ, then you Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."
 Gal. 4:28 - "children of promise"

- Rev. 7:9 - "a great multitude, which no one could count"
2. of the nation promise
 - I Pet. 2:9 - "You are a holy nation, a people for God's own possession"
 - Phil. 3:20 - "our citizenship is in heaven"
 - Eph. 2:19 - "you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of God's household"
 3. of the land promise
 - a. The promise was for something better than the land of Canaan
 - Rom. 4:13 - "promise to Abraham and his descendants that he would be heir of the world" (not just Palestine)
 - Heb. 11:10 - "Abraham was looking for the city..whose architect and builder is God"
 - Heb. 11:13-16 - "they desire a better country, a heavenly one...God has prepared a city for them"
 - b. The promised land is where God dwells
 - Gen. 2,3 - Garden of Eden
 - Jn. 14:2,3 - "In My Father's house are many dwelling places ...I go to prepare a place for you"
 - II Cor. 6:16 - "I will dwell in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people"
 - Eph. 2:6 - "seated us with Him in the heavenly places"
 - c. The promised land is a place of rest
 - Heb. 4:1 - "a promise remains of entering His rest"
 - Heb. 4:9 - "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God"
 - d. The promised land is the new Jerusalem, spiritual Zion
 - Heb. 12:22 - "you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem"
 - Gal. 4:26 - "the Jerusalem above is free, she is our mother"
 - Rev. 3:12 - "The name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem"
 - Rev. 21:1,2 - "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, the holy city, new Jerusalem"
 - II Peter 3:13 - "according to His promise, we are looking for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells"
 4. of the blessing promise
 - Augustine - City of God
 - Gal. 3:8,9 - "those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham"
 - Gal. 3:14 - "in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"
 - Eph. 1:3 - "God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"
 5. Only in the spiritual fulfillment do they become "eternal" promises in an "eternal" covenant by the "eternal life" of Jesus Christ.
 - a. cf. Gen. 13:15; 17:7,8,13,19; 48:4
 - b. The eternal purposes of God are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, not in restoration of physical Jews
 - Eph. 1:9-14 - "

Conclusion:

- A. The "hope of Israel" is not restoration of Jewish nationalism, but the restoration of humanity by the divine life of Jesus.
 - 1. Paul was on trial for preaching the gospel of the resurrection life of Jesus.
 - Acts 26:6 - "I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers"
 - Acts 28:20 - "I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel"
 - 2. Jesus is the hope of Israel and the Gentiles
 - Eph. 4:4 - "one hope of our calling" (not one hope for national Israel and another for Christians)
 - Heb. 7:19 - "there is a bringing in of a better hope"
 - I Tim. 1:1 - "Christ Jesus is our hope"
 - Rom. 15:12 - "In Him will the Gentiles hope"
- B. All the promises of God to Abraham and other Old Testament personages are fulfilled in Jesus
 - Lk. 22:44-49 - "all things about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms should have been fulfilled"
 - Rom. 15:8 - "Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers"
 - II Cor. 1:20 - "as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes"
 - Robert D. Brinsmead - "Unless we can take out our pen and write 'Fulfilled' across every one of the three thousand promises of the Old Testament, we deny 'the finished work of Jesus Christ,'" (*Present Truth*, Sept. 1974, pg 7).
- C. Christians are now
 - 1. the "chosen people" of God
 - Eph. 1:4 - "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world"
 - Titus 2:14 - "a people for His own possession"
 - I Pet 2:9 - "you are a chosen race,...a people for God's own possession"
 - 2. recipients of the inheritance of God
 - Gal. 3:18 - "God has granted the inheritance to Abraham by means of a promise"
 - Heb. 9:15 - "those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance"
 - Col. 1:12 - "qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints"
 - 3. spiritual Jews
 - Rom. 2:28,29 - "he is not a Jew who is one outwardly;...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly...and his praise is not from men, but from God"
 - 4. spiritual Israel
 - Rom. 9:6 - "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel"
 - Gal. 6:16 - "the Israel of God"
- D. The promises of God to Abraham are ultimately fulfilled in those who receive Jesus Christ by faith (Gal. 3:9), who are thus "heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29)