



Genesis – The Promise

The book of Genesis tells us of the creation of the heavens, the earth, and the beginnings of all humanity; we see the fall of Adam and Eve, the rise, fall, and destruction of the human race, save eight people and an ark full of animals. Then we see one man, Abraham, upon whom God bestows the honor of father of His nation; we see his life, his family, and their struggle for survival when they flee a famine to Egypt.

We also see God's plan emerge for all of humanity, a plan He will carry out through this small nation, Israel, who were to be witness of His existence and nature to all the world. Some would say it is a plan for God's people to grow into a physical multitude, to inherit a physical land in the Middle East, and to become the apple of God's eye for all eternity. But I would say that is a very myopic view of humanity's foundation laid in the book of Genesis.

I think we need to consider the broader picture. The more important picture painted by this book is one which portrays our fundamental need for and the promise of the Messiah, the Son of God, who would lead the multitude of God's people, those who believe as Abraham did, into God's promised land, where He dwells, and His people with Him forever.

Sure the book is about the nation Israel, but by the time Jacob dies at the end of the book the only promise that gets passed on to Judah is the one of the Messiah. Moreover, we will see that by the time we get to the end of Joshua's life all other promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will have been fulfilled.

The First Command

In the beginning God made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are therein (Ac 14:15). God then planted a garden eastward in Eden (Ge 2:8) and took the man, Adam, and put him in the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it (Ge 2:15). Adam was given the job of caretaker for God's garden, as well as the one who would name every beast of the field and every fowl of the air (Ge 2:19).



Adam was told by God that he may eat freely of every tree of the garden (Ge 2:16), but not of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Ge 2:17). Moreover, God said that in the day that he eats of this tree he shall surely die (Ge 2:17). And so was born God's first command, and with it our first glimpse into God's morale nature. God shows us His love for His creation and for the human race, as exemplified in His desire to keep His created human beings close to Himself in His garden. Yet we also see God's holy nature, His righteousness, and His justice when He commands Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God's morale nature requires that disobedience, or sin, be punished; and the required punishment is death (see Ro 6:23). Death may not occur right then and there, but eternal death will occur to all who disobey God and are not covered by the blood of Christ.

The First Sin

We know this story well, even those people who do not follow Christ. The serpent deceives Eve into eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and then Eve gives it to Adam to eat (Ge 3:1-6). The significance of these two acts of disobedience changed the face of history forever. We could discuss the psychological and philosophical aspects of these acts at length, but that would not bring us any closer to what God would have us know and learn from them.

Eve may have been deceived and beguiled by the smooth talking serpent, but Adam was openly disobedient to a direct command of God. We could discuss whether or not Eve received this command directly from God or indirectly through Adam, but it really would not make any difference, since scripture does not say. What scripture does say, however, is that God directly commanded Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and we know that Adam chose to do what his wife asked rather than obey the command of God. While Eve was deceived by the Serpent, Adam openly disobeyed God, a violation for which the Levitical law has no provision (Nu 16:30-31). We cannot cast stones at Adam, though, since many of us have faced, are facing, or will face a similar crisis of faith and obedience some time in our life. I can only pray that God would be merciful to each of us.

The Consequences of Sin

Scripture is clear, God forgives sin, if we repent with a contrite heart and a broken spirit (1 Jn 1:9, Ps 51:16-17, Pr 28:13). Even though God forgives our sin, I don't think anyone would disagree that we still have to deal with the consequences brought on by our actions.



Here we get into an interesting area. By way of an example, if a child accidentally spills a glass of milk, the parent will forgive, and if the child is old enough will have the child clean up the mess. The clean up is the lesson that there are consequences for the accidental, unintentional, transgression. But if the same child intentionally spills the milk, the punishment will most likely be greater, and maybe even of a more lasting duration. The consequences for an intentional transgression of accepted family behavior will be all the greater. God deals with us in much the same manner. We will take a closer look at intentional and unintentional sin when we discuss Leviticus. For now we only need to remember that God looks at our heart.

When confronted by God with their sin, Adam blamed the woman God gave him (Ge 3:12), and Eve blamed the serpent (Ge 3:13); and the serpent had no one to blame. This seems to be a common human malady; our first reaction is to blame someone or something else. I believe, however, both were guilty of intentional sin against God's command not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam could hardly have forgotten, since we know he was told directly and emphatically by God not to eat of the tree (Ge 2:17). Eve, on the other hand, was told either by Adam or by God; scripture does not say. But regardless of who told her, she knew she was not to eat of the tree (Ge 3:3). Both Adam and Eve chose to intentionally ignore God's command, and so they ate, and paid the price for disobedience.

God's punishment was both immediate and complete, containing short term and long term consequences. In the short term God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden, forcing them to fend for themselves for food, and for survival. They were no longer under the protective wing of God. We know the long term consequence. It was death. They could no longer eat of the tree of life, and therefore would experience physical death (see Ge 3:14-24).

We do not know Adam's spiritual condition at this time; scripture does not say. But we do know that all born of Adam are born spiritually dead because of Adam's sin; and all are in need of spiritual birth.

This sets the tone for all the rest of scripture. Man can do nothing of his own will or actions that are capable of reconciling himself to God. We need to know God's standard of behavior; we need to realize we cannot live up to God's standard no matter how hard we try; we need to recognize our need for a redeemer, one who can free us from the bondage of sin; and we need to be able to identify and accept the redeemer into our life and truly believe He can redeem us from all of our sin.

The First Promise



As a result of the fall of Adam and Eve, the Lord told them of their consequences; included was this statement by the Lord to the serpent: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel” (Ge 3:15).

I read this verse many times over many years before I thought to ask myself some simple questions: who is the serpent’s seed, and who is the woman’s seed? Neither answer is obvious from this passage alone. We know that the serpent, spoken of here, is the devil, or Satan (Rv 12:9), the great deceiver. So who is the seed of the serpent? It cannot be Satan himself. Does he have children? Well, the answer is yes. The seed of the serpent are those Jews, according to John 8:31-47, who are the servants of sin and do not hear the words of God; and in a broader sense all those who do not believe Jesus’ good news. Jesus says to them “Ye are of your father the devil” (Jn 8:44). Jesus also says in the parable of the wheat and the tares “the good seed are the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked one” (Mt 13:38). So the seed of the serpent are all the people who are not Christ’s.

And so, who is the seed of the woman? If we continue with the logic and scripture above, we might answer “believers in Jesus’ good news”, or “the children of the kingdom”. But we would be in error. The only way we know the correct answer is because Paul tells us that “when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law” (Ga 4:4-5). Paul also tells us that the seed is Christ (Ga 3:16). So the seed of the woman is Christ.

In verse 3:15 “it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” we have a prophetic statement that Jesus will bruise the head of Satan and that Satan will bruise the heel of Jesus, taking place at the cross. But we also have in the same verse the prophetic statement that there will be “enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed”, that is between the children of the devil and Christ. We see this today; the intense hatred the world has for all who confess the name of Christ and try to speak about the good news of what He did at the cross.

Abram’s Call

Abram, who we know today as Abraham, moved with his father Terah from Ur of the Chaldees in ancient Mesopotamia, most likely south eastern Iraq today, to Haran in ancient Syria (Ge 11:31). It was at Haran, when Abram was seventy-five years old, that the Lord spoke to him for the first, as recorded in scripture. The Lord tells Abram to leave Haran



and go to a land He will show him (Ge 12:1). Abram takes everything he has, including his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot, and follows the Lord's directions (Ge 12:4). Abram was not told where to go; he was just told to go (He 11:8). And he went.

The Lord offered Abram four promises for his obedience (Ge 12:2-3): He will make him a great nation, He will bless him, He will make his name great, and He will make him a blessing to others. Recorded history, both secular and biblical, prove these promises to have been fulfilled during Abram's life, and with the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The most important promise is the last, in which the Lord says "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Ge 12:3). How will Abram be a blessing to all the families of the earth? Does this mean Abram himself, or because of Abram, or because of one coming in the line of Abram? Well, scripture does not tell us these answers here. But we do know he will become a great and mighty nation and all nations of the earth will be blessed in him (Ge 18:18); meaning that in Abraham's seed will all the nations be blessed because he has obeyed the Lord's voice (Ge 22:18). So who is the seed? As we observed earlier, the seed is Christ (Ga 3:16); and this blessing promised through Abram to others is through Christ, who confirmed the promises made (Ro 15:8), who justified the heathen through faith (Ga 3:8), who gave us the promise of the Spirit through faith (Ga 3:14), and who included the children of the covenant (Ac 3:25) in the blessing.

The Land

Once Abram entered into the land of Canaan the Lord appeared to him and said "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Ge 12:7). Two questions come to mind every time I read this verse: who is the seed, and what land? I already addressed the seed above, which is Christ; and to answer the question of the land we have to understand the difference between the Lord's unconditional promise of the land to Christ (Ge 13:15, 15:18, 17:8, Ga 13:16) and the Lord's conditional promise of the land to Abram's descendents (Dt 4:1, 5:16, 5:33, 11:8-9, 11:18-25, 28:58-63, 30:14-20). At this point someone always says to me "but God promised the land to Israel, and if He takes it away then isn't He a liar?" However, from the verses mentioned in Deuteronomy, it is clear to me that if Israel is obedient they will continue to possess the land, but if Israel is disobedient they will lose their right to be in the land. Even so, no one can ever call the Lord a liar, since scripture also says "And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which He swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein" (Jsh 21:43). And so the Lord gave the land to Israel based on His promise to Abram, and they would be allowed to remain in the land as long as they remained obedient to the Lord.



I like to think of it this way, Christ is the owner, the deed holder, of the land, and Israel was given use of it conditioned upon obedience to the Lord. But there is a bigger picture being depicted here, one in which the land promised to Israel is a foreshadow of our promise to eternity in heaven. As long as we are obedient to the Lord, that is found in Christ, justified by our faith, then our sins are forgiven and we are no longer found disobedient in God's eyes according to His law; and therefore we will receive our promised inheritance of redemption, including our promise of spending all eternity in heaven with the Lord. Heaven, then, is our land of promise.

The Land and the Multitude

After Abram and Lot separate, the Lord speaks with him again. For the first time the Lord says "all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it" (Ge 13:15). In Genesis 12:7 the land was given to Christ without condition, and here it is given to Abram, also without condition. The Lord also reaffirms Christ's ownership forever, adding "and to thy seed forever" (Ge 13:15)

At this time the Lord adds a new promise, saying "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered" (Ge 3:16). Here the word seed, the same as the one we looked at earlier and also singular, carries with it the context of the verse and represents a multitude that cannot be numbered. Hopefully you are asking yourself the same question I am. Why is this seed different from the previous verse? Herein lies the difficulty in understanding scripture; there is no one rule that fits all situations. As we look at the rest of the Pentateuch we will begin to see a pattern develop which will show some promises are made to "thy seed" which have a singular context and are without condition. These are most likely promises, as Paul says in Galatians 3:16, to Christ. We will then see other promises are made to "thy seed" which have an inherently non-singular context and may be with or without condition. These we will have to try to determine from the context about whom they are speaking. However, a good rule of thumb is that if the promise has no conditions attached it is for Christ or Christ's heirs; and if there are conditions attached it is neither for Christ nor for Christ's heirs, and as such would be for the physical descendants of the person to whom the promise is made.

In Genesis 13:16 we see the promise is made about a multitude that cannot be numbered, the dust of the earth, and there is no condition imposed by the Lord. I would then have to conclude that, since there is no condition, this multitude, and therefore this reference to the seed, must in some significant way be associated with Christ, as Paul says "if ye be Christ's,



then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Ga 3:29). And so this multitude that cannot be numbered would have to be believers; those who are Christ's heirs.

The Lord will use different pictures for the multitude to describe the same group of people as mentioned above. He uses the number of stars in heaven (Ge 15:5, 22:17, 26:4), the sand of the seashore (Ge 22:17), and the dust of the earth (Ge 13:16, 28:14). Some want to say this is the physical descendants of Abraham, and not Christ's heirs. They will also say that this multitude has not been manifested yet. However, as with the land, the Lord makes sure that no one can misunderstand that the promise of the multitude made to Abraham, and then confirmed to Isaac and to Jacob, with regard to their physical descendants, was fulfilled during the time of Moses. And so we have Moses' own words, who says "The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude" (Dt 1:10). Moses also says "Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude" (Dt 10:22). Isaiah says "For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return" (Is 10:22). Further proof that the multitude, here in Genesis 13:16 and its context, is the seed of Abraham by faith comes from the author of Hebrews, who says "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable. These all died in faith ..." (He 11:12-13).

At this point I have to ask, what is this land that belongs to Christ and will be inherited by Abraham's seed? Is it a physical land; or a spiritual land; or a symbolic land? From the preceding verses it certainly seems to be a very special land. Could this be a veiled reference to the new earth mentioned in Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21:1? Possibly? I would say yes; we are looking at the first veiled reference to the new earth that will replace the old at "the times of restitution of all things" (Ac 3:21). It is a better country, that is heavenly and desired by all believers (He 11:16). And so this promised land is representative of our new home, our new earth to replace the old, and the promised multitude are all those who would dwell there with our Lord Jesus Christ for all eternity.

Melchizedek

One of the more perplexing questions in scripture is "Who is Melchizedek?" We know that he was the king of Salem and the priest of the most high God (Ge 14:18); and we know that he blessed Abram (Ge 14:19) and that Abram gave him tithes of all (Ge 14:20).

As we look at other verses that talk about Melchizedek we see that the Messiah, Christ, is compared to him. Christ is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4). This



is an unusual reference, where the Son of God's priestly office is after the similitude of Melchizedek (He 7:15-17); that is, Christ's role as our high priest is after the likeness of, or similar to, Melchizedek. We know that a priest is chosen of God to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins (He 5:1). We also know that Christ offered up prayers and supplications (He 5:7), He learned obedience through suffering (He 5:8), and being made perfect He became the author of eternal salvation unto all those that obey Him (He 5:9); and therefore, He is called of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (He 5:6, 10).

It is not until we get to Hebrews 6:20 that we begin to see a glimmer of the true reason for bringing up Melchizedek in Genesis 14. Melchizedek, as priest, was forerunner of Christ in His priestly office. He was one who could bless faithful Abram. Likewise, Jesus, as the true high priest is the one who can bless us by offering gifts and sacrifices to the Father for us, and more importantly for our sins.

Hebrews 7 elaborates, saying Melchizedek was king of Salem, priest of the most high God, and blessed Abraham (He 7:1); Abraham gave him a tenth part of all because he was King of righteousness and King of peace (He 7:2); and he was without father, without mother, without descent, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, and who abides a priest continually (He 7:3). This passage describes him as a great man (He 7:4), unlike any other person in the Old or New Testaments. Some would say that he was eternal, others that the author of Hebrews is stressing the fact that we just do not know anything about Him, except the little mentioned in the Old and New Testament. It is this passage, however, that causes some to argue that Melchizedek is Christ; but then how can he be Christ and also have scripture say that Christ is after the similitude of him in Hebrews 7:15. Consequently, we have to conclude that there is more unknown than known about Melchizedek, his relation to Christ, and his place in God's eternal order of things; and yet we do know that his purpose is to point to the eternal priesthood of Christ, our intercessor, of whom the Lord swore that He is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4), and that He was made a surety of a better testament (He 7:22). All else remains a mystery.

Abram's Heir of Promise

Again the Lord speaks to Abram in a vision saying "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward" (Ge 15:1). The context of the statement is set up in the preceding passage, Genesis 14:21-24, and so we see here the Lord reminding him that He is the only reward Abram needs, especially since He is the one in whom Abram puts his trust to be his shield, his protector, and the rewarder of his faith.



Abram's response to the Lord reminds me of my typical Jewish whine. (I can say this, right, even if it's not politically correct, since I am Jewish.) "Oh poor me!" Abram says what can You give me Lord, seeing as how You have not given me the seed You promised (Ge 15:2-3). I editorialized a little, but the meaning is the same. We know God's timing is perfect, and that what He says, He will do (Is 14:24, 46:11), but Abram just does not want to wait for The Lord's timing; and then the Lord tells him that Eliezer will not be his heir, but one that will come forth from his own body (Ge 15:4), which we know will be Isaac. Then the Lord reminds Abram that his seed will be innumerable as the stars of heaven (Ge 15:5).

How can we know here if this seed is Christ, Abram's heirs of the promise, believers, or Abram's heirs of the flesh, Israel? I think we can tell from the local context that this seed is a multitude (Ge 15:5) and that they are heirs of his body (Ge 15:4). Therefore, the Lord is talking about those in the nation Israel, the people from whom the Christ will come. In case you have not realized this yet, everything in scripture is about Christ, and points to Christ in one way or another.

Scripture says "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Ge 15:6). Abram believed what the Lord told him; he had faith in the Lord and faith in what the Lord said He would do, without any doubt in his mind. We know Abram has many doubts from time to time in what the Lord said to him, especially later when he fathered Ishmael, choosing to help out the Lord and not to wait for Him to fulfill His promise in Isaac. We all have doubts from time to time, just like Abram did, and just as Elijah and others did. But at this specific time (Ge 15:6) Abram had no doubts, he believed the Lord completely; and his faith saved him. Paul tells us that Abraham was not justified by works but by believing on Him that justifies the ungodly; he had faith and it was counted for righteousness (Ro 4:1-5). Faith was imputed to him for righteousness (Ro 4:9, 22). Moreover, Paul says that even as Abraham believed and it was counted for righteousness, so too those who believe as he did are the children of Abraham (Ga 3:6-7); and that God preached the gospel to Abraham, saying "In thee shall all nations be blessed," and that God would justify the heathen through faith (Ga 3:8). Abraham was justified by faith before circumcision and before the law, just as we are, apart from circumcision and apart from the law; both the circumcision (Ga 5:6, 6:15) and the law (Ro 8:3-4, Ga 3:21, He 10:1ff) are of no value when it comes to salvation. (Also see Ro 3:21-22, 4:18-25.)

The gospel, the same one preached to Abraham, says that one man, Christ, would pay the penalty for our sin against God's commands so that we would be justified by faith in Him who paid the price and rose from the dead. (See He 2:9-11, 5:7-9, 7:25-27, 9:22-28, 10:5-18, and Ro 10:9-13.)



The Covenant of the Land

The Lord says to Abram “I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it” (Ge 15:7); and Abram’s response was “whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?” (Ge 15:8). The Lord promises Abram the land, and Abram asks Him how will he know. Is doubt creeping in? A strange question to ask the Lord, unless he already had a glimpse of His plan, that the land would be given to his seed long after he himself is out of the picture. The Lord directs him to prepare an offering of a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtle dove, and a pigeon (Ge 15:9-10); and after the offering is ready, a deep sleep fell over Abram (Ge 15:12), and the Lord tells him when and how his seed will inherit the land. The Lord tells him that his descendants will be in captivity for four hundred years, He will judge that nation, Egypt, whom they shall serve, and they will come out with great substance (Ge 15:13-14); He also says that Abram will die at a good old age, which we know to be 175 (Ge 25:7), and the wait in captivity will be because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full, or complete (Ge 15:15-16). Then the Lord Himself passed through the halves of the offering, which was common practice then for those making a covenant to seal it by passing through the two halves, and then He consumed them with fire, thus making the covenant promise by Himself (Ge 15:17); and then the Lord reaffirms the covenant promise with Abram saying “Unto thy seed have I given this land, ...” (Ge 15:18).

Who is “thy seed” in this passage? They have to be the physical descendants of Abram from the context. The Lord sets the timing of the possession of the land after Israel comes out of Egyptian captivity (Ge 15:13-16), some fifteen hundred years before Christ and His seed, believers. The Lord also sets the where, saying “from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates” (Ge 15:18); a physical location in the Middle East.

Ishmael

The Lord tells Hagar, before Ishmael’s birth, that he will be a wild man, his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand will be against him, and he will dwell in the presence of all his brothers (Ge 16:12). This seems to be as true today as it was in Old Testament times. The Lord also promised Hagar that He would multiply his seed exceedingly, that it shall be numbered for multitude (Ge 16:10, 17:20); and twelve princes will he beget, and the Lord will make him a great nation (Ge 17:20). However, the Lord also says that He will establish His covenant with Isaac (Ge 17:21), not with Ishmael.

The only promises the Lord gives to Ishmael are the promise of a multitude, the promise of twelve princes, and the promise of a great nation. The Lord made these promises to Ishmael because he is Abraham’s seed (Ge 21:13). All other promises were only for Isaac; “In Isaac



shall thy seed be called” (Ge 21:12, Ro 9:7, and He 11:18); and “the children of the promise are counted for the seed” (Ro 9:8); and again “He who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise” (Ga 4:23).

The Covenant of Circumcision

When Abram was ninety-nine the Lord appeared to him and said “I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly” (Ge 17:1-2). This covenant with Abram included these elements: Abram will be a father of many nations (Ge 17:4); his name was changed to Abraham (Ge 17:5); God will make him exceeding fruitful, He will make nations of him, and kings will come out of him (Ge 17:6); God will establish His covenant with Abraham and his seed after him in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to Abraham and his seed (Ge 17:7); and God will give Abraham and his seed after him the land wherein he is a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and He will be their God (Ge 17:8). God said to Abraham “Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations” (Ge 17:9); and God said “And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you” (Ge 17:11); and again “and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant” (Ge 17:13). Then God said “But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year” (Ge 17:21).

Who is this covenant with? Is this covenant conditional or unconditional? And what is the covenant? The first question is easy, God makes this covenant with Abraham and his seed after him in their generations (Ge 17:7) and through Isaac (Ge 17:21), not Ishmael. Therefore, they are the physical descendants of Abraham, through Isaac.

This covenant is conditioned upon the obedience of circumcision; and therefore all the benefits of the covenant are everlasting promises to those of the circumcision as long as they were obedient. But who is the circumcision? The benefactors of this covenant of circumcision must be the physical seed of Abraham and Sarah through Isaac. There can be no other answer. God Himself tells us “my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant” (Ge 17:13). This is a covenant of works, obedience, in the flesh; and consequently, since we know the rest of history, ends with the incarnation of the Messiah, Christ Jesus.

God instituted the circumcision of the flesh of the foreskin as a token, an outward sign, of this covenant. This token, while important here, was also representative, or symbolic, of something much more significant; and God does not wait too long to begin to reveal the



deeper significance. Moses told the Israelites that they were to love the Lord, keep His commandments, and therefore circumcise the foreskin of their hearts (Dt 10:12-13, 16); and when they return to the Lord and obey Him then the Lord will have compassion on them, return to them, gather them, and circumcise their heart, and the heart of their seed, to love the Lord (Dt 30:1-6).

The prophet Jeremiah says to Judah to return to the Lord, to put away their abominations, to acknowledge that the Lord lives, to break up their fallow, untilled, ground, and to circumcise themselves to the Lord and take away the foreskin of their heart (Jer 4:1-4). This picture we have of the foreskin of the heart represents that which surrounds the heart, encloses it, and keeps us from loving the Lord God before He removes it during the salvation process.

Paul says in Romans that circumcision profits only if one keeps the law, and that a true Jew, which is one inwardly, is one who is circumcised in the heart, in the Spirit (Ro 2:25-29). Paul also says that circumcision is a seal of the righteousness of the faith which Abraham had before he was circumcised (Ro 4:11); and that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which works by love (Ga 5:6), and by being a new creature, born again (Ga 5:15).

Now we have only to answer the third question I asked earlier: what is the covenant? Many things are mentioned in this passage: the Lord will change Abram's name to Abraham, multiply him exceedingly, make him a father of many nations, with kings coming from his lineage, and give him and his seed after him the land. The Lord calls it an everlasting covenant (Ge 17:7, 13), and gives the land as an everlasting possession (Ge 17:8). So what is the covenant? The Lord says "I will establish my covenant . . . an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Ge 17:7). It is an everlasting covenant for the Lord to be a God to Abraham and to his seed. The Lord also says it is everlasting, meaning lasting or enduring through all time, eternal. A covenant that will last as long as the Lord lives; and He will never break the covenant. But this does not mean that we cannot break the covenant; we can, and do, when we turn away from God, and follow after other gods, including our own ideas of what God should be like, and do, and not do. Circumcision is a token of this covenant in the flesh of our heart; a token of being one who has the Lord for our God; an outward expression of the inward change of salvation.

Abraham's Test of Faith

God tested Abraham (Ge 22:1) when He said "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt



offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (Ge 22:2). So Abraham rose up early in the morning, took two young men, Isaac, and the wood for the burnt offering, and went to the place which God had told him (Ge 22:3). When they could see the place he told the two young men to wait there and said to them “I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you” (Ge 22:5). Isaac knew something important was left unsaid, because he asked his father “Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (Ge 22:7); and then Abraham tips his hand, showing that by faith he already knew the outcome by answering “God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (Ge 22:8). When they came to the place which God told him of, Abraham built an altar, laid the wood in order, bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the alter on the wood (Ge 22:9). Then, just as Abraham raised his hand to slay his son Isaac (Ge 22:10), the angel of the Lord stopped him saying “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me” (Ge 22:12). God Himself provided a ram for the burnt offering instead of Isaac (Ge 22:13).

It never ceases to amaze me at the depth of Abraham’s faith, knowing that God would provide His own sacrifice, and that, if necessary, “was able to raise him up, even from the dead” (He 11:19). Even Isaac had a depth of faith that was shown when he allowed his father to tie him up and place him on the alter. How many of us taught our children of God’s faithfulness so that they would allow us to do to them what Isaac allowed Abraham to do? I am sure that by this time in the boy’s life he learned faith in God from his father’s many examples, and so this would just be another of those examples. Abraham never doubted God, he just picked himself up, gathered what he needed, and proceeded to do exactly what God asked. I pray always for such great faith.

God tested Abraham, just as Moses said later “to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart” (Dt 8:2); and Abraham passed the test. So the angel of the Lord said to him “By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Ge 22:15-18).

Notice how the angel of the Lord is the one speaking to Abraham; first in verses 22:11-12 and again in verses 22:15-18. Is this the pre-incarnate Christ or just an angel of the Lord speaking? We have our answer in verse 12 where the angel of the Lord says “for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” Therefore, this has to be the pre-incarnate Christ, since the angel of the Lord is talking about Himself. We also know that the angel of the Lord in verse 15 is the same as in verse 12, since it says He “called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time.” Now notice



how, in the second passage, the angel of the Lord swears by Himself; again reinforcing our conclusion that this is the pre-incarnate Christ speaking with Abraham. Moreover, the Lord restates His unconditional promise of the Messiah, in whom all nations of the earth will be blessed. And so, in this account God shows us that He will provide His own sacrifice for those who obey His voice, thereby redeeming us from death, eternal death, just as He did Isaac.

The Covenant Passes to Isaac

The Lord appeared to Isaac, as He did earlier to Abraham his father, at a time of famine in the land (Ge 26:1) and told him not to go down into Egypt, but to dwell in the land He will tell him of (Ge 26:2); Isaac is to sojourn in this land, and the Lord will be with him, and will bless him, and He said “for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father” (Ge 26:3). The Lord continues “And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Ge 26:4); and the Lord continues saying “Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Ge 26:5).

Here we have the Lord passing on to Isaac the three key promises He made to Abraham his father: the land, the multitude, and the Messiah. While the English word chosen, countries, is different than the one in Genesis 12:7, the Hebrew word is the same, but here plural; “these lands” (Ge 26:3, 4) versus “this land” (Ge 12:7). The Lord told Abraham to go to a land that He will show him (Ge 12:1), and He told Isaac to dwell in the land He will tell him of (Ge 26:2). How do we know if they are the same or different? Is there any difference in the singular “land” versus the plural “lands”? I think not. The same promise is being made to Isaac as was to Abraham; as we discussed before, the land, whether singular or plural, belongs to Christ, and its use is given to Isaac and to his descendants. The language for the multitude, “as the stars of heaven”, is the same to Isaac (Ge 26:3) as it was to Abraham (Ge 22:17); the language for the Messiah, “in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”, is also the same to Isaac (Ge 26:4) as it was to Abraham (Ge 22:18); and God’s reason is also identical, because Abraham obeyed His voice (Ge 22:18, 26:5).

The Covenant Passes to Jacob

When Jacob was fleeing from Esau, on his way to his mother’s brother’s house, he met God in a dream (Ge 28:12); He said “I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed” (Ge 28:13); and



He said “thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth” (Ge 28:14); and again “in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Ge 28:14). The Lord also said He would be with Jacob and keep him wherever he goes, and bring him back again into this land, and He will not leave him until He has done all He has spoken of to him (Ge 28:15).

I think Jacob’s reaction is interesting; first he acknowledges that the Lord is surely in this place, unknown to him (Ge 28:16); and then he vows to make the Lord his God (Ge 28:21) if the Lord does what He said He would do (Ge 28:20-21). Even though we know that we love Him because He first loved us (1Jn 4:19), Jacob’s reaction seems backwards to me; he wants to test God to see if He will keep His promises, when in fact it was the Lord who was testing Jacob to see if he would believe, as did Abraham and Isaac. It’s no wonder that the Lord left him at his uncle’s house for so long; Jacob had a lot to learn about the Lord.

After many years, Jacob left Leban’s house to return to Canaan, and as he is preparing himself to meet his brother Esau, he spends the night wrestling with God (Ge 32:24-30). Jacob would not give up, even though his leg was put out of joint, until he was blessed by God. At that time Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, “for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Ge 32:28).

When Jacob returns to the first place he met the Lord, at Beth-el, He appears to him again, and blesses him (Ge 35:9); the Lord confirms his name change to Israel (Ge 35:10); and the Lord confirms again His promises of the multitude and the land (Ge 35:11-12).

We now have full confirmation that the Lord passed on to Israel the same promises He made to Abraham and confirmed to Isaac. All three key elements were passed on: the land, the multitude, and the Messiah (Ge 28:13-14, 35:10-12).

The Covenant Passes to Judah

Just before Jacob was about to die he tells Joseph “God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the lands of your fathers” (Ge 48:21); and then Jacob gathers all his sons together so he can tell them what will befall them in the last days (Ge 49:1). Jacob proceeds to bless each one, counting Joseph’s two sons as his own (Ge 49:5-6); Joseph being the first born of Jacob’s true love, Rachael, and therefore by tradition of the first born was the one to receive the double portion.

Jacob blesses Judah saying “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Ge 49:10). This verse is the key promise of the Messiah to come from the line of Judah; the one



who will fulfill the law and the prophets (Mt 5:17). Jacob's blessing says that the scepter shall not depart from Judah. The scepter is the rod, or staff, held by a king, and therefore a symbol of the king, the ruler, the one who has dominion (Da 7:14), power (Mt 28:18), and authority (Mt 7:29, Jn 5:26-27). There will always be a ruler from the line of Judah until the Messiah comes; and we know from history, even during the various captivities, Babylonian, Roman, etc., one from the line of Judah was governor and ruler of the Jews, albeit answering to their captors.

Jacob's blessing also says there will be a lawgiver from between Judah's feet. The lawgiver is also a symbol of the king, the one who is the scepter bearer, or ruler, or governor, judging His people according to their works.

All references in scripture to Shiloh, except this one, refer to a place; however, this reference, based on the language, the context, and what we know of history, refers to a person, the Messiah, the promised seed of the woman (Ge 3:15, Ga 4:4), the promised one in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed (Ge 12:3, Ac 3:18-25). So, why is this Shiloh different? From the context, this Shiloh holds the scepter and is the lawgiver, and the one to whom the people will gather; the one person, not place, who can fulfill all these references is the Messiah, the Christ. Let's take a look at some of the supporting scripture in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Son born to us will be ruler of God's government (Is 9:6); there shall come forth a rod, a scepter bearer, out of the stem of Jesse (Is 11:1-5); all the Gentiles will seek Him, His rest will be glorious, and He shall gather His elect from the four corners of the earth (Is 11:10-13); He will bring judgment to the Gentiles (Is 42:1-4, Mt 12:18-21); He will raise up the tribes of Jacob, restore the preserved of Israel, be a light to the Gentiles, and salvation to the ends of the earth (Is 49:6-7); He will be a witness to the people, a leader of the people, people who do not know Him will call on His name, and nations that do not know Him will run to Him (Is 55:4-5); He is the glory of the Lord, and the Gentiles will come to His light (Is 60:1-5); and He brings salvation, redeeming His people (Is 62:11). He is the sword of the Lord, judging Jerusalem (Eze 21:1-7). He is Messiah the prince, bringing in everlasting righteousness (Da 9:25). He is the desire of all nations who will come, and God will fill His house with glory (Hag 2:7). The Lord will come and dwell in the midst of Zion, many nations will be joined to the Lord in that day (Zec 2:10-11); and many will come to seek the Lord in Jerusalem, and will take hold of the sleeve of Him that is a Jew, hearing that God is with Him (Zec 8:20-23).

He will save His people from their sins (Mt 1:21); He is the Son of God (Mt 3:17, 17:5, Lk 1:35, 32-33); and He is king of the Jews (Mt 27:11, Jn 18:33-37, 19:12-15). The Lord will give Him the throne of His father David, He will reign forever, and His kingdom will not



end (Lk 1:31-33). He will draw all men to Himself (Jn 12:32). We must all appear before His judgment seat (2Co 5:10).

There is still one more question that must be answered before we leave Genesis. Why did Jacob's blessing only pass on the promise of the Messiah, and not the promises of the land and the multitude? I have no doubt that these blessings to each son came from God, through Jacob. We have previously discussed that all three promises made by the Lord to Abraham were passed on to Isaac and then to Jacob; but Jacob only passes on the promise of the Messiah to Judah. This supports my earlier statements that the earthly land use was fulfilled for all the tribes in Joshua 21:43, and that the earthly multitude was fulfilled for all the tribes in Deuteronomy 1:10 and 10:22. Any other non-earthly meaning of those two promises were to the Messiah; and therefore only the promise of the Messiah, Christ, was passed on to Judah. If you will permit me to over simplify for a moment, all the law and the prophets are fulfilled in Christ (Mt 5:17), and so the key message of the Old Testament is the promise of the coming of the Messiah; all else is background information or history. We see this in the Jewish bible, the Tanakh, which consists of three sections: the Torah, or the Law; the Nevi'im, or the Prophets; and the Kethuvim, or the Writings, that is, their history.

Conclusion

There is a lot in the book of Genesis that I could have also included; two such areas are Noah and his ark and Joseph in Egypt. Both are clear examples of how God orchestrates events so that He can provide us with glimpses into His plan of redemption. In Noah's case the Lord redeemed eight people from a flood that would destroy the whole rest of the human race; and in Joseph's case the Lord redeemed a small group of seventy souls from a famine that would devastate the region of Canaan.

My focus herein has been on one simple fact. Only three key promises were made by God in the book of Genesis: the land, the multitude, and the seed, which is the Messiah. As we discussed earlier, the land was given to Israel conditioned upon obedience, and it was given to Christ, unconditionally. The Lord then says in Joshua 21:43 that He gave Israel all the land He promised to their fathers. Consequently they had use of the land as long as they remained obedient to the Lord, and were thrown out when they were not. We saw this when the Lord removed Israel, the northern kingdom, at the hand of Assyria in 722 B.C., and when He removed Judah, the southern kingdom, at the hand of Babylon during the period of 605 to 586 B.C.; and we saw the final removal of Israel as God's nation by Rome in 70 A.D. for the ultimate disobedience, the rejection of His Son.



The multitude promised by the Lord to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the physical descendants, which He said would be greater than the dust of the earth, the number of stars in heaven, and the sand of the seashore. Scripture says specifically that the Lord fulfilled this promise in Deuteronomy 1:10, 10:22, and Hebrews 11:12-13.

By the time we get to the end of Joshua's life, at about 1365 B.C., the promise of both the land and the multitude have been fulfilled by the Lord; and the only promise remaining to be fulfilled is the one of the seed, which is the Messiah. Genesis opens up with the promise of the Messiah, the seed of the woman, in verse 3:15; and Genesis closes with the promise of the Messiah, the lawgiver, Shiloh, in verse 49:10. Genesis is a book of promise, and of hope, when the foundation of God's eternal plan of redemption was laid upon the hearts and minds of a small band of people, Israel, who were to be witness to His existence, and to His nature, and of His promise of the one who would come, the one in whom all families of the earth would be blessed; that is, Jesus Christ, the Messiah.