



Lesson 12

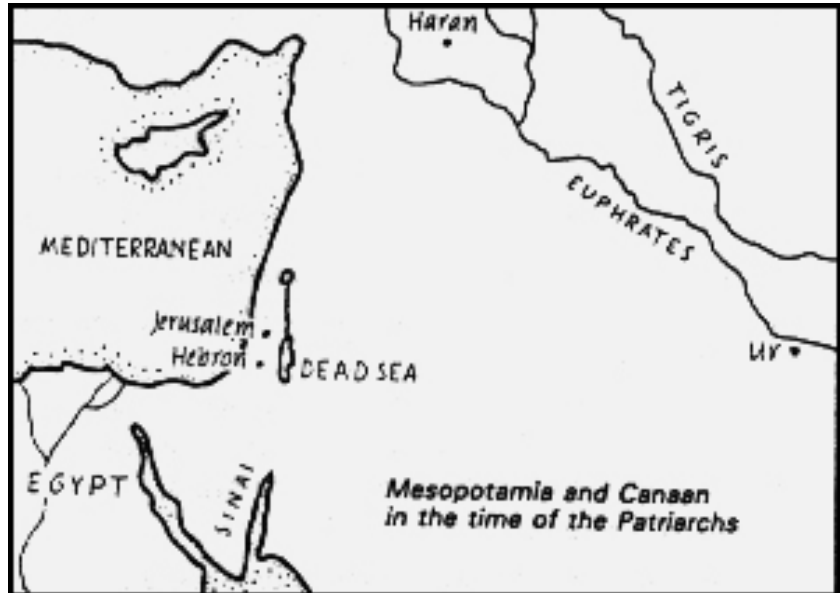
GOD'S PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

Reading Genesis 13

About 2000 years before Jesus was born, there lived a man named Abram, who is spoken of in the Bible as the friend of God (Isaiah 41:8). He lived in the town of Ur, which was in the land we now call Iraq, about 800 miles to the east of the land of Israel.

The people of Ur knew nothing of the true God. They worshipped many false gods, chief of which was the moon.

The ruins of a temple built to the moon-god have been found there.



A message from God

One day Abram received a message from Almighty God. We can read this message in Genesis 12:1:

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from my father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee."

He was told to leave his own land, and his own people, and travel to a country that God would show him. I wonder how we should feel if we received such a message? [And of course travelling was far more difficult and far more dangerous in those days.]

When He told Abram to do this, God also told him:

"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (verses 2, 3).

Abram believed the promises that God had made, and he obeyed Him. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Abraham "went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8).

At length he reached the land of Israel with his wife, Sarah, and his nephew, Lot. Now read Genesis 13 again. You will see how Lot chose the best of the land and Abram was left to find pastures for his flocks and herds in the more barren parts of the country. But God was with Abram, and enlarged upon the promises He had made to him in Ur:

"All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth" (Genesis 13:15-16).

A wonderful promise

Did you notice that this time God promised Abram, later called Abraham, the land for ever? To possess the land for ever, Abraham would have to live for ever, so God was really promising him everlasting life. The land he was promised was the land he saw - the land we now call Israel.

Besides this, God promised it to Abraham's seed, or son. At that time Abraham and Sarah had no children. God promised him a 'seed', or son, who should share the land with him. He also promised that Abraham's descendants should become a great nation.

God makes a covenant with Abraham

Turn to Genesis chapter 15, and here you will find that God again repeats and adds to His promises to Abraham.

Time had gone by and Abraham was getting old. The promised son had not been given. But once more God assured him that he should have a son, and that his descendants should be as great in number as the stars in the sky. In verse 6 we read:

"He (Abraham) believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness."

Abraham, like us, was not free from sin; but he trusted in God and, because of this, God was pleased with him. This time we are told that God made a covenant with Abraham - that is a very solemn promise that can never be altered. You will read how this covenant was made in Genesis 3 5:8-18.

In the time of Abraham, a covenant was made by slaying an animal. Then the dead animal was divided, and the two people who were making the covenant walked between the pieces. In this case, the glory of God passed between the pieces, so that Abraham would know that the covenant was sure.

The promised child

Abraham was 100 years old, and his wife 90, when at last God fulfilled one of His promises and gave them a son, whom they called Isaac. In Genesis 22 you will find a wonderful example of Abraham's trust in God. Read the first 14 verses. God told Abraham to offer up his only son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. And yet God had promised that through Isaac Abraham's descendants should become a great nation.

What did Abraham do? He knew that God would keep His promises, and so the writer tells us in Hebrews 11:17-19:

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises (Abraham) offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'That in Isaac shall thy seed be called': accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

Abraham was prepared even to offer up his beloved son, knowing that God would restore him to life. No wonder God was pleased with his trust and obedience. Read in Genesis 22:15-18 the promises which God again made to him.

A greater seed than Isaac

These things happened nearly 4,000 years ago, and at first they do not seem to matter very much to us.

But Abraham had a son who was greater than Isaac. The first verse of the New Testament (Matthew 1:1) speaks of:

"Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Jesus, too, was the promised son of Abraham. Paul tells us this in Galatians 3:16:

"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."

So the promises made to Abraham - that he would live for ever in the land of Israel and be a blessing to all nations, were also promises made to the Lord Jesus Christ.

When he comes again to rule from Jerusalem, we shall see these promises fulfilled.

We, too, may share the promises

If we believe in Jesus, and do what he asks us, we too may share these promises. For if we belong to Christ, we too are Abraham's seed. We read in the last verse of Galatians 3:

"And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Then we, too, may share the promises. We may have eternal life, and help Jesus Christ in the great work of bringing happiness to the earth. We can become "Abraham's seed" (children) by believing and being baptized into Jesus Christ. This is exactly what Paul says in Galatians 3:27-29:

"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."

You will remember that one of the promises was,

"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). This promise will be fulfilled when Jesus returns to set up the Kingdom of God.

What of Abraham?

But, you may be thinking, "What of Abraham? He never received the promises, and he is dead". That is true. But God's promises cannot fail. When Jesus comes again, he will raise Abraham and Isaac from the dead - and many others besides - and they will live for ever upon this earth, enjoying those blessings which God promised them so long ago.

Notice that God did not promise Abraham a place in a Kingdom up in heaven, but he was promised the land he saw and lived in.

Summary

1. Abraham was called by God to leave Ur and go to an unknown country.
2. This country was the land of Israel, and God promised that Abraham should possess it for ever.
3. He also promised that Abraham should have a son; that his descendants should become a great nation, and that his son would be a blessing to all nations.
4. Abraham had a son, Isaac, born miraculously when his parents were very old. Jesus Christ is also a son, or descendant, of Abraham (and he, too, was born miraculously - of a virgin).
5. If we belong to Christ (through belief and baptism), we are counted as children of Abraham, and may share the promises made to him.
6. These promises will be fulfilled when Jesus comes back, and sets up the Kingdom of God

A suggestion

All this about the seed of Abraham is somewhat difficult to understand the first time. But it is very important. Why not read this section through once again - now!

Chart of God's Promises to Abraham		
Gen. 12:2	Abraham would be a great nation	Abraham was the first Jew
Gen. 12:2	God would bless him	Through Abraham's descendant Jesus, we can be blessed with salvation and a place in God's Kingdom on earth
Gen. 12:3	In Abraham all nations of the earth would be blessed	
Gen. 12:7, 13:15	The land Abraham lived in would be given to Abraham and his descendants for ever.	This was the land of ISRAEL
Gen. 13:16	Abraham's descendants would be like the dust in number	Despite attempts to destroy them, the Jews still exist in great numbers today
See also Genesis 15:18, 17:6-8, 22:16-18		

Chapters to read

Hebrews 11 (notice particularly verses 39-40)

Learn by heart

Galatians 3:27-29