

Catching the Vision

The Vision Revealed to the Patriarchs; The promises given to Abraham and Israel.

In this series of newsletter studies we are pursuing an overall theme entitled Catching the Vision. The vision itself, revealed to us in the pages of God's Holy Word, the Bible, gives its readers a picture of what the creator of this world saw when he brought it into being and placed his creatures on the face of it.

He could have made it perfect but then we would not be reading this today as we would not exist. He made it less than perfect so that the people who read and study God's vision can have an opportunity to participate in this vision when it becomes a reality in the future and God's plan and purpose fills the whole earth. In studying this vision we have an opportunity to embrace it or "catch" it and make it our own vision and in doing so become part of the glorious things that are going to take place in the near future.

In the first study we looked at God himself, the designer and architect of the vision, and what the Bible says about his purpose and plan for the world and his people on it. He did not create it in vain but he created it so that one day his glory might be spread throughout the earth and all creatures, from the least to the greatest, will worship him and recognize that there is no other God.

In many ways mankind is currently destroying his environment. God will not allow this to

continue forever but rather he will, by sending his son a second time begin that process of restoration and usher in a period of peace and prosperity that has not been known before since the garden of Eden and Adam and Eve before the fall.

In the second study we looked at the subject of God's creation, mankind itself, and saw the marvelous potential that men and women have for being the creatures that God intended them to be. We also have seen the evil that can lie in the heart of man and the destruction that it has caused and can cause in the world today.

We have gotten a glimpse of how God, in his infinite mercy and grace, provided a means for his people to reconcile themselves with him and share fully in the vision when it becomes a reality in the future. But that is jumping ahead a bit and will be looked at in more detail in future studies of Catching the Vision.

In this section of our overall view of God's vision for planet earth and the people that inhabit it, we are going to look at the vision shared with the patriarchs. We have looked at specific promises God has made to his people in the first two sections of this study, but now we are going to look at some very sweeping and comprehensive promises that involve a man originally named Abram, but whose name was later changed to Abraham, and his heirs.

His immediate heirs were Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob whose name was later changed to Israel. We are going to see that these

promises or covenants made with Abraham extend not only to his immediate heirs but pertain to us today. They not only pertain to us today, but we can look to the nation of Israel and see it not only as a small and somewhat insignificant player in world affairs but rather as the beginning of a fulfillment of God's vision about to break forth on this earth.

We see numerous references to Abraham in the New Testament. They are not there just as reference points to ancient history but through these references we find Jesus, Peter, Paul, the writer to the Hebrews and others giving testimony to the pertinence of the lives of the patriarchs, not only to both the Jews and the gentiles in the first century but to us today who read these promises and see God's vision for the earth being fulfilled in our lifetime.

A brief study of Abraham and the patriarchs such as the one you are about to undertake in this issue will not only give you insights into the importance of the promises to Abraham that you may have never considered before, but it will help you understand better the connection between obedience and faith and how these both contribute to salvation. It will also give you further insight into Abraham's belief regarding the subject of resurrection and why a Biblical understanding of this is important.

So let's get our Bibles out and dig a little further into the subject of The Vision Revealed to the Patriarchs; The promises given to Abraham and Israel.

***"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
Meet Abraham - Father of the Faithful.***

From the very beginning God has had a purpose for his creation. As we read though the Bible, that plan and purpose becomes clearer and clearer. As each person is introduced, as the history unfolds, as God's promises and covenants are stated, we see God's plan and purpose revealed.

The first of God's promises is given to Adam and Eve in the Garden. When God pronounced the consequences of disobedience, he gave hope in the form of a promise: the seed of the woman would crush the seed of the snake--a child of Eve would conquer sin and temptation. Later, after the Flood destroyed all mankind except for Noah and his family who were saved alive, Noah was promised by God that there would never be another flood like it. The rainbow is God's signature to that promise.

In Genesis chapters 11 and 12 we meet Abram, later know as Abraham. God called him to leave his family and his country to go to a strange land--a promised land. At this time God made several promises to him:

Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who

bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Genesis 12:1-3 (NKJV)

Later, after Abraham believed and obeyed, God made additional promises to him:

And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are — northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, *then* your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you." Genesis 13:14-17 (NKJV)

Over the course of Abraham's life, God spoke to him several more times and each time expanded on the promises to him and to his descendants:

Genesis 15:4-7 Abraham's descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. Because Abraham believed God, it was counted to him as righteous.

Genesis 17:1-8 Abraham will be the father of many nations.

Kings will come from him. The promise was established as an everlasting covenant with Abraham and his children.

Genesis 22:15-18 Abraham and his children will be exceedingly blessed and fruitful. All nations will be blessed through Abraham's seed.

The promises or covenants that God made to Abraham and his children include:

- Abraham will become a great nation and his name will be great.
- Abraham will be a blessing. Those who bless Abraham will be blessed and those who curse Abraham will be cursed.
- Abraham and his children will receive the land that God showed him as an eternal inheritance.
- Abraham's seed would be as numerous as the dust of the land, the sand on the seashore, or the stars in the heavens.
- Abraham will be the father of many nations.
- Abraham and his children will possess the gate of their enemies.
- Through Abraham all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Through the Old Testament we
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***"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
Meet Abraham - Father of the Faithful. (Continued)***

(Continued from page 2)

learn the history of Abraham's children. Isaac his son received the same promises which were then passed to Jacob (Israel) and his 12 sons. The question, though is this, what do these promises mean to us thousands of years later? If the promises were given to Abraham and his children, why is it important that we know about them and believe them as Abraham believed them?

The answer to this question is very important and the Apostles' writings in the New Testament help us un-

derstand why. There are at least three reasons: 1) God gave these promises to Abraham and to all Abraham's children by faith. 2) These promises include the promise of resurrection and eternal life. 3) These promises are the Gospel that was announced to Abraham and now shared with all peoples. Always keep in mind what Paul writes to the believers in Christ in the letter to the Galatians:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek,

slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Gal 3:26-29 (NIV)

Paul is very clear--if you belong to Christ then you are an heir of the promises given to Abraham--through faith.

Saved by Faith

Abraham believed God's promises and acted on that belief. He left his family and homeland. He took his promised son up that mountain to offer him as a sacrifice. Because of this, his belief and trust in God was credited to him as righteousness. The promises that he received were eternal and not conditional. He had already believed and obeyed:

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6 (NIV)

This verse is so important that it is quoted at least three times in the New Testament:

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead — since he was about a hundred years old — and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he

did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness — for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Romans 4:18-25 (NIV)

Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. Galatians 3:6-7 (NIV)

You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered

righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, "and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. James 2:20-24 (NIV)

Abraham is father of the faithful. As his faith was counted as righteousness and he received eternal promises, so his children are those who through the same faith, believe and are justified before God. Remember the words of Jesus to those he healed: "Your faith has saved you." It has always been through faith that God works with his people and in his power saves his people. Abraham had that faith and those who have that faith are children of Abraham.

The Promise of Resurrection and Everlasting Life

God promised Abraham that the land he saw and walked on he would inherit forever:

He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit." Psalm 105:8-11 (NIV)

Stephen, in his defense before the Sanhedrin remarks in the book of Acts:

To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

"So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at

that time Abraham had no child. Acts 7:2-5 (NIV)

And the writer to the Hebrews tells us:

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God...

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth...

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Hebrews 11:8-10, 13, 39-40 (NIV)

Notice that Abraham never owned

the land that was promised to him--in this lifetime. But he believed that God would give it to him. He has yet to receive that land. No wonder Jesus remarked that Abraham was proof of the coming resurrection:

Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead — have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." Matthew 22:29-32 (NIV)

Amazingly Abraham not only believed that God would give him the promised land, he also understood and believed that he would be given eternal life in the land. He believed, that although he died, he would live again, forever. God gave him an eternal inheritance of the land and Abraham believed that promise. No wonder God called him his friend.

"But you, Israel, *are* My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham My friend." Isaiah 41:8 (NKJV)

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Through Abraham's offspring, all peoples on earth will be blessed - The Gospel Announced to Abraham

In Acts chapter 3, Peter was speaking to the crowd who had gathered to see the crippled man who had been healed, he quoted this promise that God made to Abraham:

"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." Acts 3:24-26 (NIV)

This promised blessing foretells the coming Messiah. It is through Jesus that this promise is fulfilled:

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham. Matt. 1:1

The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. Galatians 3:8-9 (NIV)

Those, then, who belong to Christ through faith and baptism, are heirs of the promises made to their father of faith, Abraham:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:26-29 (NIV)

God has a plan and purpose with his creation. As the Bible unfolds, God's plan is made known. Those who trust in God and believe the promises that God has given will be blessed with faithful Abraham.

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed... And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. Romans 8:19, 28-30 (NIV)

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Did you know? Some facts about Abraham—Friend of God

Three major religions trace their beginnings to Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Abraham is mentioned more than 48 times in 9 of the 27 books of the New Testament. In fact the very first verse of the New Testament mentions him: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matthew 1:1)

Abram is Abraham's original name. The name Abram means "exalted father" but Abraham means "father of many". God changed his name when he promised him that he would be a father of many nations.

No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. (Genesis 17:5-7)

Abraham's wife, Sarah's original name was Sarai. God changed her name when he promised that she would be the mother of many nations and that kings of peoples would come from her.

God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." (Genesis 17:15-16)

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| Day | APRIL | | MAY | | JUNE | |
|-----|--------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Old Test | New Test/Psa | Old Test | New Test/Psa | Old Test | New Test/Psa |
| 1 | Deut 13,14 | Mark 6 | Judges 3,4 | 1 Corinth 11 | Job 38,39 | Psalm 59 |
| 2 | Deut 15,16 | Psalm 33,34 | Judges 5,6 | 1 Corinth 12 | Job 40-42 | Luke 17 |
| 3 | Deut 17,18 | Mark 7 | Judges 7,8 | 1 Corinth 13 | I Sam 1. 2 | Luke 18 |
| 4 | Deut 19,20 | Mark 8 | Judges 9,10 | Psalm 48 | I Sam 3. 4 | Psalm 60. 61 |
| 5 | Deut 21,22 | Mark 9 | Judges 11,12 | I Corinth 14 | I Sam 5. 6 | Luke 19 |
| 6 | Deut 23,24 | Psalm 35 | Judges 13,14 | I Carinth 15 | I Sam 7. 8 | Luke 20 |
| 7 | Deut 25,26 | Mark 10 | Judges 15,16 | Psalm 49 | I Sam 9.10 | Luke 21 |
| 8 | Deut 27,28 | Mark 11 | Judges 17,18 | I Corinth 16 | I Sam 11. 12 | Psalm 62. 63 |
| 9 | Deut 29,30 | Psalm 36,37 | Judges 19,20 | Psalm 50 | I Sam 13. 14 | Luke 22 |
| 10 | Deut 31,32 | Psalm 38,39 | Judge 21 Ruth 1 | Psalm 51. 52 | I Sam 15. 16 | Luke 23 |
| 11 | Deut 33,34 | Mark 12 | Ruth 2-4 | Luke 1 | I Sam 17. 18 | Luke 24 |
| 12 | Provb 17,18 | Mark 13 | Provb 29,30 | Luke 2 | I Sam 19. 20 | Psalm 64. 65 |
| 13 | Provb 19,20 | Mark 14 | Provb 31 | Luke 3 | I Sam 21. 22 | Psalm 66. 67 |
| 14 | Provb 21,22 | Mark 15 | Job 1-3 | Psalm 53 | I Sam 23. 24 | II Corinth 1 |
| 15 | Joshua 1,2 | Mark 16 | Job 4,5 | Luke 4 | I Sam 25. 26 | II Corinth 2 |
| 16 | Joshua 3,4 | Psalm 40,41 | Job 6,7 | Luke 5 | I Sam 27. 28 | II Corinth 3 |
| 17 | Joshua 5,6 | 1 Corinth 1 | Job 8,9 | Luke 6 | i Sam 29-31 | Psalm 68 |
| 18 | Joshua 7. 8 | 1 Corinth 2 | Job 10,11 | Psalm 54,55 | Eccles 1. 2 | Psalm 69 |
| 19 | Joshua 9,10 | 1 Corinth 3 | Job 12,13 | Luke 7 | Eccles 3. 4 | II Corinth 4 |
| 20 | Joshua 11,12 | Psalm 42,43 | Job 14,15 | Luke 8 | Eccles 5. 6 | II Corinth 5 |
| 21 | Joshua 13,14 | 1 Corinth 4 | Job 16,17 | Psalm 56 | Eccles 7. 8 | II Corinth 6 |
| 22 | Joshua 15,16 | 1 Corinth 5 | Job 18,19 | Luke 9 | Eccles 9.10 | Psalm 70. 71 |
| 23 | Joshua 17,18 | Psalm 44 | Job 20,21 | Luke 10 | Eccles 11. 12 | II Corinth 7 |
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| 25 | Joshua 21,22 | 1 Corinth 7 | Job 24,25 | Psalm 57 | II Sam 3. 4 | II Corinth 9 |
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| 28 | Provb 25,26 | 1 Corinth 9 | Job 30,31 | Psalm 58 | II Sam 9. 10 | Psalm 73 |
| 29 | Provb 27,28 | 1 Corinth 10 | Job 32,33 | Luke 14 | II Sam 11.12 | II Corinth 11 |
| 30 | Judges 1,2 | Psalm 46. 47 | Job 34,35 | Luke 15 | II Sam 13.14 | II Corinth 12 |
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