

4. Promises to Abraham Fulfilled Hebrews 1, Galatians 3

Introduction: This is the second in a short series on the overview of the Bible. The idea is to help you understand what the Bible is all about and how it all fits together. We'll also explain how its various parts fit together. Today's lesson focuses on how God's covenant with Abraham applies to us today as we explore its New Testament fulfillments. Jesus and the new covenant are the direct fulfillments of the promises made to Abraham.

Review: The Bible is a record of various covenants made between God and man. Arguably, the most significant covenant in the Old Testament is the one between God and Abraham.

Review: What three things did God promise Abraham (Ge 12, 15, 18)?

PPT>>> The three things God promised Abraham were **land, seed and blessing**. It clearly is a central theme throughout Genesis and indeed, the whole of the Old Testament.

Review: How did God reveal to Abraham that the promises were unconditional and not based on anything Abraham did (or did not do)? When the confirming covenant was cut, God alone passed between the animal pieces.

Review: What was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham? It was circumcision.

a) Where was the literal, physical Promised Land? It was in the Middle East, modern Israel. Its ancient name was Canaan. The Romans called it Philistia (Palestine).

b) What was the seed promise literally all about? God promised Abraham that he would have many descendants: The Israelites or the Hebrews (or practically speaking, the Jews). Isaac was his firstborn child through Sarah. Isaac's son of promise was Jacob (alias Israel). Jacob had twelve sons (hence, the twelve tribes of Israel).

c) God promised a physical blessing to Abraham, including protection from his enemies and material prosperity. However, God also promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham. We'll study more about aspect of the promise today.

— The Promised Land —

1. God promised Abraham real estate in the Middle East (modern Israel, Genesis 12 & 15). What can we learn about this promise from Joshua 21:43-45, 1 Kings 4:21 and Nehemiah 9:7-8?

PPTS>>> Joshua 21:43-45, 1 Kings 4:21 and Nehemiah 9:7-8.

The boundaries originally given to Abraham appear to be greater than the land area the Hebrews eventually occupied. However, we must read the Bible not just literally but literarily (as literature). It is a basic principle of interpretation that we must let scripture interpret scripture. According to the above texts, the Hebrews did indeed obtain all the real estate that God intended for them to have.

We must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Some people claim that the Hebrews never actually possessed all the land God promised to Abraham. Therefore, to be true to His word, God must one day in the future grant a restored nation of Israel every acre of real estate promised in Genesis. To see if this is so, we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.

PPTS>>> We must also read the Bible not just literally, but literarily. **The land promise was literally fulfilled.** As we study the true extent of the fulfillments of promises made to Abraham (which were prophecies), we must remember to consider the differing types of Biblical literature (history, poetry, prophecy). We must read the Bible not merely **literally**, but also **literarily** (considering that prophecy is treated far different than history). Prophecies often contain hyperbole and sometimes double fulfillments

2. It is a fact that Abraham never built a house in the Promised Land. He lived in tents his whole life there. According to Hebrews 11:8-10, why did Abraham live like a stranger in the Promised Land? The New Testament reveals that there is metadata beyond what was recorded in Genesis. Abraham was looking for something far more significant than Middle Eastern real estate. He understood that the Promised Land was just a shadow, a type, a token of something much greater: *spiritual reality*. In fact, almost everything in the Old Testament is just a type of the reality that is in Christ and the new covenant.

3. What city has foundations with God as its designer and builder (Heb 11:10)? (*Hint: It is not earthly Jerusalem!*). See Revelation 3:12, 21:2. This is a supernatural city. Abraham was looking for the New Jerusalem.

PPT>>> ESV Revelation 21:1ff I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."

In one sense, the heavenly Jerusalem represents the bride of Christ, the church. This is the "city" whose foundations are laid by God. Its only citizens are those whose names are in the Lamb's book of life. This city is both now (the church) and not yet (heaven):

PPT>>> ESV Hebrews 13:14 ... here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

4. Why does Hebrews 11:13-16 conclude that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not get the things that were promised? See also 11:39. According to 11:13, they did *not* receive the things promised because they were looking for the ultimate fulfillments, which did not begin until Christ was born. They were seeking a *heavenly* country, not earthly real estate. Just as the earthly tabernacle was a copy of heavenly reality, so too the Promised Land, that Middle Eastern real estate, was only a type, only a shadow, only a picture of the true, the real, the actual *heavenly* country.

PPT>>> ESV Hebrews 11:39 ... all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised ...

5. According to Hebrews 11:16, what has God prepared for these people? Compare 11:10. God has prepared a city for them. This is the city with foundations that Abraham was looking for, 11:10.

PPTS>>> Sometimes heaven is compared to a **country** and sometimes to a **city**.

Abraham understood that the Promised Land was just a shadow, a type, of something much better to come: a heavenly country and a heavenly city!

Synthesis: According to Hebrews 11, Abraham lived as a stranger in the immediate promised land of Canaan because he was looking for something better, a “heavenly country”, a city whose builder is God (the New Jerusalem).

Thus, there was an immediate, physical fulfillment (Canaan, the *literal* fulfillment) and finally a long-term, ultimate fulfillment (a heavenly country, the *literary* fulfillment).

— The Promised Blessing —

6. Genesis 12:3, 22:18 & 26:4 predicted that all the families of the earth will be “blessed” through Abraham. According to Galatians 3:6-9, 13-14, how has this been fulfilled? See also Romans 4:1-8, Acts 3:24-26. The promised blessing is that of justification by faith, just as Abraham was justified by faith (Ge 15:6).

PPT>>> Romans 4:1-8 (note the use of the word blessing).

PPT>>> Acts 3:24-26 (note the use of the word blessing).

— The Promised Seed —

7. Letting Scripture interpret Scripture, what can we conclude about the promised seed (Ge 22:17) from 1 Kings 4:20?

PPT>>> ESV 1 Kings 4:20 Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy.

According to the Scriptures, the seed promise was fulfilled in that Abraham had a multitude of descendants.

8. According to Galatians 3:16, who is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to give Abraham "seed" (Ge 12:7)? The ultimate promised "seed" was the Lord Jesus, who according to the flesh was a direct descendant of Abraham.

The ultimate "Seed", through His death on the cross, made possible the ultimate "blessing" of justification by faith so that Abraham's descendants can live forever in the true promised land (heaven).

9. God's initial promise to Abraham was that he would have physical children.

According to Galatians 3:6-7, who else are Abraham's children? See also *Galatians 3:29 and Romans 4:11-12*. Any one from any ethnic group who has the faith of Abraham is a true child of Abraham.

ESV **Galatians 3:29** ... if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

PPTS>>> Thus, the immediate fulfillment of the promise to give Abraham descendants was Abraham's **physical offspring**, the Hebrew race. The ultimate physical fulfillment was that particular "seed" named **Christ (Seed Jesus)**, who was a direct physical descendant of Abraham. Through the salvation that "Seed Jesus" made possible, all who follow Abraham in faith (**true believers**) are Abraham's true offspring and are blessed with being justified through faith. The true children will live forever in the true Promised Land (a heavenly country).

10. What does Romans 4:11-12 imply about those Jews who do not have the faith of Abraham? See *John 8:39*.

PPTS>>> **Romans 4:11-12** (with phrase blacked out).

Romans 4:12 implies that Abraham is actually not the father of the circumcised (Jews) who do not believe.

PPT>>> **John 8:39** Unbelieving Jews are not Abraham's true descendants.

11. Based on Galatians 6:15-16, who is the true Israel of God? Neither being circumcised (being a Hebrew) nor being uncircumcised (being a Gentile) counts for anything with God. What does count is being made into a new creation in Christ. Old Testament Israel was not the church. Israel was only a type of the church. Abraham's true and promised descendants are those who have the same faith that Abraham did. Thus, the church, the new creation, is the true Israel of God.

System Overview

Covenant theology says that Old Testament Israel was the church and the church is the true Israel. They can't get Israel and the church apart.

Dispensational theology says Old Testament Israel was not the church and the church is not Israel. They can't get Israel together in any way.

New Covenant theology holds that Old Testament Israel was not the church, but the church is the true Israel.

So What?

12. What were the immediate and ultimate fulfillments of the promises God made to Abraham (land, seed, blessing)? The immediate fulfillment of the promise to give Abraham descendants was Abraham's physical offspring, the Hebrew race. The ultimate physical fulfillment was that particular "seed" named Jesus the Christ, who was a direct physical descendant of Abraham. Through the salvation that "Seed Jesus" made possible, all who follow Abraham in faith are Abraham's true offspring and are blessed with being justified through faith. The true children will live forever in the true Promised Land (a heavenly country).

PPTS>>> Each of the "big three" promises of the Abrahamic covenant (land, seed, blessing) had at least two fulfillments:

- an immediate and then an ultimate,
- the physical and then the metaphysical,
- the foreshadow and then the reality,
- the type and then the fulfillment of the type,
- a temporary and then an eternal,
- an outward and then an inward,
- the sign and then the substance to which the sign pointed,
- the interim and then the permanent.

PPTS>>> PIVOTAL ISSUE: What effect (if any) did the ultimate New Testament fulfillments of the promises to Abraham have on the intermediate Old Testament fulfillments? That is, once the final fulfillments came, how are we to view the initial fulfillments? (Rhetorical questions to be discussed next week).

***** = ask these questions before you have anyone read the verse.

Timing: Each lesson is designed for a 45-minute session.

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