

6. Abraham's Seed (2Q 2021—The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant)

Biblical Material: Ezek. 16:8; Deut. 28:1, 15; Jer. 11:8; Gen. 6:5; John 10:27, 28; Gal. 3:26–29; Rom. 4:16, 17; 1 Pet. 2:9.

Quotes

- A name is so important in biblical settings that Scripture frequently mentions God Himself changing someone's name to reflect a new reality. Abram, which means "exalted father," was changed to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude." *Tony Evans*
- The promise of an offspring or seed is the focal point of God's promise to Abraham just as it was in the promise that was made to Adam and Eve and that would be made years later to David. The promise of a righteous seed is the thread running through every covenant promise. *Michael P.V. Barrett*
- We have the promise of God's being our God, and of the blessing by Christ for ourselves, as we are Abraham's seed, yet take the whole promise collectively made to him and us. `

Questions

Why does salvation in the Old Testament seem so tied to being part of an ethnic group? How do we explain the truth about God from this Old Testament example about Abraham? Is God's identification of Abraham as "right" enough to make him "right"? How about us? In what way are we now descendants of Abraham, and what does that really mean?

Bible summary

Ezek. 16:8 likens the relationship to a marriage. Deut. 28:1, 15 lists promises and curse for obedience or lack thereof. Jer. 11:8 says they did experience the curses. Gen. 6:5 reminds us of the condition of humanity at the time of the Flood. "My sheep recognize my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life; they shall never be lost, and no one can snatch them from me." John 10:27, 28 FBV. "You are all God's children through your trust in Christ Jesus. All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There's no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female—you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's children, and you are heirs of the promise!" Gal. 3:26–29 FBV. Paul says we are all children of Abraham because we have the faith of Abraham (Rom. 4:16, 17). "You are a specially-chosen family, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God." 1 Pet. 2:9 FBV.

Comment

There's a text that's sadly lacking in our study today. John 8:31-41. "Then Jesus said to those Jews who trusted in him, "If you follow my teaching then you really are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

"We're descendants of Abraham! We've never been slaves to anyone," they answered. "How can you say that we'll be set free?"

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave doesn't have a permanent place in the family, but the son is part of the family forever. If the Son sets you free, then you're truly free. I know you're Abraham's descendants, yet you're trying to kill me because you refuse to accept my words. I'm telling you what the Father has revealed to me, while you do what your father told you."

“Abraham is our father,” they answered.

“If you really were children of Abraham, you’d do what Abraham did,” Jesus told them. “But you are trying to kill me now, because I told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham would never have done that. You’re doing what your father does.”

Jesus is making it clear that lineage is not the issue. Just because you’re descended from Abraham does not make you right with God, as Abraham was. Even the text Genesis 15:6 doesn’t say that God considered Abraham was right even though he was not. This is how the verse is translated in the FBV: “Abram trusted what the Lord said, and so the Lord counted Abram as being in a right relationship with him.”

The idea of simply stating that Abraham is “right” might suggest that either God doesn’t really see our sinful selves (as has been stated by some), or that God is not being truthful. Both these ideas are clearly problematic. However, when it is understood that any “rightness” comes as a result of Abraham’s trust, then things become much clearer. This is not to do with any “imputed” or “imparted” righteousness, terms that are much loved by some theologians. It simply means that God says Abraham is right because he trusts in God, not because of his spiritual performance. He is not saying that Abraham is sinless or perfect, but that because Abraham trusts God, then the relationship is right and will bring the eventual good result.

This is the argument that Paul makes in Galatians and Romans. It was because of Abraham’s trust in God that he is right—it has nothing to do with observing the Law. Certainly as a result of a right relationship with God you do identify with God as to what is true and right, and in God’s grace this is how you live (despite the missteps!) But this is not “magical” transfusion of “rightness” from God that in some mysterious way “makes you right” when you are not. Nor is God stating an untruth—for what would that say to the Universe in the great controversy? What the angels and the other created beings want to know is not whether sinful rebels have been “pronounced” righteous, but whether they have truly changed! God would never make such a misleading statement—declaring us right when we are clearly not. No, God is looking at the trusting attitude of Abraham, and saying, “I will reward your attitude of trust, and as I work with you to restore you and heal you, you will be transformed into someone who truly lives right.”

This example from the Old Testament shows us that God has not changed and that salvation is still dependent on trusting him. It is not enough, and never will be, to say “But I did what I was told!” God is not looking for performance, but friendship; not compliance, but love. We will do right because it is right, trusting in the God who is truth and right incarnate.

Ellen White comments

The Jewish people might have repented, if they would, but they were clothed with the garments of their own self-righteousness. They claimed to be the descendants of Abraham, and looked upon every promise made to Israel as theirs. But the Israel of God are those who are converted, not those who are the lineal descendants of Abraham. {UL 80.4}

Had the Israelites obeyed the instruction they received, and profited by their advantages, they would have been the world’s object lesson of health and prosperity. The Israelites failed of fulfilling God’s purpose, and thus failed of receiving the blessings that might have been theirs. CD 26.3}

The children of Israel fell under the power of the enemy by cherishing an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, and when once they were found on the enemy’s side, he pressed his advantage, and made them his allies to the utmost extent. {Signs of the Times, Apr. 25, 1895}