

LESSON 22 - BIBLE TEACHING ABOUT THE PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

"...The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. 4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child." (Acts 7:2-5)

The promises made by God to Abraham are, quite literally, the foundation of the Gospel message; yet at the same time they are probably the least understood and acknowledged by Christendom in general as a significant part of God's purpose.

In Lesson 21 (page 1) it was clear that the disciples of Christ, when sent forth to preach the GOSPEL, did so quite successfully without an understanding of the redemptive work of Christ. What did they teach?

Paul speaks of his ministry as being centered upon the HOPE OF ISRAEL -

"For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. (Acts 28:20)

- and the HOPE OF THE PROMISE MADE UNTO THE FATHERS -

"And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:" (Acts 26:6)

The promises to Abraham are to the purpose of God as the hub is to a wheel; it is the center and all else revolves around it and emanates from it. We cannot fully comprehend God's purpose unless and until we fully and fundamentally understand the promises to Abraham.

To obtain the full benefit of this lesson, a review of Lesson 6 is recommended before proceeding further.

ABRAHAM: WHO HE WAS, WHERE HE CAME FROM

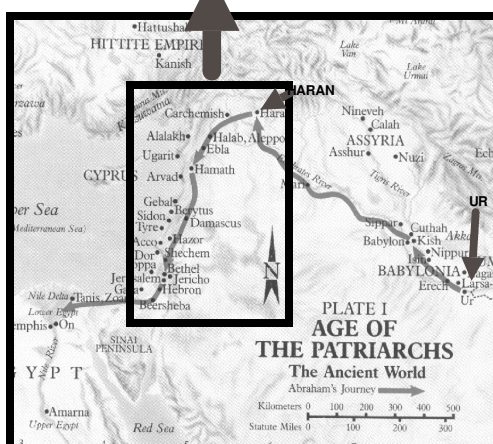
Who was Abraham? The Bible outlines a brief history of his life before his call by God; at this time he was known as "Abram" ...

"Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran." (Genesis 11:27-32)

We are told that he was an idolator when he lived in Ur of the Chaldees, before God appeared to him...

"And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD." (Joshua 24:2,14)

Refer to the map on the side-bar; it is interesting to trace the journey of Abram. Note the distance travelled - a considerable journey judged even according to the current standards of modern travel! They were on foot or camel, and leaving a place of familiarity, comfort and beauty to go to "uncharted" territory - not knowing what was in store for them! Paul comments on this in Hebrews...



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"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;" (Hebrews 11:8-9) - NKJ

DETAILS OF THE PROMISE (refer to map)

God did not reveal to Abram the entirety of the promise all at once. It was given over a long period of time, and in a variety of places and circumstances of Abram's life. Each further revelation expanded upon the previous one, until ultimately the entire purpose of God through Abram and his seed was clear.

1) AT UR AND HARAN

This was the first recorded communication by God to Abram - occurring first in the land of Ur (Acts 7:2-4), then at Haran (Genesis 12:4)...

"Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 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." (Genesis 12:1-3)

This initial communication contained the following promises:

- i) that Abram would become a great nation and a great name;
- ii) To bless him that blessed him, and to curse him that cursed him;
- iii) that through him all nations would be blessed.

2) AT SHECHEM ("Sichem")

This promise was made after entering the land.

"And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him." (Genesis 12:6-7)

In this passage we are informed that Abram, in spite of the fact that "the Canaanite was then in the land", continued on his journey to a place called Shechem (refer to map). By doing so, he continued to manifest great faith and trust in God. Consequently, God again appeared to him, and revealed additional details of the promise:

- i) that Abram would have offspring who would inherit the land - "Unto **thy seed** will I give this land". Note the exclusive reference in this passage to Abram's **SEED** - not Abram himself.
- ii) that what he was promised was a gift - "...will I **GIVE** this land". There were no conditions, i.e. IF you do this, THEN I will promise...etc.
- iii) that this promise, in order to be fulfilled, required a miraculous intervention, because we are informed that not only was Sarah barren, but that Abram and Sarah were at this time beyond childbearing age.

There is in this passage also a significant change of wording: no longer is it "**a**" land as in the promise at Haran and Ur, but "**this**" land, indicating that Abram had reached the area where God wanted him to be.

3) AT BETHEL

The possessions of Abram and Lot increased to the point where they had to make a decision to separate and each choose an area in which to settle. In the process of making this choice, Abram demonstrated a very unselfish attitude towards Lot by allowing him to be first to make a choice. It was after this that God again appeared to Abram with a further elaboration on the details of the promise --

BibleKEY observation:

“The promises made by God to Abraham are....probably the least understood and acknowledged by Christendom in general as a significant part of God's purpose.”

BibleKEY observation:

“We cannot fully comprehend God's purpose unless and until we fully and fundamentally understand the promises to Abraham”

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"And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For 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: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD." (Genesis 13:14-18)

This phase of the promise involves the following features:

- i) Bethel is located in the approximate center of Palestine. It is important to recognize the literality of this promise. Abram was standing upon the soil of Palestine near its center, and told to look in the four directions of the globe, that all the land that he could SEE "to thee will I give it, and to thy seed".
- ii) For the first time, Abram is mentioned and personally named in the promise, along with his seed.
- iii) His seed is to inherit the land FOREVER.
- iv) His seed is to be (a) the Messiah (Galations 3:16), and (b) a great multitude

4) AT HEBRON

when he believed God's promise that his seed would be multitudinous

"And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:" (Genesis 15:13-18)

The promise given on this occasion concerned events that would occur and affect the natural and physical descendants of Abraham - natural Israel - after his death. This promise is quite literally a prophecy, a forecast quite accurately outlining the things that befell them in Egypt, the events of the Exodus, and the 40 years wilderness trek to Canaan.

The final part of the passage provides a description of the boundaries of the land promised to him. Never in the checkered history of Israel - even at the zenith of their glory under king David - have these boundary limits, as described here, ever been realized! This part of the promise is yet future, awaiting fulfillment

5) AT THE OCCASION OF A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE OF NAME

A further development of the divine promise occurred while at Hebron. The time had come for God to emphasize an important point by changing the name Abram to Abraham...

"And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. (Genesis 17:2-5)

The purpose of this was to call attention to the fact that Abram (meaning Lofty Father) was to be not only the father of a single nation of people, but a father of many nations (Abraham means "father of a multitude of nations"). While this has a literal, national application to the nations of the earth's mortal population in the Kingdom Age, there is reference to this in the New Testament as applying to Gentile believers in Christ...

"For not through the law was the promise to Abraham or to his seed that he should be heir of the world, but through the righteousness of faith. For this cause (it is) of faith, that (it may be) according to grace; to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, A father of many nations have I made thee) before him whom he believed, (even) God, who giveth life to the dead, and calleth the things that are not, as though they were. Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be. (Romans 4:13-18)(ASV)

BibleKEY fact:

“ Abraham's seed is the Messiah (Christ) - "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." (Galations 3:16) ”

BibleKEY Definition:

"multitudinous" = a word used to describe the concept of a collective whole - many in one; many people organized and collected under the leadership of one head and title.

BibleKEY observation:

“ Never ... have these boundary limits, as described here, ever been realized! This part of the promise is yet future, awaiting fulfillment ”

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6) AT MOUNT MORIAH

This part of the promise was given to Abraham after he had been put to the ultimate test of his belief and trust in God. It is important to consult your Bible and read the entire passage that relates to this event. After this great display of his faith, Abraham received this additional phase of the promise:

"And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, 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." (Genesis 22:15-18)

From this the following additional hilites emerge:

- i) Abraham's seed is to "possess the gate of his enemies" i.e. be victorious. This has a twofold application:
 - a) Literally, the seed of Abraham - Israel in the future kingdom age in cooperation with Christ and his spiritual brethren (the saints) - are to be victorious over all world empires and political systems. This must be yet future because to this day there has been no fulfillment of this part of the promise.
 - b) Spiritually, in conjunction with the above and as a consequence of it, there will be an ultimate triumph of righteousness over wickedness; the victory of Divine goodness over the evil manifested in human nature. This will be the final settlement in the incessant struggle between these two forces that has been ongoing since creation - from the time of the sin of Adam and Eve onward. Refer to observation box at right.
- ii) In his seed all nations are to be blessed. There is reference here to the final effect of the victory of righteousness over wickedness. Recall the Divine purpose of creation as stated in Numbers 14:21 - (Consult Lesson #6)
- iii) The final thing to be noted in this promise given at Moriah is that God has confirmed it by an oath - "By myself have I sworn..." The writer to the Hebrews comments on this in the New Testament -

"For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us..." (Hebrews 6:13-18)

The two "immutable" things are:

- a) The word of the Covenant given at Hebron (Genesis 15:17,18) -
And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:"
- b) The Divine oath given at Moriah (Genesis 22:16) -
By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD

The promises to Abraham were so critical to God's purpose that He confirmed them by both a Covenant and an Oath - which involved God's very existence!

HOW DOES ALL THIS AFFECT OUR HOPE AND SALVATION?

First, we must understand that ABRAHAM AND HIS SEED HAVE NEVER RECEIVED THAT WHICH WAS PROMISED TO THEM.

Traditionally, most of modern Christianity are of the opposite opinion; i.e. that the long history of intermittent possession of the land of Palestine by the nation of Israel - Abraham's offspring - was in effect the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham.

The Bible, however, has no support for such a perception. It is vital that we understand the scriptural viewpoint, which is clearly indicated in none else

BibleKEY comment:

"...THY SEED SHALL POSSESS THE GATE OF HIS ENEMIES..."

This promise guarantees final and lasting victory of Divine righteousness over human wickedness... the ongoing struggle since Adam and Eve:

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Gen 3:15)

- Victory of the Kingdom of God over political wickedness:

"The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies." (Ps 110:1-2)

"For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." (Isa 60:12)

- Victory of life over death:

"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave,

BibleKEY Definition(s):

"immutable" = *unalterable*

"covenant" = *pact, contract, will*

BibleKEY fact:

“The promises to Abraham were so critical to God's purpose that He confirmed them by both a Covenant and an Oath - which involved God's very existence!”

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but the NEW TESTAMENT...

"...The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, HE PROMISED to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him." (Acts 7:2-5)

This is plain, simple language, very direct and to the point. Abraham did NOT inherit what he had been promised, not even an area large enough for his foot! He had to **buy** enough land for a **burial site** for members of his family...

"So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem." (Acts 7:15-16)

If the land was his, why would it be necessary to purchase a parcel of property in a land he already owned?

The following comment from Hebrews relates to many of the faithful ones from Abel to Sarah, including Abraham himself...

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13)

Abraham's grandson, Jacob, recognized the fact that they were transients in a land that had been promised to them but of which they were not yet in possession, and made reference to this fact when, speaking to Pharaoh king of Egypt, he stated...

"...The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. (Genesis 47:9)

In view of all the above, two very important points emerge:

- 1) Abraham is now dead, and has not inherited the promise. Therefore, resurrection from the dead is the prerequisite to obtaining the promise! Resurrection is, in fact, the basic doctrine of the covenant. It is taught here to Abraham and those of his time by promising something which necessitates it.
- 2) Only two people actually have title deeds to this land -- Abraham and Jesus Christ...

"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." (Galatians 3:16)

JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONE through whom the blessing comes (Gal. 3:16; Matt. 1:1).

"...the covenant...was confirmed before of God in Christ..." (Gal 3:16-18)

, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." (Gal 3:16-18)

The fact that only these two people, Christ and Abraham, have the "title deeds" presents an interesting and logical question: How can others share the promise? The answer is provided in Galatians 3:26-29 quoted below, i.e., by Baptism "into" Christ enlightened men and women join the "body of Christ" and become Abraham's "seed" and "heirs" according to the promise. By belief and baptism one is constituted "IN CHRIST" who is in turn Abraham's seed, and the terms of the promise are that "IN THY SEED shall all nations be blessed". Abraham's seed has firstly a singular aspect, CHRIST; and also a multitudinous aspect, His followers - as "sand and stars" for multitude.

The title deeds to the land and the promised inheritance are the exclusive property of Abraham and his SEED - Christ, and those who are Christ's spiritual family.

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. 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

BibleKEY fact:

“ Abraham did NOT inherit what he had been promised, not even an area large enough for his foot! He had to buy enough land for a burial site for members of his family...” ”

BibleKEY fact:

“ two very important points emerge:
(1) Resurrection is, in fact, the basic doctrine of the covenant;
(2) Only two people actually have title deeds to this land -- Abraham and Jesus Christ...” ”

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the promise." (Galatians 3:26-29)

Physical descent from Abraham does not confer a title to the land. In fact the Jews, even when they had fully inhabited the land, were specifically advised by God that they did not possess title deed to the land...

"The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me." (Leviticus 25:23)

From this it is clear that the SEED referred to in the promise was not the nation of Israel (the Jews), but rather ONE PERSON - Jesus Christ!

"He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." (Galatians 3:16)

"...Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matthew 1:1)

The purpose of Christ was to confirm and establish the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The record of scripture throughout compliments and supports this important gospel fact, e.g. -

"...Jesus Christ was.....to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:" (Romans 15:8)

Faith and obedience are the only family characteristics God recognizes, linking Abraham with his children...

"Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." (Galatians 3:7-8)

Take the time to think long and hard about how these Biblical facts impact upon the traditional perception of the "gospel". Traditional Christianity has long overlooked the significance of these promises which form the very foundation of God's purpose and message.

These promises were repeated by God several times afterwards to Abraham's immediate descendants.

First to his son Isaac (Genesis 26:3,4) -

"Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; 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;"

Then to his grandson Jacob (Genesis 28:13,14) -

"And, behold, the LORD... 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; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Concerning all of these faithful people of God, and many who came afterwards, we are told by the writer to the Hebrews (11:13,39,40) -

"These all DIED in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

The promises will be inherited by all the faithful TOGETHER, when Christ returns to the earth to resurrect the dead and set up the Kingdom of God his Father ON THE EARTH - the very location of the promised inheritance. There is no other hope or promise contained in scripture. All scripture coordinates and synergizes with the promises to Abraham. This is the essence of the Gospel. This is the COVENANT established by Christ in his life, death and resurrection. This is the GOSPEL taught by the disciples even BEFORE Christ's death, when they yet denied that he must die. This is the gospel concerning which Paul warned -

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Gal 1:8-9)

BibleKEY comment:

“ Take the time to think long and hard about how these Biblical facts impact upon the traditional perception of the "gospel" ”

BibleKEY fact:

“ The promises will be inherited by all the faithful TOGETHER, when Christ returns to the earth ”

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Name Mr/Mrs/Miss

Address Postal Code

* You may need an additional sheet for your answers if there is not enough space below. Your answers to the following questions will help you - and us - to determine how much you have discovered about your Bible. Please return this form in the envelope provided even if you are unable to answer all the questions. On receipt of it we will forward a further study, as well as some

- 1) What did the Disciples teach when they were sent forth in pairs by Christ to preach "the gospel"?
- 2) a) Was Abraham always a believer in the one true God?
b) Give a brief summary of Abraham's background and travels.
- 3). How were the promises communicated to Abraham?
- 4) Briefly state the particular details unique to each occasion (phase) of the promises to Abraham -
 - At Ur and Haran
 - At Shechem
 - At Bethel
 - At Hebron (1)
 - At Hebron (2)
 - At Mount Moriah
- 5) What is the common perception of traditional Christianity concerning the promises to Abraham?
- 6) What particular passage of scripture provides us with proof that Abraham did not receive that which was promised to him?
- 7) a) What passage of scripture shows us that resurrection of the dead was implicitly taught in the promises to Abraham?
b) How?
- 8) Which two people have title deeds to the land?
- 9) Who is the true "seed" of Abraham according to the promise?
- 10) By what means might we become a part of Abraham's "seed"?
- 11) What was the purpose of Christ's mission relative to the promise to Abraham?
- 12) To whom were the promises repeated?
- 13) a) Is it important that the gospel be properly understood and taught?
b) How do we know?