

## The Land Promise to Abraham and His Descendants — the Key to the Whole Bible Plot

Underlying the entire Bible story, running like a golden thread through Scripture, is the promise made to Abraham that he would receive, as a reward for his obedience to God's call to leave Ur of the Chaldees, **prosperity, progeny, and property**. This amazing, divinely promised guarantee of success, which Christians are invited to share as spiritual children of Abraham, is summed up in the compact phrase "the blessing of Abraham." This beautiful and memorable phrase is found only twice in Scripture, in Galatians 3:14 and Genesis 28:4. This provides the essential link between the two Testaments. That blessing of **prosperity, progeny and property** (land forever) is defined by Paul in Romans 4:13 as "the promise to Abraham and to his descendants that he would be heir of the world" (earth, BBE, Basic Bible in English).

This is exactly the promise of Jesus to his followers in Matthew 5:5. "The meek are to inherit the earth/land," citing the amazing Psalm 37 which no less than five times defines the goal and destiny of the faithful. This has not a word to say about "going to heaven as a disembodied soul at death." To confirm this point, note the fearless words of Dr. J.A.T. Robinson at Cambridge: "'Heaven' is in fact never used in the Bible for the destination of the dying" (*In the End God*, p. 104). You get a very different impression at funerals and in commonly heard sermons! The only recognizable goal of the believer is "heaven." But not according to Scripture.

The biblical drama hangs on this remarkable tension: Abraham and his seed have **never yet** inherited the land/earth. In fact Stephen in the sermon which cost him his life (Acts 7, the longest chapter in that book) explicitly says that "**Abraham did not inherit as much as a square foot of the promised land**"! But "**God promised it to him and his seed**" (Acts 7:5). That marvelous promise is rooted of course in Genesis 12, 13, 15 and constantly throughout the Hebrew Bible. How is that staggering promise to find fulfillment, since Abraham is long dead? God will indeed as always be vindicated.

The obvious and only solution is that Abraham will have to be resurrected when Jesus comes back in order to take up his allotted place in the Kingdom/land of the new order to be introduced by Jesus. Hebrews 11:8 clearly recalls that Abraham once lived in the promised land, as did his children, but in verses 13 and 39, "these [heroes of the OT] all died, **not having received the promises**." There it is! Everything hinges on the faithful attaining to the inheritance of the earth/land as promised to the meek by Jesus in Matthew 5:5 and unpacked in more detail in Revelation 5:10 (cp. Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:1-6; Jer. 27:5). Not only do they gain the earth, they rule and reign with Jesus in it.

Add to this the astonishing promise of Jesus to Peter, who inquired as to what reward the apostles might expect (Matt. 19:27), after all the exhausting trouble and maltreatment they had received from the established "church." Jesus' answer was transparent. In that new-born world when the Son of Man returns to the earth and takes up his position on his throne of glory, the apostles will also occupy 12 thrones and set about the task of governing the tribes re-gathered at that time in the land (see Matt. 19:28, and put this verse up on your refrigerator!). The reference of course is to the new order of society foreseen in all the prophets and especially in Isaiah 65:17ff and 66:22.

There is coming a new world order on earth, to be inaugurated at the return of Jesus, and we are urged by the Gospel to prepare with all urgency for that coming event. This is the substance of Christian hope, and hope is the basis, Paul said, for the companion virtues of love and faith (Col. 1:4-5). Without a proper grasp of hope, faith and love are diminished and thwarted. It matters very much what you believe. And believing and having a passion for truth is of paramount importance (2 Thess. 2:10).

The Christian faith is called "the faith of Abraham" (Rom. 4:16), and Abraham is the spiritual father of the faithful (Rom. 4:11). No wonder then that **the Gospel was preached in advance to Abraham** (Gal. 3:8). This in short is the Gospel of the Land/Kingdom, the Gospel as preached by Jesus and Paul (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; Acts 19:8; 20:24-25; 28:23, 31), which is conspicuous by its absence in churches and preaching! For further detail please read my *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah: A Solution to the Riddle of the New Testament* (free at our site). Also my *Our Fathers Who Aren't in Heaven*. For a short summary see our ten-minute youtube video "Jesus Is Still a Jew."

Here then is the easy story of the whole Bible, to be taught to the old and the young alike. God is working to restore peace to our tortured earth, using His agent the Messiah and Son of God. Luke 1:35 explains with lucid simplicity **the basis** for Jesus being the Son of God (do not read KJV on this verse. It misleads you into thinking there is more than one reason for Jesus' Sonship!).

Jesus, the lord Messiah (Luke 2:11) was fathered in the womb of Mary by miracle. He certainly did not arrive from a pre-human life elsewhere! He announced the Kingdom of God, which is to bring about the reversal of the calamity which came to the human race in Adam and Eve. Mark 1:14-15 commands us to stop *not* believing in the destiny of man, which is to rule in the Kingdom, the very task at which Adam failed.

Jesus, the perfect and sinless human person, the second Adam, modeled the perfect Christian life, devoted to the will of his Father, who is the one and only God of true monotheism (John 17:3). Jesus affirmed belief in the unitary monotheistic God of his biblical heritage (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29).

Jesus also confirmed the promises made to the fathers of the Hebrew Bible (Rom. 15:8). Thus the Christian Gospel was preached in advance to Abraham (Gal. 3:8). The promise was that the faithful believers should receive the whole world as their inheritance (Jer. 27:5). The promise to Abraham was specified as the guarantee that he would be "heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). Thus the land promise to Abraham is exactly the Kingdom of God promise of the New Covenant, and Jesus stated this by promising possession of the earth/land to the meek (Matt. 5:5).

The fascinating fact is that Abraham has until this day not received a square foot of his inheritance. Acts 7:5 is a marvelous "John 3:16" verse! The point to be gained is that Abraham and all the faithful who are now dead, sleeping the sleep of death (Ps. 13:3), must at the return of Jesus rise from death (1 Cor. 15:23) to receive their promised inheritance. (So also Daniel in Dan. 12:13.)

The ideal conditions on earth will then be introduced, and such scenes as Isa. 65:17ff and 66:22, where mortals (not the saints who will by then have gained immortality) will be considered exceptional and unfortunate, or even under judgment, if they die at the age of 100!

Jesus and his disciples loved and looked forward to the great "restoration of all things." There is to be a rebirth (*palingenesis*) of the world, when the Messiah will be sitting on the throne of his glory. At that time the apostles will be co-rulers with Jesus, and they will be administering the 12 tribes regathered in the land (see Matt. 19:28 and Luke 22:28-30).

This coming new world order on earth is also called the *apokatastasis* — "putting everything back in order." Heaven, where Jesus is currently, must retain him there "until the *apokatastasis* of all things, about which the prophets spoke" (Acts 3:21, cp. Acts 1:6).

None of this is remotely connected to the misleading popular idea about "going to heaven" when we die! Mary, even, is currently dead, sleeping the sleep of death, certainly not functioning as an intercessor. She will awake when Jesus comes back and be part of the great Kingdom of God to be set up on a renewed earth (Dan. 2:44; 7:18, 22, 27, etc).

Please read the following and be suitably shocked: "We must guard against a one-sided spiritualizing. Certainly the prophets do not think of heaven. Plows and pruning hooks have as little to do with heaven as swords and spears" (Lange's *Commentary*).

"The records of our Lord's life and teaching do not speak of going to heaven, as a modern believer so naturally does...Especially there is no suggestion that Jesus is offering his disciples heaven after this life" (Strawson, *Jesus and the Future Life*, p. 38). ✧