

Teaching The Good News Of The Promise

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How is God going to do it? How is God going to fulfill all of those wonderful promises which He has made to you and to me? In answering that question, we could generate a whole number of answers. We could say He will do it by the power of Jesus Christ. Yes, we could develop a marathon series of sermons answering that question of "how." And, the answers would not necessarily be wrong.

Today, let us look at how God answers that question. How does God say that He is going to fulfill His promises to us? I think that you will find His answer quite amazing. I did. But, before we go there, we will need to identify the promises to see exactly what they entail.

Hebrews 9:15 tells us that Christ mediates a new covenant "so that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." The promise then is to the called. It is for us. Peter provides a second witness in Acts 2:

Acts 2:39 For the promise is to you and to your children . . .

Brethren, please, hold on to that concept of "and to your children." It is very important to my comments today.

Acts 2:39 For the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.

We will begin to take a look at those promises as we read Genesis 12. Let us review the promises that God made to the called-out ones. These are the promises He made to Abraham—whom He called out of Ur. These are so important, brethren, that God repeated these promises over and over again.

Genesis 12:1-3 The LORD said to Abram, "Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, I will curse those who treat you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through

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you."

This is a thunderous promise, connected with a command: "Leave your land, your family. Move to another—an undefined—land, a land to which God will lead." Result? Abraham's name will be great: he will become a great nation, a blessing to everyone on the planet. So protected would he be, that God will curse anyone who mistreated Abraham.

God is more specific in the second iteration of the promise.

Genesis 13:14-16 After Lot had separated from him, the LORD said to Abram, "Look from the place where you are. Look north and south, east and west, for I will give you and your offspring forever all the land that you see. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if one could count the dust of the earth, then your offspring could be counted.

Remember how Mr. Armstrong taught us that a kingdom had to have land and people. Well, here, God tells Abraham that as a great nation—a kingdom—he will possess lots of land and lots of people.

There is another important component added here: the concept of eternity, the concept of forever. Kingdoms and nations come and go, wax and wane. But, this is different. Whatever God gives to Abraham and to his children is permanent. The great nation Abraham will become will not come and go with the ebb and flow of history—just another dreary empire. Rather, this nation is out of history. This should give us a clue that we are talking about something truly great, truly special here. I am sure that point was not lost to Abraham.

The third iteration of the promise is recorded in Genesis 15. Here, for the first time, the promise becomes covenantal.

Genesis 15:18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "I give this land to your offspring, from the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates River . . ."

We will stop there. The fourth iteration of the promise is recorded in Genesis 17. Again, God states it in covenantal terms. Notice as I read this, brethren, that God stresses

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Abraham's descendants as much as He stresses Abraham himself.

Genesis 17:2-8 I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you greatly. Then Abram fell to the ground, and God spoke with him: "As for Me, My covenant is with you, and you will become the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Abram, but your name will be Abraham, for I will make you the father of many nations. I will make you extremely fruitful and will make nations and kings come from you. I will keep My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant to be your God and the God of your offspring after you. And to you and your offspring after you I will give the land where you are residing—all the land of Canaan—as an eternal possession, and I will be their God."

"I will be their God." I did not mention it before, but in the first recital of the promises, (Genesis 12), God uses the personal pronoun 'I' five times. But in this particular recital here, God refers to Himself using the pronouns I, My, or Me about thirteen times. God is stressing that He is the fountain-head of these promises. Basic to the promises is a relationship, and it is a formal, covenantal relationship with the Creator God. God is not just a genie in a bottle who gives gifts and floats away. Rather, God is the perpetual and the persistent benefactor of Abraham and his descendants. His religion—His way of life—will be the way of life of these people. The benefits of the promises are centered in a relationship between God and man. He will be their God; they will be His people. This fact is pivotal.

Now, in passing, I would like to mention that one of those characteristics of any kingdom that Mr. Armstrong mentioned was that a kingdom had to have a king. Well, Abraham was to become so great that many nations and many kings would descend from him.

Finally, brethren, let us look take a look at the last iteration of the promises in Genesis 22, just after the aborted sacrifice of Isaac.

Genesis 22:15-18 Then the Angel of the LOORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By Myself I have sworn, says the LOORD: Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your only son, I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the gates of their enemies. And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring because you have obeyed My command."

Because of Abraham's unflinching obedience, God promises that the influence of his offspring (not Abraham himself) will stretch far beyond their immediate geographic bounds, extending all the way to their enemies' gates.

Looking across these promises, we can summarize them to relate to nationhood, to population, and to land—all on a vast scale, and all with an underlying characteristic of lasting forever. Now in the old church, there was a tendency to view these promises as national in nature and to stop there. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with applying these scriptures nationally; they certainly do pertain to land and population of a physical nation. We could cite a number of examples:

We certainly know that one application of the promise of land relates to the restoration of Israel to "the Promised Land" during the Millennium. Again, I suspect that everyone in this room agrees that any number of kings have already descended from Abraham, especially through the Davidic line. Or, we can consider the great physical kingdoms of David and Solomon to be typical fulfillments, as are the modern-day Israelite nations in our time: America, Australia, Britain, and Canada. Once more, Mr. Armstrong correctly taught us that modern-day Israelite nations possess (or have possessed in the past) their enemies' gates.

Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with understanding these various physical phenomena to be typical fulfillments of God's promises to Abraham. The persisting question, though, is this: Are these national applications the primary thrust of God's promises to Abraham? As the song goes, "Is that all there is?" We have come, in more recent years, to understand that the great nation of these promises is God's Kingdom, that the promises have profound spiritual application to us in God's church, whether we are genetically descendants of Abraham or not—that is not important.

Paul here addresses this issue in Galatians 3. In context, Paul is arguing that salvation is of faith and not of works.

Galatians 3:8 Now the Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and foretold the good news to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you."

Other translations say that God preached the gospel to Abraham. Abraham understood the gospel. Paul even tells us here in what terms he understood the gospel: in terms of the promises. For Paul quotes from Genesis 12:3, which was that first iteration of God's

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promises to Abraham we looked at a few minutes ago: "All nations will be blessed in you." This is how Abraham came to understand the gospel through the promises.

And, there is only one true gospel. God did not preach another gospel to Abraham. Indeed, Paul clearly tells us in Galatians 1:7, that there is no other gospel. In Romans 1:16, Paul defines that one gospel as "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." Abraham was faithful, indeed the father of the faithful. He believed. And, we inherit those same promises if we are faithful as our father Abraham was.

Well, that said, let us quickly make a second pass through the promises. This time, we will focus on their application to members of Christ's church today—to us. First, the promise of the eternal possession of land is really a promise concerning the territory of God's Kingdom. I call this part of the promise the four-compass-point-promise. As we saw in Genesis 13, it includes north, south, east, and west, quite inclusive. How inclusive is it, brethren? Please turn to Romans 4, which is one of two scriptures I will cite that helps clarify the intent and scope of this particular promise of land.

Romans 4:13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

As a second scripture, notice Revelation 21, and here we see that the inheritance comes to overcomers.

Revelation 21:7 "He who overcomes shall inherit all things."

That is the universe, brethren. This is the territory of the promise of land—the world, and indeed, the universe.

Second, let us turn our attention to God's promise that He will make of Abraham "a great nation." We saw that very early in the first iteration of the promise (Genesis 12), although it is implied in a number of the later iterations. How did this promise of great nationhood preach the gospel of God's Kingdom to Abraham? How does it pertain to us spiritually?

Please turn to I Peter 1, and I want you to notice to whom Peter is writing:

I Peter 1:1-2 (Amplified Bible) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, writing to

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the elect exiles of the dispersion scattered [sowed] abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia who were chosen and foreknown by God the Father and consecrated by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ.

Without question, Peter is writing to the church. Now, turn over a page to chapter 2, where he quotes Deuteronomy, applying it to a church audience, not to ancient Israel.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people. . .

God's people make up a nation. The prophet Daniel discusses that nation quite a bit.

Daniel 2:44 And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom [a nation] which shall never be destroyed, and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

Daniel elaborates quite a bit in chapter 7, referring to Christ:

Daniel 7:14 He was given authority to rule, and glory, and a kingdom; so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.

And we understand that this is what Christ will inherit. And, who under Him will inherit it as well? Drop down a few verses to verse 27:

Daniel 7:27 The kingdom, dominion, and greatness of the kingdoms under all of heaven will be given to the people, the holy ones of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom...

In Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, the prophet is not speaking about a physical nation, but an everlasting kingdom. Let us face it, brethren, the Millennium will eventually end. But, the nation of which Daniel speaks is ongoing, and it is everlasting. It will last beyond the Millennium, and it will last past the White Throne period. Daniel speaks of a spiritual

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nation, a nation that is outside history, beyond history. It is a great nation that is so special, and so very different from other nations, because it will not decay or fall into oblivion with the ebb and flow of history like every other nation has done. This is the great nation that God promised Abraham and his descendants.

We look at a third element of the promises. God promised Abraham a multitude of descendants. How in the world could this promise of people preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God to Abraham? How does it apply to us in God's church?

II Peter 3:9 God is not slack concerning His promise, as many count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Now, "all" is just a whole lot of people. You may want to jot down I Timothy 2. The apostle Paul tells us of God's commitment to save as many as possible. I Timothy 2:4: "[God] desires all men to be saved." We understand that some will fall into the Lake of Fire. But I think that we all believe that God will work mightily to save the bulk—the major part—of humanity. After all, does Paul not tell us that, "All Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26)?

Fourth, let us consider the Genesis 17:6 promise to Abraham, where God says, "Kings shall come from you." In type of course, some of those kings have come and gone. But, to find the real kings to whom God is referring, we cannot use genealogical tables, and family Bibles. No, we need eyes that look forward. For these are the kings of whom John writes in Revelation 5:10—those kings who "shall reign on the earth."

You may want to jot down Galatians 3:29 in this context: It will be the faithful—the sons of Abraham—who will rule with God as kings.

Galatians 3:29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

God's promise that Abraham will be the father of kings is a spiritual promise referring to Abraham's spiritual children—future kings and priests.

In all of this review, there has been an unmistakable, undeniable undertow. I have not stressed it, but you know what it is, it is the theme of perpetuity. For instance, God gives the land forever. This is an important point.

Notice, God gives the land to Abraham's descendants forever. The land will never be snatched away from them. But, as importantly, God gives it to Abraham—not just to his descendants—forever. He himself will inherit the land forever. Did he ever inherit the land during his lifetime? Stephen, as recorded in Acts 7:5, answers that question, "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."

How will Abraham inherit the land, then, since he is dead? Clearly, he will inherit it through a resurrection. And, once resurrected, he will possess it forever. We do not need to be rocket scientists to figure this one out; we all know that Abraham will inherit the land in the first resurrection. Revelation 20:6 points out that death has no more power over those in this resurrection. Abraham will not die again. He will inherit forever.

Well, brethren, having laid all this background, I think I am ready to address the question I posed in my introductory comments: How will God fulfill all these promises? A good point of departure in answering this may be this: Remember, I stressed earlier that the basis of the promises is an on-going relationship between the Creator God and man. Now, no relationship, whether informal or formal, like one enshrined in a covenant, is one-sided. There have to be two parties involved.

When we deal with God, we are dealing with a Being who actively seeks a relationship with other sentient, other thinking beings, and I mean a going-forward, growing relationship. He does not deal with us as if we were rocks and could not reciprocate. So, Abraham became a friend of God, as James writes in James 2:23. They had a close relationship. Or, consider Enoch, and later Noah, both of whom we are told walked with Him. David came to share His same mind. Clearly, a strong relationship developed between these men and God. At heart, it was a relationship of trust.

So, the great nation of promise did not begin with a legal document, a constitution, or, like so many empires and kingdoms, by a military conquest. No! It started with a relationship of trust. It was a two way trust.

You may want to jot down Hebrews 11:19. Here, we read that Abraham considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead.

Talk about Abraham knowing the gospel! Abraham knew about the resurrection, and he believed in the resurrection. He knew about the resurrection in terms of the promises for Isaac was the son of promise. Abraham, acting in faith to God, was willing to sacrifice Isaac, knowing that God would resurrect him. Abraham trusted God, explicitly.

1. Abraham trusted God, as Paul tells us in Romans 4:20-22: "Abraham did not waver in unbelief at God's promise, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, because he was fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform."
2. But, just as important: God came to trust Abraham. The trust was reciprocal. Notice Genesis 18:19, where God, speaking of Abraham, says: "For I know him . . ."

God came to the point that He knew Abraham. He could trust him. We use much the same idiom in English today, where we say to someone we know well: "I know you," "I know where you are going with that idea," "I know what you are thinking." What we are doing is indicating our confidence that we understand the way that person is thinking and, consequently, the way he will act. We know him. God came to the point that He knew Abraham. He knew what He would expect from Abraham.

Trust is a two-way street. The relationship between God and Abraham was reciprocal.

And, that takes us to our question: How is God going to fulfill the promises He made to Abraham and us? The answer is right there, right there in Genesis 18:19, but we often miss it because of misguided, or misdirected translations. A few translations seem to get it right. I will read it from Holman first: "For I have chosen".

A footnote indicates that the verb is know: "For I know him [God says,] so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just". This is how the LORD will fulfill to Abraham what He promised him.

It is an amazing answer to the question. Another translation puts it this way:

"In this way I, the Lord, will do what I have promised Abraham."

There it is; the 'how', from God's mouth. God will fulfill His promises to Abraham through the patriarch's teaching God's law to his descendants. There is a lot we can say about this.

First, I would like to imagine, to crib Richard's term, that Abraham was an excellent father. He was a well-traveled person—tradition says he lived in Europe for a while. More to the point, I think that he walked with God, talked with God for years, and could probably captivate the imagination of his children and grandchildren with stories about what he had been through, what he had seen, and what he had learned. I also imagine he was a great teacher who probably taught by precept as well as by example, who

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conscientiously taught his children God's law. Abraham did not die until Jacob and Esau, his twin grandsons, were fifteen years old. I think that we can understand from this verse that God knew that he would teach those boys about God's law.

Notice, further, that God says that Abraham would command his progeny "after him" to obey God's laws. What does that term "after him" mean? If you stop to think about it, your descendents always come "after you." That is just the nature of things, is it not? Your grandchildren cannot come along before you do. So, what does Genesis 18:19 mean when it refers to Abraham's descendants, his house, and his progeny "after him?" This seems redundant, but it is not. I think this verse gives us a clue to Abraham's work after he is resurrected. Then, in the Millennium and White Throne period, he will be actively involved in teaching God's way of life to his progeny, those millions of individuals who lived long after he had died.

I think many of you remember Mr. Armstrong's comments that the work of God is at heart an educational work. Yes, God's work is to re-educate us in His way of give, to re-orient us away from Satan's way of get.

Paul, writing in Colossians 1:28-29, says that he proclaims Christ, "warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ." Paul (in II Timothy 2) is writing most specifically to Timothy, but his comments have real application to all who are in Christ. Notice Paul's stress on teaching, on instruction:

II Timothy 2:20-21 Now in a large house [like God's house] there are not only gold and silver bowls, but also those of wood and earthenware, some for special use, some for ordinary. So if anyone purifies himself from these things, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

Now, Paul mentions some of those areas from which we are to be purified:

II Timothy 2:22-25 Flee from youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But reject foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they breed quarrels. The Lord's slave must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance to know the truth.

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Paul twice calls himself a teacher of the Gentiles. Twice he tells Timothy to teach the sound doctrine of God. Indeed, in Titus 2:3-5, Paul reminds us that women have a teaching role as well. The older women are to "teach" what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and children.

We started by looking all the way back to Abraham and the promises that God made to him. But, the answer to the question "How will God fulfill these promises?" takes us into the future, to a time when we, as Abraham's children, will join him in the vastly important work of teaching the way of God to billions of deceived people. Earlier, John Ritenbaugh read John 8:39. There, Christ confirmed that Abraham's children will "do the works of Abraham." We are in reality Abraham's true children and we will do his works.

In good measure then, Abraham's work, the work of teaching, will be our work in the Millennium and beyond. As we teach, God will extend His Kingdom more and more; God will fulfill His promises of great nationhood, of vast population, and of land eternally. He will fulfill those promises to Abraham and to his descendants. With Abraham, brethren, we will teach the good news of the promise.