

THE STARS AND THE SAND

A Closer Look at the Abrahamic Promise

After Abraham demonstrated his faithfulness to God by being willing to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, he was given one of the most beautiful promises in the entire Bible. It is recorded in Genesis 22:16-18, and is known as the Abrahamic promise.

“By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and has 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.”

This promise was merely the final outgrowth of an earlier commitment God had made to Abraham if he would leave the land of Ur of the Chaldees and go to a land which God would show him. This original promise is found in Genesis 12:1-3:

“Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show 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 the families of the earth be blessed.”

On Several occasions the promise was reiterated in various forms, and with several additions. On the second occasion, in Genesis 13:15, 16, the allusion to the “dust of the earth” is added.

“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.”

Just two chapters later, in Genesis 15:5 the additional metaphor of “the stars of heaven” is also included.

“Look now toward heaven and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be.”

The questions thus present itself, were these allusions to “sand” and “stars” just to present the concept of a multitude, or was there a deeper reason?

WHY “SAND” AND “STARS”?

To probe the answer of our query we need to turn to the pages of the New Testament. The Apostle Paul speaks of this very promise, and the “seed” around which it centered, in Galatians 3:16.

“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.”

But who is this Christ of whom Paul speaks? Certainly not Jesus, for he is an individual and the seed was to be uncountable. The term “Christ” merely means “the anointed,” and refers not to Jesus alone, but his followers as well. Note the testimony of 1 Corinthians 12:27.

“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

It is with this larger “Christ,” Head and Body, in mind that Paul continues his argument in Galatians 3:29:

“And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

In these passages, then, the Apostle Paul identifies not only Jesus Christ, but also all of his followers as the “seed of Abraham.”

{The “Stars are a heavenly seed, while the “Sand” are an earthly seed}

MORE THAN “A LITTLE FLOCK”

Yet, speaking of this same class in Luke 12:32, Jesus speaks of them as a “little flock.” This is hardly a term that harmonizes well with the Genesis expression “*if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.*”

A careful examination of Genesis 22:18, in fact, suggests that the ultimate size of this seed is “all the nations of the earth.” As several translators suggest, the sense of the Hebrew conjugation here is “in thy seed shall all families of the earth bless themselves,” or, “by becoming thy seed shall all families of the earth bless themselves.”

Notice the implication: Paul, in Galatians, identifies the seed as the followers of Christ, who will share a heavenly inheritance with their bridegroom and Redeemer. Moses, in Genesis, on the other hand, suggests a seed large enough to encompass “all the nations of the earth.” These nations, as many texts show, are destined to inhabit a perfected earth.

Who is right: Paul or Moses? The obvious answer is, Both. For the writings of both are in the Bible. But how? We suggest the answer lies in our these text, Genesis 22:17, which implies that the “seed of Abraham” would be divided into two portions. First, the

followers of Christ, would be like “the stars of heaven,” a spiritual or heavenly class; and second, mankind, would be like “the sand which is upon the sea short.”

How harmonious this is with Paul’s words in Ephesians 1:10:

“That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.”

How fitting that Christians continue to pray, as Jesus commended in Matthew 6:10:

“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”

“IF THE RIGHTEOUS SCARCELY BE SAVED WHERE SHALL THE UNGODLY AND THE SINNER APPEAR?”

What seems to be one of the most restrictive statements concerning salvation is found in 1 Peter 4:17,18:

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

The implication which many draw from this statement is that a very small percentage of the human race will ever obtain salvation. Such a concept would fly directly in the face of the Apostle Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 2:4 where we read that God “*will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*”

To accept the thought that only the small percentage of righteous are to achieve salvation is to suggest the untenable idea that God is not powerful enough to realize his will for “all men to be saved.” Satan, in this scenario, becomes more successful than God—an obvious fallacy.

The simple harmony to this enigma is to realize that the “salvation” to which the righteous are brought is the heavenly salvation. This reward is reserved for the footstep follower of Jesus, those in whom he delights and chooses to call “his bride.”

In Hebrews 3:1 these are said to be “*partakers of the heavenly calling.*” Again, in Philippians 3:14, we read Paul’s determination to be a part of this group--

“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

All of these texts, and especially our theme text, emphasize the exalted nature of this call, and therefore the strenuous conditions that are set for its attainment. In clear terms, Jesus mentions the difficulties of the way in Matthew 7:14.

“Strait [difficult] is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

Contrary to the thought of many that one need merely “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” to be saved, the Bible depicts the Christian course as one fraught with difficulties and trials.

“The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire.” 1 Peter 1:7

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

To best comprehend the reason of this “narrow way,” it is wise to get a clear perspective of God’s purpose in developing a special Christian class. Paul hints at this overall design in 2 Timothy 2:12:

“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he will also deny us.”

If Christ is to reign, and we are to “reign with him,” there must, of necessity, be subjects to reign over. These are clearly the countless millions of mankind to be raised from the dead in fulfillment of John 5:29: *“All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth.”*

The object of this reign is also obvious—to “bless all the families of the earth” in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. This work is described as being like a “highway” in Isaiah 35:8—“The way of holiness.” More properly, it is to be called “the way that leads to holiness.”

It is for the purpose of instructing man in the path that leads to holiness, that the church is called and developed. It takes but a glance at the problems that face mankind around us to realize the depths of sin into which they have fallen. The uplift from this quagmire of sin will not be easy or sudden.

Sympathetic knowledge and understanding of what man has gone through will be required to assist the Lord in this wonderful kingdom activity.

Notice how Paul, on two occasions in the book of Hebrews, describes the experiences which qualified Jesus for this work of bringing redeemed men to a condition of holiness.

“Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted.” (Hebrews 2:17, 18)

“For we have not an high priest, which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities: but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15, 16)

Just as it was required for Christ to share the experiences of his church in order to fully sympathize with them, so it is necessary for the church to have the experiences of men, and overcome them, to assist men in overcoming the same.

It is for this reason that Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that *“there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.”* The standards of perfection that will be required of a perfect race in God’s kingdom, must be sought by the Christian now.

It is only by a thorough understanding of the demands of a just and holy God, and the needs of sinful and fallen humanity, that one can be qualified to assist in the great social uplift project of that kingdom which is the answer to every Christian’s prayer.

The ungodly and the sinner shall not appear in hell. Nor in Purgatory. But right here on earth. Not only on earth, but on a perfected earth in Edenic conditions. The answer may seem surprising, but let us examine it further.

The fourth chapter of First Peter deals with the sufferings to be anticipated by the followers of Jesus. Notice some of the expressions:

“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.” (Verse 1)

“Beloved think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings: That when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” (Verses 12, 13)

“If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.”

It is against this background of trials and difficulties that Peter speaks of the righteous “scarcely” being saved. If their salvation is that difficult, how can the “ungodly and sinner” hope to participate in it?

The answer is simple. They cannot! They will not! But, and this is the beauty of God’s plan, that does not mean that they will not be saved. It merely means that they will not participate in the church’s salvation, the heavenly salvation.

In introducing our theme text, Peter speaks of “judgment” **beginning** at the house of God. This implies that after the judgment of the “house of God” it must proceed elsewhere. Who will be next?

The next aspect of judgment, after the “house of God,” is mentioned in John 5:28, 29, but it is often lost because of a poor translation of the text.

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

It is easy to see how a surface reading of this text leaves nothing but “damnation” or “condemnation” for a large part of humanity.

But the Greek word simply does not mean “condemnation.” Most literal translations correct it to the more proper term, “judgment.” This Greek word is easy to grasp, for we have picked it up into the English language, with a changed spelling. It is the word “*krisis*,” or as we spell it, “crisis.” It is most frequently used in a medical sense to describe that point in the treatment of a disease where the patient will either get better, or continue deteriorating until death takes over. But the important thing is **the outcome can go either way**. The patient will not necessarily die. In fact, more often than not, he recovers. While one may look forward to the crisis with appropriate anxiety, there is also a large measure of hope in its anticipation.

The same word is used in verse 22 of the same chapter where we are informed:

“The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”

The time for the execution of this judgment by the Son is given by the Apostle Paul in his sermon on Mar’s Hill in Acts 17:31:

“He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.”

It would seem strange indeed to “give assurance” of that which is sure to be negative in its impact. These words also imply that many will survive the “judgment,” the “crisis,” and recover, not only their health, but the perfection which they collectively lost in the fall of Adam.

How briefly it is summarized by the prophet in Isaiah 26:9:

“When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the earth shall learn righteousness.”

The “Day of Judgment,” then, is not a day of doom and gloom. It is a day of education and learning. It is not a time of condemnation. It is a time of healing. It is not to be anticipated with dread and fear. It is to be looked forward to with joy and gladness.

**Rejoice! Then, O people, for...
THE “DAY OF JUDGMENT” IS COMING!**

{How To Be A Disciple...

“Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” –Matthew 16:24

THREE SIMPLE REQUIREMENTS! So simple to say! So hard to live by!

“LET HIM DENY HIMSELF”

TO ACCEPT THE WILL OF GOD is to deny one’s own will. Before one can do the will of God, one must understand what that will is. Therefore, a sincere and devoted study of God’s Word is a necessity to the doing of His will. Then, when that will conflicts with our own, it must be accepted, even at the cost of the rejection of our own desires and preferences.

“TAKE UP HIS CROSS”

FOR JESUS, THE CARRYING OF THE CROSS meant the acceptance of the burden of another’s guilt as his own. It means a voluntary surrender of life itself on behalf of others. He expects no less from those who would follow him—to love unto death, not only one’s friend, but one’s enemies as well.

“AND FOLLOW ME”

NOT ONLY DID JESUS COME TO EARTH TO DIE as a ransom for man’s sins, but also to set an example as to how his followers should live. He not only taught a life of gentleness and love, but lived such a life as well. And this is just what he expects of those who would be his disciples. }