

God's Plan for the Ages

Understanding the Dispensations

Lesson 7 – The Dispensation of Promise

The Time The fourth dispensation of God's rule over mankind extended from God's call of Abraham to the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai.

The Scripture The Scripture portion which covers this dispensation is Genesis 12-Exodus 18.

1. Man's State at the Beginning

The judgment of the Dispersion (scattering) did not cause mankind to return to God and most of the resulting nations continued in their rebellious ways.

Many were now worshipping false gods and descending deeper into moral degradation. **Until this time God had been dealing with mankind as a whole.**

It is at this point in history, some two thousand years after He first created man, that God undertook a completely new approach toward mankind.

a. God began to prepare a _____ by calling Abraham.

Genesis 12:1; Acts 7:2-3

God's attention now focussed on an individual named Abram (later renamed Abraham by God), through whom He would implement His redemptive plan. This was an act of grace from God, as Abraham came from a pagan civilisation who worshipped idols (Joshua 24:2). God called him out of his country and family him to a new place. This was not an easy assignment, but we find that Abraham obeyed.

b. God made a _____ with Abraham, making unique promises to him and his descendants.

In Genesis 12:2-3 God gave Abraham some wonderful promises. God had never promised these things to any other man on the face of the earth. These were very special promises that were given to Abraham and to Abraham's children.

In Genesis 12:2-3, how many times does God say "I WILL"? ____

In these verses God is giving His word that He will do certain things for Abraham. This covenant, made by God contained three basic areas of provision:

1. The _____ Blessing to Abraham.

Abraham himself is promised that he would be the father of a 'great nation' (v2), comparable to the dust of the earth and the stars of heaven (Genesis 13:16;15:5), and that many nations would come from him, with kings coming from his line (17:6).

This promise is made all the more significant when we remember that Abraham's wife Sarah was barren (unable to have children). He was told that God would 'bless' him personally and that he would be a blessing himself. He was promised the land of Canaan as 'an everlasting possession' (Genesis 17:6).

2. The _____ Blessings.

This promise is to Abraham's 'seed' or descendants. It includes being a 'great nation' of an innumerable host, possessing the land of Canaan, with the boundaries outlined in Genesis 15:18-21. The blessing to Abraham would come through Isaac and Jacob which became the nation of Israel.

3. The _____ Blessings.

God promised Abraham that all nations would receive a blessing through his physical descendants (v3). Great spiritual blessings have come to all Gentiles because of the Jews. We have the revelation of God, which was transmitted through Moses, the prophets and the scribes (Romans 3:2).

Of course the greatest blessing of all has come through Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross has made salvation available to all people of all nations – *'for salvation is of the Jews'* (John 4:22).

The promises given to Abraham by God were unconditional, meaning that God assumed full responsibility for their fulfilment they did not hinge on Abraham's faithfulness to the Lord. We see this demonstrated in Genesis 15:1-21.

These promises were reaffirmed to Isaac (**Genesis 26:3-4**) and Jacob (**Genesis 28:13-14**) and have continued to be affirmed to Israel throughout God's word.

2. Man's Responsibility

Since Abraham was chosen by God to be the Father of the nation of Israel, he and his descendants were to believe this promise.

- They were to take possession of and to remain in their land.
- They were to be God's unique (separated) people. For this reason, the people of Israel were not to intermarry with people from other nations (Genesis 24.4).
- They were to have the sign of the covenant- circumcision (Genesis 17:9-11).

In summary we could say that man's responsibility was to _____

3. Man's Failure

Abraham and his descendants at time demonstrated faith, believing God's promises and obeying Him, but there were also numerous occasions where they failed to trust and obey:

- Abraham left the Promised Land and stayed in Egypt during a famine. While in Egypt he lied about his wife to Pharaoh (Genesis 12:10-20).
- Abraham fathered Ishmael through Hagar, because he failed to believe God's promise to give him a son through Sarah, his wife (Genesis 16:1-3).
- Isaac lied concerning Rebekah, his wife (Genesis 26:1)
- Isaac decided to bless Esau over Jacob against God's plan (Genesis 25:21-23; 27:1-4).
- Jacob often failed to trust God and see his blessing and protection upon him (Genesis 31:31, 32:7-12; 37:33-35; 42:36; 47:9)
- The sons of Jacob sold their brother Joseph into slavery and covered up their sin by deceiving their father (Genesis 37).
- The children of Israel failed to take God at His word and believe His promises (Exodus 14:10-14; 15:23-26; 16:1-8; 17:14)

4. God's Judgment

This failure brought divine judgment. Throughout their history the Jews have continued to have problems with Ishmael's descendants. Through time they were subjected to slavery and threatened with extinction in Egypt.

5. God's Grace

After years of hardship and suffering, the children of Israel cried out because of their terrible slavery and God heard their cry (Exodus 2:23-25; Acts 7:34).

God was the only One who could deliver them from this terrible bondage and slavery. Even in the middle of this slavery God gave this nation some wonderful promises (Exodus 6:6-8).

God brought His people out of the land of bondage and back into the land of promise. The book of Exodus tells about going out of Egypt and Joshua tells about going into the Promised Land.

We must remember that God has never broken His word to the nation of Israel and God has never gone back His promises to them. There are aspects of promises given to Israel that have yet to be fulfilled, they will be realised in the Millennial Kingdom and we can trust that God will keep His Word.

Conclusion – God’s Promises to Us

What are you doing with the great and wonderful promises that God has given to you? God’s wonderful promises do not do us any good unless we believe them.

Consider Hebrews 4:1-2.

*“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, **not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.**”*

The children of Israel were given a promise, but they did not believe the promise. God’s Word will not profit us unless we mix it with faith (Hebrews 4:2).

What are you doing with these promises?

- **Eternal life** (1 John 2:25; John 5:24).
- **Salvation** (Acts 16:30-31 and Romans 10:9,13).
- **Forgiveness of sins** (Acts 10:43 and Acts 3:19).
- Being **safe and secure in Christ forever** (John 10:28-30; Romans 8:1,38-39).
- **God’s care** (1 Peter 5:7).
- **God’s constant presence** (Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 28:20).
- **God always meeting our needs** (Philippians 4:19; Psalm 23:1).
- **Strength** (Philippians 4:13; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Isaiah 41:10).
- **God’s help** (Hebrews 13 :6; Isaiah 41:10,13).
- **Forgiveness and cleansing from sin** (1 John 1:9).

*“For all the promises of God
in him are yea,
and in him Amen,
unto the glory of God by us.”
(2 Corinthians 1:20)*