

Christian Fundamentals

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the children of Israel

Although the Christian gospel extends to every nation and to all peoples in the world, in some ways the history of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the children of Israel is not particularly relevant. However, getting a proper understanding of the purposes of God through the children of Israel, Jesus Christ of course Himself a Jew, will greatly assist us in understanding the God who has provided salvation for us through his son Jesus Christ. In fact, to see the dealings of God with the nation of Israel is very important for Christians, the more we can learn about God the better. Two thirds, roughly, of our Bibles is Old Testament, the law and the prophets, which is very much about Israel. If God, in His wisdom, has deemed it to be so, then we need closely to look at what those pages tell us and to learn from them. In the New Testament we find many references back to the Old Testament, in the gospel of Matthew and the letter to the Hebrews in particular. In the book of Galatians, though written to a non-Jewish community, we find these 2 amazing verses in chapter 3: *“And the scripture, **foreseeing** that **God** would justify the **heathen** through faith, preached before the **gospel** unto **Abraham**, saying, In you shall all nations be blessed”, and, “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the **Gentiles** through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the **promise of the Spirit** through faith”.*

All the verses are relevant, but a few words have been highlighted to help us. We have God, with His foresight, we have identified the one true eternal God in section 1; we have the heathen in one verse and the Gentiles in another, practically they are the same. We then have the gospel, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and of course Abraham. There is therefore the involvement of Abraham in the gospel to bring salvation to all nations through faith, and the coming of the Spirit of God; so, we very much need to look at Abraham and the children of Israel.

If we look at the second quoted verse first, we see God’s intention that the ‘Holy Spirit should come upon all flesh’; in other words, be made available for all people to receive. Peter quoted from the book of Joel in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, *“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh”*. (Joel was a prophet in Israel.) The coming of the Holy Spirit brings the life of God into a person, it makes him/her ‘of Christ’, ‘Christ in them’, and through new birth regenerates the person, giving them a new nature. This is how all the nations were to be blessed ‘in Abraham’, which explains to us why when God spoke those words to Abraham, He was preaching the gospel, bringing the good news of the hope of salvation for all human beings. Therefore, it is clear that the history of Abraham and his descendants is totally relevant to Christians and a foundation of our faith.

We read this in Romans chapter 4, *“Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might 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**”*. In a letter written to the Roman Christians, who were Gentiles, Abraham is described as the ‘father of us all’, that is Jews and Gentiles; he is the ‘father of faith’ being the first person who, in believing God, had that faith ‘reckoned/counted to him for righteousness’. We see from the verse in Galatians God’s intention to justify all that would believe in Him by faith; that is the way of eternal salvation, ‘it is of faith that it might be by grace’. Abraham was the first person to whom that grace was

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applied, and through his believing it was possible for there to be a line of promise and faith which would culminate in our Lord Jesus Christ being born and come to live upon the earth. God especially chose Abraham and made promises to him, and he believed those promises. Although in the account of his life in the book of Genesis we find his struggles as well as his triumphs, at the end he is described as the 'friend of God'. Through those promises Isaac was born, when Sarah was past child-bearing age. Isaac married Rebekah, who after barrenness had two sons, Esau and Jacob. The latter supplanted the former, and in a meeting with God was given a new name, Israel, and out of his 12 children the nation of Israel came into being. There is much detail in the book of Genesis, and it is worth reading if you have a Bible; we cannot go into it all here. But that is how the nation of Israel came into being.

We see that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all had their life-changing encounters with God and believed Him and His promises. We will see how Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are 'types', patterns/illustrations maybe, of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the first 2 are easier to see than the third. We learn much from God's dealing with them, perhaps most wonderfully shown with Abraham 'offering his son' on mount Moriah, showing how in God's plan He was to offer His son on a mount called Calvary thousands of years later.

We see God bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt into their land, the land which God had promised to Abraham. God wanted a special people for Himself, that was the nation of Israel, the Hebrews, the 'passed over ones', whom God had brought out of Egypt. God had declared Himself to the children of Israel as 'Jehovah', 'He that is and was and is to come'. The exodus was miraculous, again showing a 'Passover', a judgement, a deliverance illustrating how God brings Christians out of sin, seeing 'all their enemies dead beneath their feet'. God gave Israel the ten commandments and a system of sacrifices and rules, to keep them holy and healthy, to maintain their 'fellowship' with God through their individual lives and their life as a nation. The history of Israel sets out God's dealing with His people as they sinned and went away from Him, as they were restored, went into exile and then came back to their land. There are battles, some won, some lost, and the reasons behind the triumphs and the defeats. These battles can teach us much about spiritual warfare, as many of the same principles apply in both. All through the history, the prophets constantly brought the word of God to the people, and in the centre of all their words the gospel of Jesus Christ and His coming was constantly being declared, as it was at the heart of God's purposes for the world. The constant speaking of God to the people shows us God wants and needs to speak regularly into our lives. God made covenants with Israel. We have already seen the covenants/promises which God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which He constantly remembered, and He never forgot His people. By these covenants with Israel we see that God is a God of Covenant, a God who makes promises and always fulfils them. However, because of the failure of the nation of Israel, because of sin, to keep the covenant, a New Covenant was required, and the Lord Jesus came to provide that New Covenant. It is clear through the many sacrifices and prophecies that God was speaking of the future sacrifice of His Son, and the bringing in of the New Covenant which gives eternal life.

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Paul says this at the end of Ephesians chapter 2, which perhaps helps us to see the place of Israel and how God has now brought Jew and Gentile together as 'one man' and reconciled both to God in one body.

"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands.

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.

And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

In whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto an holy temple in the Lord:

In whom ye also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit"