

CHAPTER 6

THE DISPENSATION OF PROMISE (From the Call of Abraham to The Giving of the Law)

Many different nations resulted from God's judgment on the city of Babel (see the last chapter of these notes). We can read about these different nations in Genesis chapter 10 (see especially verses 5, 20, 31-32). Years passed, and then God did something very special. God chose *one man* who would be the father of a very special nation. What was his name (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:5)? _____

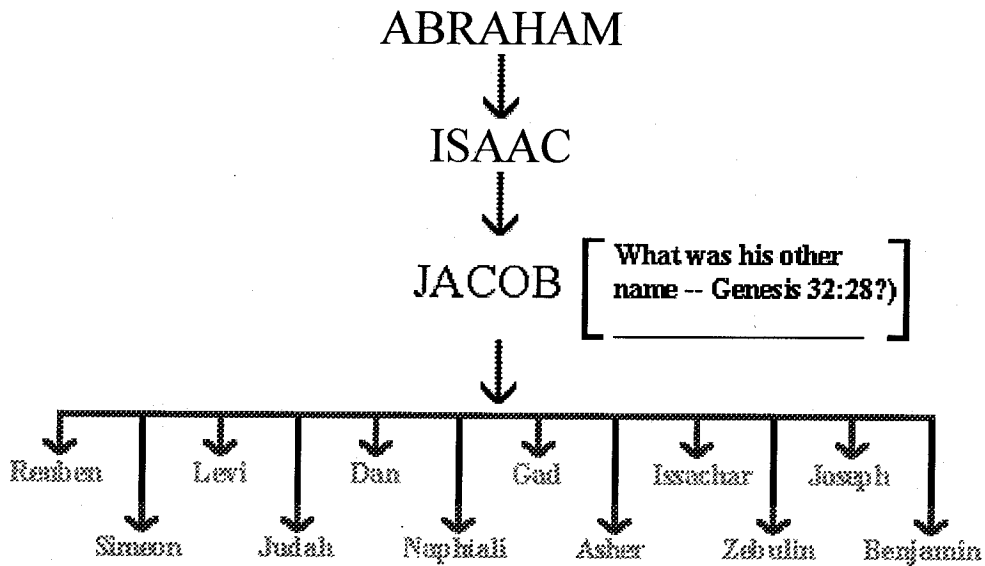
From now on God would deal in a very special way with...

ONE MAN → Abraham

ONE FAMILY → Abraham's family

ONE NATION → The nation that would come from Abraham
(ISRAEL)

Abraham's family tree can be sketched as follows:



OUT OF THESE 12 MEN CAME THE NATION ISRAEL (CHILDREN OF ISRAEL)

1. Man's State At The Beginning.

We learn about the call of Abraham in Genesis chapter 12. In Genesis 12:1 we learn that God called Abraham out of one place (away from home and family and friends) and God called him to a new place—"unto a _____ that I will show thee." This was not an easy assignment. Suppose *you* were asked to leave your home and your country and your parents and your relatives and your friends and go to a place (a strange land) where you had never been before. Would this be difficult for you?

The Bible does not tell us too much about Abraham's family, but in Joshua 24:2 we learn something about Terah who was Abraham's father (see Genesis 11:27). We learn that Terah "served _____" (see the last part of Joshua 24:2). Abraham's family did not worship and serve the one true and living God. They were IDOLATERS. They served false gods that did not even exist. Abraham's family was involved in a false religion and God called Abraham out of this. Does God want to bring people out of false religion even today (see 1 Thessalonians 1:9)? _____

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*"? _____ When a person makes a PROMISE he is giving his word that he will do something or not do something. In these verses God is giving His Word that He will do certain things for Abraham. Let's think about some of these promises:

GOD SAID...

1. **I WILL** make of thee (of Abraham) a great nation (Genesis 12:2). This would later be called THE NATION ISRAEL.
2. **I WILL** bless thee (Genesis 12:2). God's blessing would be on Abraham and on his descendants.
3. **I WILL** bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee (Genesis 12:3). This means that God would bless Israel's friends and curse Israel's enemies.
4. **IN THEE** (in Abraham) shall all families of the earth be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Out of Abraham would someday come the Saviour, Christ Jesus the Lord (see Matthew 1:1 and compare Galatians 3:16) and He would be the Saviour not just of Israel, but He would be the Saviour of the entire world (1 John 4:14).

In these two verses (Genesis 12:2-3) God actually promised Abraham four things:

- 1) A GREAT NATION (v.2).
- 2) A GREAT BLESSING (v.2).
- 3) A GREAT PROTECTION (from enemies)-(v.3).
- 4) A GREAT SAVIOUR (v.3).

Did Abraham do just what God told him to do (Genesis 12:4 and see Hebrews 11:8)? _____

Another promise that God gave to Abraham is found in Genesis 13:14-17. What did God promise to give to Abraham? _____ In Genesis

15:18 we find this very same promise repeated again. According to this verse God would give Abraham the land from the river of Egypt (THE NILE RIVER) to the river EUPHRATES. Can you locate these two rivers on a Bible map? God gave to Israel the LAND between these two rivers!

God's wonderful promises to Abraham are also found in Genesis chapter 17, verses 5-6. How many times does God say "*I WILL*" in these verses? _____ God promised that He would have a very special relationship with Abraham and Abraham's seed (descendants): "and I WILL BE _____" (see the last part of Genesis 17:8).

Did God give these same promises to Abraham's son Isaac (see Genesis 26:1-5)? _____ Did God give these same promises to Isaac's son Jacob (see Genesis 28:10-15)? _____

These three men (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) were given very special promises. God had given them His Word that He would do certain things. Men may break their promises, but God never breaks His promises. A man may not keep his word but God always keeps His Word! There is a faithful, promise-keeping God in heaven. Look up each of the following verses and complete the sentence following each verse:

1. Titus 1:2 God always keeps His promises because _____
2. Hebrews 6:18. God always keeps His promises because _____
3. Numbers 23:19. God always keeps His promises because _____
4. Joshua 23:14. God always keeps His promises because _____
5. Romans 4:21. God always keeps His promises because _____
6. Hebrews 11:11. God always keeps His promises because _____

2. Man's Responsibility.

God had put some great and precious promises into the hands of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Jacob's children. When God gives a promise man's responsibility is to BELIEVE it! When God gives a promise men must grab that promise and embrace it and hug it and firmly believe that what God said is true (see Hebrews 11:13)—GOD SAID IT, I BELIEVE IT, THAT SETTLES IT! Faith is simply taking God at His word. Faith is simply believing that God will do exactly as He said!

Abraham's faith is seen in Genesis 15:5-6. On one starry night God told Abraham to try to count the stars (verse 5). Do you think Abraham was able to do this? _____ There are countless numbers of stars in the universe. The more you look the more stars you see. The closer you look (even with big telescopes) the more stars you discover. There are so many stars that they cannot be numbered! Then God said to Abraham: "so shall thy _____ (children, descendants) be" (end of verse 5).

At this point in time Abraham did not even have one child, but God gave him this amazing promise: YOU WILL HAVE COUNTLESS NUMBERS OF CHILDREN (DESCENDANTS) JUST AS THERE ARE COUNTLESS NUMBERS OF STARS! Did Abraham BELIEVE God's promise (Genesis 15:6)? _____ God kept His promise in a wonderful way (see also the promise in Genesis 22:17). When Abraham's children went down into Egypt, the total count was only 70 (see Exodus 1:5), and you could have easily counted that number of people. Did God MULTIPLY this nation and make it great and numerous? To find the answer, read Exodus 1:7-12,20; 5:5 and compare Acts 7:17. Today there are MILLIONS of Jews (Abraham's children) in the world!

Abraham was God's example of what a person is supposed to do. We must believe God like Abraham did. All men, whether Jews or Gentiles are to believe God like Abraham. The responsibility of all men is to BELIEVE GOD and to have the faith of Abraham who was "fully _____ (convinced) that, what He (God) had _____, He was _____ also to perform" (Romans 4:21).

It was also needful *to stay* in the place of blessing. In Genesis 26:3 God told Isaac to "Sojourn (stay) in this _____, and I WILL BE WITH THEE." Isaac was also told not to go into the land of _____ (Genesis 26:2). The promised land (the land of Palestine) was the land of BLESSING. When the children of Israel came out of the promised land they usually got into trouble, such as when they were slaves in Egypt or exiles in Babylon. God had given them a very special LAND and they were to stay in this land and BELIEVE God and serve Him!

3. Man's Failure.

Abraham's Failure

Abraham was a man of faith (Genesis 15:6), but there were times in his life when he had problems believing God's promise. For example, in Genesis chapter 16 Abraham did not believe that God was able to give him a child by his wife Sarai. So instead he had a child by Sarai's maid

whose name was Hager. Instead of listening to his wife's suggestion (see verse 2), Abraham should have said something like this: "Sarai, God has promised us a child, and even though we are very old and even though we do not have a child yet, I believe that God will keep His Word! Nothing is too hard for Him!"

Later Abraham did believe God's promise (see Romans 4:20-21)! _____

Isaac's Failure

Before Esau and Jacob were born God promised that Jacob ("the younger") would be the child who would receive God's blessing (Genesis 25:21-23). But Isaac favored his other son Esau (Genesis 25:28). Which son did Isaac decide to bless (Genesis 27:1-4)? _____ God had said, "I WILL BLESS JACOB!" and Isaac contradicted God's Word and said, "I WILL BLESS ESAU!" Instead of taking God at His Word (FAITH), Isaac was contradicting God's Word (UNBELIEF). As things turned out Isaac was tricked and he actually blessed Jacob without knowing it! Finally when Isaac found out what really had happened he decided to stop contradicting God and he started agreeing with God: ". . . yea, and he (Jacob) shall be _____" (Genesis 27:33). God had said, "I WILL BLESS JACOB!" and Isaac finally agreed and said "JACOB SHALL BE BLESSED!" The man of faith agrees with God's Word and does not contradict God's Word (see Hebrews 11:20).

Jacob's Failure

Again and again God had promised to BLESS Jacob (see Genesis 28:13-15; 32:24-29; 35:9-12). But there were times when Jacob had difficulty believing that God's blessing was really upon him. Read Genesis 42:36. Jacob was now an old man. He thought that his beloved son Joseph was dead (compare Genesis 37:31-35). He thought that he might also lose his son Benjamin and he thought that he would never again see his son Simeon. Jacob cried out in despair, "ALL THESE THINGS ARE _____ ME" (Genesis 42:36). Instead of believing that God's blessing was upon him, he was acting as if God's CURSE were upon him!

Before long Jacob found out how wrong he was. God was working out His wonderful plan and Jacob would see all of his sons ALIVE, including Joseph! Instead of all things being against him, all things were really working together for his good (compare Romans 8:28). In the middle of his difficulties he should have said, "I do not understand why all of these things are happening to me, but I believe that God knows what He is doing and that God is going to bless me through it all!"

The Failure of the Sons of Jacob

Jacob had 12 sons (see the chart at the beginning of this chapter). In Genesis chapter 37 we read about a very terrible thing that 10 of these sons did to Joseph their brother. They planned to murder him (Genesis 37:20) but as things turned out they sold him into Egypt to be a slave (Genesis 37:28) and then covered up their sin by deceiving their father (Genesis 37:31-34). All of these things happened because these sons were JEALOUS over Joseph because Joseph was favored and blessed more than they were.

These 10 sons should have remembered God's PROMISE! God's PROMISE OF BLESSING was for all of the sons of Jacob, not just for Joseph. If these brothers had believed God's promise their entire attitude towards Joseph would have been different. They could have said something like this: "Even though Joseph is receiving special treatment (Genesis 37:3) we need to remember that God's blessing is for all those who are the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God is going to bless us too but we need to be patient and wait for God to do exactly as He said!"

The Unbelief of the Children of Israel

Throughout their history, the children of Israel have failed to take God at His Word and have failed to believe God's promises. Read the following passages and explain how the children of Israel failed to *believe* God:

- (1) Exodus 14:10-14
- (2) Exodus 15:23-26
- (3) Exodus 16:1-8
- (4) Exodus 17:1-7 (especially verse 7).

God had promised to bless them and meet every need that they had, but the children of Israel would not believe this.

4. God's Judgment.

When the brothers of Joseph sold him into Egypt as a slave, they did not realize that the day would come when all of their children (descendants) would also be slaves in Egypt.

Long before it ever happened God told Abraham about the Egyptian slavery. We read about this in Genesis 15:12-14. One night Abraham had a terrible nightmare (verse 12). God then explained to Abraham that his seed (descendants) would be in a land that is not theirs (EGYPT) and that they would SERVE these people and they would be AFFLICTED for how many years (Genesis 15:13)? _____ God also promised that He would JUDGE the Egyptian nation and make it possible for the children of Israel to come out of that land (Genesis 15:14).

In Genesis 46:3-4, 27 we learn about the time when Jacob and his sons went down to live in Egypt. This was during a time of severe famine which lasted for seven years. After these years of famine were over the sons of Jacob remained in Egypt and did not return to the promised land. In fact, Jacob's 12 sons all died in the land of Egypt. In Exodus chapter 1 we learn how the children of Israel became SLAVES in this land. This terrible SLAVERY can be seen by completing the following MATCHING problem:

1. _____	They were made to toil and labor so hard that their lives became bitter because of the work they were forced to do.	A. EXODUS 1:11
2. _____	They were told to make the same amount of bricks even though they were given less materials to work with.	B. EXODUS 1:14
3. _____	They were forced to build cities for Pharaoh, the King of Egypt.	C. EXODUS 5:6-19

After years of hardship and suffering, the children of Israel cried out because of their terrible slavery and _____ 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**. Read Exodus 6:6-8. Can you find the seven "*I WILL*'s found in these verses? Did God keep all of these promises? _____ 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 the book of Joshua tells about GOING IN to the promised land.

We must remember that God has never broken His word to the nation Israel and God has never gone back on His promises to them. There was once a man who was hired to CURSE the nation of Israel (see Numbers 23:7-18). His name was Balaam. This man was *unable* to curse Israel (see Numbers 23:8) and the reason is found in Numbers 23:19! God has promised certain things for the nation Israel and God cannot go back on His Word!

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. 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 _____ (Hebrews 4:2).

Think of a seed. That seed when planted in the ground can grow up into a wonderful plant and bring forth much fruit. But if that seed is kept on your kitchen table or on some other hard surface it would never do anyone any good. God's Word is like that seed. God's promises must be planted deep in our hearts and we must believe what God says. Suppose your father says, "I will put \$20.00 into your coat pocket so that you will have money to spend in town." If you do not believe this, then you could go to town and the money would do you no good, because you cannot spend something that you do not believe you have! The smart thing to do would be to believe what your father said, reach into the pocket, grab the money and USE IT! We need to take God's promises and grab them and use them!

What are you doing with these promises?

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

How are you using these promises in your daily life? Can you think of other promises that God has given you and that He wants you to believe? What promises can you find in Philippians chapter 4?

As you think about the above promises (in the list given above), which promises could you use in the following situations:

1. When I am afraid of what others might do to me?
2. When I worry about losing my salvation?
3. When I face a difficult task (something that seems too hard for me to do)?
4. When I feel all alone?
5. When I have sinned and disobeyed God?

For another study on how to claim the promises of God, see chapter 9 in the set of study notes entitled **Spiritual Life**.

The safest and smartest thing a person can do is to simply BELIEVE whatever God says! Is there any other way to please God (Hebrews 11:6)? _____

*"Faith is just believing what God said He will do!
He will never fail us, His promises are true.
If we but receive Him, His children we become (John 1:12)
Faith is just believing this wondrous thing is done!"*