

The Gospel Preached To Abraham

The Gospel before the New Testament



By Roy Knight

[Note: this article has been sourced from the Carolina Messenger. The original can be viewed at: <https://carolinamessenger.wordpress.com/2020/05/12/the-gospel-preached-to-abraham-roy-knight/>]

When one thinks of the word gospel, one often thinks of Romans 1:16 where Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation..." Others will go to where the gospel is described as the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:3-4). At the heart of the definition of the word gospel is the good news. We must realize that the good news predates the pages of the New Testament. The seed of what we will know as the gospel dwelt in the heart of God before the world began. Though not the first prophecy of a coming blessing to humanity, the good news spoken at the call of Abraham was certainly one that would ring true down through the history of the Jewish nation.

Paul wrote, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed'" (Gal. 3:8). This passage connects the gospel with the blessing that will come to all nations, not just the Jewish nation, through faith in Jesus Christ. This passage is first recorded in Genesis 12:1-3 where God speaks to Abraham and calls him away from Haran and from his father's household. God promises to make Abraham a great nation and ends with the promise that through him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

The significance of "when" Abraham is called is not lost upon the apostle Paul. At the calling of Abraham in Genesis 12, he had not yet received the sign of the covenant which did not come until Genesis 17. This is significant because Paul wrote in Romans 4:9-11: "Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also..."

Like a long string of pearls this promise is reiterated throughout the book of Genesis. Twice again the promise is spoken to Abraham after God stays Abraham's hand from

sacrificing Isaac (Gen, 18:18; 22:18). The promise is then made to Isaac (Gen. 26:4) and finally to his son Jacob as he lay in a vision at the bottom of the ladder of God (Gen. 28:14).

As God took the children of Israel aside to make them His own special people and build them into a great nation, He never forgot the promise of the blessing that would come through Abraham and his descendants. The prophets of God alluded to this blessing in their writings. Isaiah wrote, "I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles..." (42:6; cf. 60:1-3). Likewise Malachi prophesied, "'For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations,' says the Lord of hosts" (1:11). Simeon, while standing in the temple and holding the infant Jesus, prophesied by the Holy Spirit saying, "For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel" (Lk. 2:30-32).

Though speaking to Jews, Peter referred back to the blessing promised to Abraham when he said, "You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities" (Acts 3:25-26). In verse 26, the phrase "To you first" is spoken to the Jews, signifying that there will be others who would be blessed. This is a lesson he would learn for himself firsthand with the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10). Second, this verse signifies the means by which they would be blessed, which is God's "Servant Jesus." The verse also indicates the nature of the blessing: "in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." God's blessing would be greater than physical blessings of lands and riches. God's blessing would transcend this world all together.

The apostle Paul summed up his mission and the forthcoming blessing in this way: "...to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints" (Col. 1:25-26).

The gospel which was preached to Abraham was not only a message of hope for him. It was also a blessing reaching into all nations of which we share today. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ.