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THE BLESSING OF GOD TO ABRAHAM

God told Abraham to leave his country and to go to a land that He would show him (Genesis 12:1). God's blessing depended upon whether or not Abraham would go where God told him to go. We know, of course, that Abraham did go where God said. The blessing that God held out before Abraham included the following. God said to him,

“I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed
through you.”

Genesis 12:2-3

This blessing contained seven parts. God promised to do the following things for Abraham:

1. God promised to make him into a great nation.
2. He promised to bless Abraham.
3. He promised to make Abraham's name great.
4. He promised to make Abraham a blessing.
5. He promised to bless those who bless Abraham.
6. He promised to curse those who curse Abraham.
7. And He promised that all peoples on earth would be blessed through Abraham.

Abraham walked before God in obedience, for the most part. God was not willing, however, to lay such heavy blessings on Abraham until He had tested him further. So God told Abraham to take his son Isaac to the region of Moriah and sacrifice him there.

Abraham took Isaac and was preparing to sacrifice him when an angel of God stayed Abraham's hand. Because Abraham had demonstrated his willingness to obey Him, God took an oath, in which He swore,

“I will surely bless you
and make your descendant as numerous

as the stars in the sky
and as the sand on the seashore.”

Genesis 22:17a

God also added,

“Your descendants will take possession
of the cities of their enemies.
and through your offspring all nations on earth
will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

Genesis 22:17b-18

HOW MOSES DESCRIBED THE BLESSING

Many years after Abraham died, Moses elaborated on what God’s blessings on Abraham’s descendants included. Moses said,

“You will be blessed in the city
and blessed in the country.
The fruit of your womb will be blessed,
and the crops of your land
and the young of your livestock—
the calves of your herds
and the lambs of your flocks.
Your basket
and your kneading trough will be blessed.
You will be blessed when you come in
and blessed when you go out.”

Deuteronomy 28:3-6

Notice that these blessings are all mundane blessings. That is, they pertain to this life only. Notice also that the blessings were addressed exclusively to Abraham’s descendants. Moses said, “*You* will be blessed.” He spoke of “the fruit of *your* womb,” of “the crops of *your* land,” of “*your* livestock, of “*your* herds, and of “*your* flocks,” etc. So the following question arises:

DOES GOD BLESS ONLY ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS?

This is only a rhetorical question, of course, for we know that it is not true that God desires to bless only one race of people on earth. God blesses all people in many wonderful ways, and He desires to bless them even more. Before He can bless them as fully as He desires, however, He has to work certain changes in their thinking and customs. God attempts to bring about these changes through the influence of Abraham. You will recall that God said to Abraham,

“All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Genesis 12:3

HOW DID GOD INTEND TO BLESS ALL PEOPLES THROUGH ABRAHAM?

Did God intend that Abraham's example should induce faith in the hearts of others? Yes. Did God intend that the laws that He gave Moses should teach people something about justice and righteousness? Yes. Did God intend that people be brought to prayer by the beautiful psalms of David? Yes. Did God intend that the people of the world be enriched by the wonderful gifts and talents He has given to Abraham's physical descendants? Yes. All of this, God likely intended, and more.

WHAT WOULD BE THE GREATEST THING THAT THE DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM COULD DO FOR THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD?

Would not the greatest thing that the descendants of Abraham could do for the people of the world be to bestow upon them status equal to their own?

If the descendants of Abraham should be content to allow Gentiles to remain “strangers and foreigners” forever, what kind of a blessing would that be? Would that not be the same as relegating a second class status to all the people of the world? Does that sound like what God possibly had in mind when He said that Abraham would be a blessing to the peoples of the world? Could Abraham rightly be called a “father of many nations,” if he did not accept the nations into his family?

HOW DOES THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM COME TO THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD?

The blessing of Abraham comes to the peoples of the world through Abraham's matchless son, Jesus. If not through Jesus, then through whom?

If someone says, "We are still waiting for the Messiah," then it would be appropriate to ask, "What kind of a Messiah are you waiting for?" Would he not have to be a great deal like Jesus when he came? Could He possibly be better than Jesus? If He were better than Jesus, then, pray tell, in what way would he be better? Would he preach a higher message? Would he live a better life? Would he do more miracles? Would he die for the sins of the world, as Jesus did? Let's face it, we are not likely to get a better Messiah than Jesus. He is the one.

The apostle Paul said of Jesus,

"He redeemed us
in order that the blessing given to Abraham
might come to the Gentiles
through Christ Jesus,
so that by faith
we might receive the promise of the Spirit."

Galatians 3:14

From this we see that through Jesus, the blessing pronounced upon Abraham comes to the peoples of the world (Gentiles). Jesus gave Himself to redeem people (Jews and Gentiles alike) from the bondage of their sins, and without redemption there can be no real blessing.

WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR THE DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM

The apostle Peter spoke to a group of people in Jerusalem who had gathered around him, because Peter had made a lame man walk. Peter reminded the people that the prophets of the Old Testament had foretold the things that Jesus did. Peter also reminded his hearers that they were heirs of the covenant that God had made with their fathers. Peter said,

"And you are heirs of the prophets
and of the covenant God made with your fathers.
He said to Abraham,
'Through your offspring

all peoples on earth will be blessed.”

Acts 3:25

After having said this, the apostle Peter explained how God had blessed the descendants of Abraham through Jesus. He said,

“When God raised up his servant [Jesus],
he sent him first to you to bless you
by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

Acts 3:26

So Jesus came to turn to bless the descendants of Abraham by turning them from their wicked ways.

JESUS' THOUGHTS ON BLESSEDNESS

Jesus was an expert on blessedness. He had a lot to say about it, especially in what we call the “beatitudes” (Matthew 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-23).

Jesus spoke His blessings (or beatitudes) in a style that is reminiscent of the Psalms and Proverbs, yet there is a striking difference between His beatitudes and those of the Old Testament. The beatitudes in the Old Testament point mostly toward some specific, earthly fulfillment, but Jesus' beatitudes are open-ended. By that I mean, there is, literally, no earthly limit to what they imply.

For example, concerning the kingdom of heaven, Jesus said that the kingdom belongs to the “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3). Such a statement could possibly be understood as referring to the kingdom of heaven on earth (i.e. the church), but it can equally apply equally to heaven.

The blessing that Jesus pronounced upon “those who mourn” (Matthew 5:4) is similar. It says that mourners would be comforted. Mourners are frequently comforted in this life, to be sure, but full comfort will come to them only in heaven.

In the same way, while it is often true that “the meek” (Matthew 5:5) do inherit land, their greatest inheritance will be in heaven.

Those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6) will not be filled with righteous until they reach heaven.

Only in heaven will the “merciful” (Matthew 5:7) be shown infinite mercy. Only in heaven will the “pure in heart” (Matthew 5:8) actually see God. Only in heaven will “peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9) come into full possession of their title as “sons of God.” Only in heaven will those who

are “persecuted because of righteousness” (Matthew 5:10) possess the kingdom as their own.

Jesus said that when people are insulted and persecuted and when evil things are said about them falsely (Matthew 5:11-12), they should rejoice, because their reward will be great --where?--in heaven.

So the deeper one gets into the message of Jesus, the more clearly one sees that His concept of blessedness is not the same as that of the Old Testament. True blessedness, from His point of view, is not to be found on this earth. He taught that true blessedness does not come by way of a physical lineage but by hearing the word of God and doing it (Luke 11:28). On the Judgment Day blessedness will not depend on a person’s earthly parentage, but on what kind of a life he or she has lived (Matthew 25:34-40).

With such teaching, Jesus elevated people’s expectations. He did this by emphasizing the hereafter. He lifted people’s thinking from a preoccupation with temporal and material blessings to a concern for spiritual and eternal blessings.

HOW MUCH OF THIS DID ABRAHAM UNDERSTAND?

We do not know, of course, just how much Abraham understood of what would happen in the future, but Jesus said that Abraham had seen His (Jesus’) day and was glad (John 8:56). The apostle Paul said that “the gospel” was announced in advance to Abraham. Paul said,

“The Scripture foresaw
that God would justify the Gentiles by faith,
and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham:
‘All nations will be blessed through you.’”

Galatians 3:8

DOES A BLESSING ON ALL NATIONS LESSEN THE BLESSING ON ABRAHAM’S PHYSICAL FAMILY?

The answer to this is, no; not at all. If, however, the descendants of Abraham relegate the Gentiles to a status that is separate and distinct from them, and not an integral part of their family, then Gentiles’ being blessed would rival and cast a shadow on the uniqueness of the blessing on Abraham’s family.

On the other hand, if Abraham’s family takes up the Gentiles, embracing them and allowing them to be a part of their family, then the

blessing remains unique. It resides on the whole, enlarged family. The apostle Paul indicated that this is precisely what has happened. He said,

“Understand, then,
that those who believe
are children of Abraham.”

Galatians 3:7

DOES THIS REPRESENT A LOSS FOR ABRAHAM’S FAMILY?

What does Abraham’s family get out of accepting the Gentiles into the family? Do they lose their identity. No, they gain their true identity. They fulfill God’s purpose for them, and unless they fulfill God’s purpose, they will be like a branch cut off from a tree, dried up, and producing no fruit.

Some of the physical descendant of Abraham might be tempted to think, “You Gentiles are stealing our birthright! You are taking away our heritage!” No, not at all. How can the birthright of the descendants of Abraham be a blessing for all if they do not share it? How can their heritage benefit the rest of the world if they keep it for themselves?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways did God promise to bless Abraham?
2. What do you think about the test that God devised to test Abraham? Was it appropriate? Was it adequate?
3. Why do you think God chose Abraham to be the object of so many blessings?
4. Have you been blessed in anyway through Abraham? How have you been blessed through him?
5. Has Jesus been a blessing for the physical descendants of Abraham? In what ways?
6. What aspects of the gospel do you think were announced to Abraham in advance (Galatians 3:8)?

7. Do you think that your nation has been blessed through Abraham and his descendants? If so, how?
8. Do you feel that you have been blessed personally through Abraham and his descendants? If so, how?