

DISPENSATIONS

Promise

The next dispensation in our study is found in Genesis 12:1--Exodus 19, and is called "Promise" because of the promise God made to Abraham to make of him a great nation.

After God scattered the people abroad because of their attempt to build a tower to reach heaven, Nimrod (son of Ham) founded the Babylonian Empire. Once again, sin and idolatry became widespread. Therefore, God chose to separate unto Himself a family through which He might preserve a pure and undefiled religion and manifest Himself to the world. To do this, He chose Abram (descendent of Shem). Abram (whose name was later changed to Abraham) lived among idolaters. Therefore, God commanded him to leave his people and his country and go to a land that He would show him. This was the beginning of a new nation.

God's promise to Abram as given in Genesis 12:1-3 is called the Abrahamic Covenant. This covenant is a very important covenant as it relates to all prophecy of the Bible. There are seven parts to this covenant:

1. "I will make of thee a great nation"
2. "I will bless thee"
3. "And make thy name great"
4. "Thou shalt be a blessing"
5. "I will bless them that bless thee"
6. "And curse him that curseth thee"
7. "And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

As soon as Abram obeyed God by leaving his country and family as God told him to do, this covenant became unconditional. That is, the fulfillment of these promises was not conditioned upon anything Abram did or did not do. In Genesis 17, God changed his name from Abram (high father) to Abraham (father of many nations). God then confirmed the covenant to Abraham and told him it was an everlasting covenant that would be established with Abraham's son, Isaac.

However, before Isaac was born, and because Sarah, Abraham's wife, was barren, Abraham attempted to help God by first suggesting God let the steward of his house be his heir (Gen. 15:2,3). God then assured him that one that would come forth out of his own bowels would be his heir. After several more years, at Sarah's suggestion, Abraham had a son by his wife's maid. But God would not accept this son. When Abraham was 100 years old and his wife (who was barren) was 90 years old, God kept His promise and gave them a son. In Gen. 17:19, God said, "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him."

God told Abraham that He would give him all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting covenant. God also told Abraham that every manchild should be circumcised as a token of the covenant.

Isaac grew up and married Rebekah, who also was barren! But God answered Isaac's plea to Him for a child and Rebekah delivered twins, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the elder of the two, but God promised Jacob that He would establish His covenant through him. In Genesis 32:28 we see that God changed Jacob's name to Israel.

Therefore, as the years went by, Jacob had twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel.

Although the New Testament church has been blessed through the Abrahamic Covenant—especially the last part, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed,” the church has **not** replaced Israel in the fulfillment of this covenant. These promises were made to Abraham concerning the nation that would be born of him, namely Israel, and they will be fulfilled just as God has spoken.

Jacob’s eleventh son, Joseph, was favored by Jacob and, therefore, hated by his brothers. Because of this, the older brothers plotted to have Joseph sold as a slave. He was taken to Egypt where he eventually was unjustly put in prison. However, Joseph remained true to God, and God allowed him to be released from prison and exalted to a place of rulership just under Pharaoh.

A great famine took Jacob and his family (seventy in all) to Egypt where God had miraculously allowed food to be preserved. Thus, Joseph was united with his family once again.

After all of Jacob’s family died, the children of Israel remained in Egypt for 400 years, multiplying and increasing abundantly. The rulers of Egypt then became afraid that Israel would attempt to fight against them, so they began afflicting them with much persecution. This caused Israel to desire to leave Egypt and go back to their land of Canaan. Exodus 2:24 says, “And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” Therefore, God raised up Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt.

Pharaoh refused to let them go, so God sent ten national calamities—the last, being the death of the firstborn of every household who did not kill a lamb and put the blood on the doorposts of their house. Thus, the Passover was instituted (Ex. 12:13). Jesus is our Passover (I Corinthians 5:7). His blood has freed us from the terrible bondage of sin, even as the blood of the lamb freed Israel from the bondage of Egypt! This came to pass because, “God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” (Exodus 2:24)

This dispensation ended with judgment upon Egypt through the death of the firstborn in all their land, and then through the death of Pharaoh and his army in the midst of the Red Sea.