

Come to Understanding

They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24

July 14, 2009

Volume 8 Number 14

The Promise

A promise is:

1 a: a declaration that one will do or refrain from doing something specified **b:** a legally binding declaration that gives the person to whom it is made a right to expect or to claim the performance or forbearance of a specified act. -<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/promise>

The English word “promise” is translated in the Bible from the Hebrew word, “dabar,” which means “to speak.” Therefore, when God speaks His Word, He promises that He will do what He says. Paul writes of the certainty of all of the promises of God in Yahshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ):

20 For all the promises of God in him are yes, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

-2 Corinthians 2

The English word, “promise,” comes from the Latin translation of the Greek word, “epaggelia,” which literally means “before” (epi) “message” (aggelia). In other words, a promise is a message given beforehand.

The message that God gave beforehand was called by the Greeks the “eu” (good) “aggelion” (message), which is “euaggelion.” This Greek word is the basis of the modern English word, “evangelical,” meaning one who believes in the “good message.” In Middle English, a message was something that was “spilled” out. Therefore, it was called a “spill” or a “spell.” Eventually the “Good Message” became known as the “Good Spell,” which in modern English is called the “Gospel” (see *Strong's Concordance* and www.etymonline.com).

While many think the “Gospel” was first preached in the New Testament of the Bible, Paul reminds us that it was preached beforehand to Abraham!

8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel to Abraham, *saying*, In you shall all nations be blessed. -Galatians 3

That means Abraham heard the Gospel as a promise:

42 For he remembered his holy promise, *and* Abraham his servant. -Psalms 105

That Gospel was the promise that all of the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham:

2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing:

3 And I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you: and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed. -Genesis 12

Yahweh made the promise on the condition that Abraham (whose name was then Abram) leave his country, his family, and his father’s house and travel to a new land:

1 Now Yahweh had said to Abram, Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you: -Genesis 12

Abraham’s father, Terah, had already started to move his family from his homeland, Ur of the Chaldees, toward the new land, called Canaan. However, he did not venture beyond Haran. He stayed there until he died:

31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son’s son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran, and dwelt there.

32 And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran. -Genesis 11

Haran was located in what is now southeastern Turkey. It is about 700 miles north of Ur of the Chaldees, which is in what is now southern Iraq. Terah likely followed the Euphrates River to reach Haran.

Haran was part of the ancient Kingdom of Mari, the capital of which was discovered in modern Syria near the border of Iraq by French archeologists in 1933. An ongoing excavation of Mari, which is now called Tell Hariri, found documents confirming the historical existence of Abram’s family, including his brothers, Haran and Nahor, his father, Terah, and his grandfather, Serug (Werner Keller, *Bible As History*, New York, Barnes & Noble Books, 1995, pp. 59-66).

What was the attraction in Haran? Why did Terah choose to stay there until he died? There was clearly a religious connection between Ur and Haran. Ur was known as the city of light, or the moon city, and was the largest city in Shinar:

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8

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Ur was consecrated to the worship of Sin, the Babylonian moon-god. It shared this honour, however, with another city, and this city was Haran, or Harran. -*Easton's Revised Bible Dictionary*

In fact, Haran was so important to the worship of Sin that King Nabonidus of Babylon (555-539 B. C.) boasted on a clay cylinder that he had reconstructed the ancient temple of the moon-god "Sin" in Haran (Source: British Museum). In addition to moon god worship, which was dominant in Haran, the kingdom of Mari was an important center for worshipping Ishtar, the goddess of fertility, and Dagon, the fish god. Temples dedicated to these gods were found during the excavation of Mari (Keller, p. 61).

Joshua later explained to the children of Israel, after they had finally entered the land that Yahweh had promised to Abraham, why Yahweh had separated Abraham from the land of his father and brought him to Canaan. It was because, in the land on the "other side of the river," Terah was worshipping other gods!

- 2 And Joshua said to all the people, Thus says Yahweh God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the river in old times, *even* Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.
- 3 And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac. -Joshua 24

After Abraham finally arrived in the land of Canaan, he found himself in conflict. Kings from the east, including the king of Shinar, aligned themselves together and captured Abram's nephew, Lot. Abram joined up with the Amorites, who were the people from the kingdom of Mari (Watson E. Mills, ed., *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998, p. 25), and rescued Lot. Abram had entered the land of Canaan, but where was the promised blessing? Yahweh sent Melchizedek to confirm His promise to Abram:

- 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.
- 19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: -Genesis 14

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How could all the families of the earth be blessed through Abraham when, in their old age, he and his wife, Sarah still had no children? Yahweh again confirmed His promise and Abraham believed Him:

- 5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if you are able to number them: and he said to him, So shall your seed be.
- 6 And he believed in Yahweh; and he counted it to him for righteousness. -Genesis 15

Even though the promise was sure, Yahweh told Abraham, it would not be seen in his lifetime. Yahweh told him that it would not be fulfilled until after the iniquity of the Amorites was completed:

- 16 But in the fourth generation they shall come here again: for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet full. -Genesis 15

While the Amorites, like Abram, had migrated from the kingdom of Mari into the land of Canaan, they had not abandoned the gods of Mari. Their presence in Canaan delayed fulfillment of the promise.

Many years later, as Joshua was leading Israel into the Promised Land, he told them to put away those gods from the "other side of the river" and only serve Yahweh:

- 14 Now therefore fear Yahweh, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the river, and in Egypt; and serve you Yahweh. -Joshua 24

Whether they were the gods from Mari or those that the Amorites brought with them to Canaan from Mari, even having new names, they were competing with Yahweh for worship. Joshua told Israel that it was time to choose whom they would serve. He had already chosen Yahweh:

- 15 And if it seems evil to you to serve Yahweh, choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh. -Joshua 24

The blessing of Abraham cannot be given to us if we continue to worship the gods from the other side of the river. Paul concludes that the promised blessing of Abraham is given only to those who believe that it was fulfilled in Yahshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ). The blessing is received by faith:

- 14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Yahshua the Messiah; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.
- 15 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though *it is* but a man's covenant, yet *if it is* confirmed, no man annuls, or adds thereto.
- 16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He said not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to your seed, which is the Messiah. -Galatians 3

The blessing of Abraham is given to those who believe that Yahweh delivered on His promise through Yahshua (Jesus). If we believe that, we will put away other gods and will also be counted to be among the righteous.