

THE PROMISE OF A GREAT NATION (TWO)

In our last lesson we studied about the birth of **ISAAC**. He was the son of the promise that God had given to Abraham through his wife Sarah. Abraham had an older son named **ISHMAEL**, who was born to Sarah's slave girl. This son was about 13 years older than Isaac. Because of the jealousy between the two mothers, the slave girl was eventually sent away with her son. **ISHMAEL**, though not the heir of the promise, did also become the father of a great nation (You can read about this event in Genesis 16 and Genesis 21). The great nation that came from **ISHMAEL** is known today as the Arab nations. Many of them live in Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and other areas of the Middle East. **ISRAEL** (from Isaac) and the **ARAB** nations (from Ishmael), are both from Abraham. The two boys and their mothers were enemies from the beginning and the nations are still fighting 4000 years later.

The Bible focuses on the story of Abraham's descendants through Isaac. Why? Because God chose Isaac and his descendants to bring the promised Savior into the world. He gave Isaac a miraculously birth as a sign to his parents that God would be able to accomplish his wonderful promises to save mankind.

But this is the important part of our lesson!

Even though God chose Isaac and his descendants, this choice was simply the fleshly choice of what lineage would give Jesus a body of flesh. God used this fleshly lineage (later called the nation of Israel) to bring Jesus into the world but this did not mean that everyone in that lineage was saved. It also does not mean that those who are not of the lineage will not be saved.

In fact, a great majority of the nation of Israel were not faithful to God and did not believe. Therefore they did not live up to the privilege that God had given them. It was actually these people who were responsible for putting Jesus Christ on the cross 2000 years after Abraham. After Christ died, some in the Jewish nation were asking if God's promises failed, since most of the nation of Israel did not believe. Here is the answer given in the Bible:

"It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." (Romans 9:6-8)

So God's promise to Abraham was not fulfilled in the physical lineage from Abraham, but in those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Paul, one of the writers of the Bible who lived after Jesus' death explained it this way:

"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:26-29)

In the original promise to Abraham about 4000 years ago, the third part of the promise said that ALL NATIONS would be blessed through Abraham's offspring. God's promise was not limited to the nation of Israel but included all nations if they would enter a relationship with Christ. Your being a part of God's promise to Abraham does not mean you have to be from Israel. God does not care whether you are Chinese, American, or Russian. As long as your faith in Jesus Christ leads you to be baptized (immersed) into Jesus Christ, you belong to Christ and you are an heir of the promise.

The promise was not really for the nation of Israel, but pertained to one person from that nation. That one person was Jesus Christ. Listen to Paul explain again:

"The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ." (Galatians 3:16).

If you want to benefit from this great promise made by God 4000 years ago, you must be in a relationship with Jesus Christ. All of the history of Israel, from Abraham until the death of Jesus, was focused on our salvation. This salvation comes only through Jesus Christ, the descendant of Abraham, and Isaac. Studying the history from Abraham to Jesus will be a great faith builder for you.

QUESTIONS:

1. Name the two sons of Abraham.
2. Which son was the son of the promise?
3. Name the two nations or peoples that came from Abraham.
4. Why does the Bible story follow the ancestors of Isaac and not of Ishmael?
5. If you want to benefit from this wonderful promise to Abraham, who must you have a relationship with?