

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM AND CHRIST

Millenniums had passed since God gave the first promise and prophesy of a Messiah coming into the world (Gen. 3:15), and it was ten generations after the Flood, before God laid the basis for the fulfillment of the Genesis prophecy. The summons to Abram is recorded first in these words: "Now the Lord said to Abram 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you, and I will make you great nation and will bless you and make your name great; and so you will be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse. And all the families of the earth will be blessed.'" So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him...And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran" (Gen 12:1-4). Later God sealed the promise to Abraham with a covenant (Gen. 15:1-21) and when he was ninety-nine years old, God renewed the covenant with him and promised: "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you" (Gen 17:7).

There is a commentary on these verses in the New Testament that is conveniently not used many times as sermon subjects, Sunday School lessons nor discussion groups. Neither is it dealt with in any real substance by most Christian writers. These verses are explained by the Apostle Paul in these words: "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed' that is, Christ" (Gal. 3:16). Paul goes on and identifies the "seed of Abraham": "For 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, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:26-29). Note he says "if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise." Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones in *Atonement and Justification* comments on this passage by showing "the ultimate reference is to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the 'seed' and we are only the seed of Abraham by being in Christ. All the great promises that come to us, come only through our being in Him. And as we are reminded in the eighth chapter of Romans, verse 17, 'because we are children, we are therefore heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.'" We are therefore joint-heirs with Christ to the promises God made to Abraham. The promise to Abraham was not the land of Canaan because "He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground" (Acts 7:5). Although the fleshly descendants of Abraham settled the land this was not the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. It is in Romans 4:13 we are told what the promise to Abraham and his seed was: "For the promise to Abraham or his seed that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith." When Jesus said "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5), he was speaking of those who "belong to Christ, Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:29). If Abraham and his seed, those who belong to Christ, are heirs of the world, then the

common belief that the world is going to be destroyed and all Christians will be taken into heaven, cannot be true according to the Scriptures. Let's first look at the fact that the Scriptures do not teach that the world is going to be destroyed. After the flood God made this promise to Noah: "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done *while the earth remains*, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will not cease" (Gen. 8:21, 22). How long will the earth remain? Ecclesiastes 1:4: "A generation comes and a generation goes but the *earth remains forever*." Psalm 104:5: "He established the earth upon its foundations so it *will not totter forever and ever*." Psalm 115:16: "The heavens are the heavens of the Lord; but the earth He has given to the sons of men." If God's promise to Abraham was he would be heir to the world (Rom 4:13), if "the meek shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5) it doesn't seem that the earth will be destroyed. But what about II Peter 3:10, 11: "...the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" Notice verse 6 in this same chapter: "...the world at that time (time of the flood) was *destroyed* being flooded with water." The word *destroyed* in verse 11 is the same as the word *destroyed* used here. The earth will be "destroyed" in the future the same way it was "destroyed" by the flood in Noah's day. God did not annihilate the earth by the flood, neither will the earth be annihilated in the future. Rather, it will be *redeemed*. Romans 8:19-22: "The anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Not only will our bodies be redeemed (ver. 23) the creation itself is waiting for its redemption. Eric Sauer in *The King of the Earth* quotes German theologian Karl Heim as saying: "Our human attempts to penetrate the secret of the end of the world leads us therefore to two possibilities only, both of which embrace the whole entity of reality. The first possibility is the *nothingness* in which all earthly processes come to rest, the death of the universe, which is science's last word about the future of the world. A second possibility exists only if the resurrection message, which the messengers of the risen Lord have carried throughout the world, is in fact true. According to this message the world does not await nothingness, but the great transformation of the world." The Hebrew writer after saying "For he did not subject to angels the world to come (marginal note: *the inhabited earth*, the Greek text is simply the word: "*inhabited*", translated "world" in Hebrews 1:6 and Matthew 24:14) concerning which we are speaking" he then quotes nearly verbatim Psalm 8:3-6: "When I consider thy heavens, and the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou has ordained; what is man that thou doest take thought of him and the son of man, that thou doest care for him? Yet thou hast made him a little lower than the angels and doest crown him with glory and majesty! Thou doest make him to rule over the works of thy hands, thou hast put all things under his feet." Then his conclusion is: "For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do

not yet see all things subjected to him. But we see him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he might taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:8, 9). When the writer says "we do not yet see all things subjected to him" he implies that although all things are not subjected to him now, some time all things will be subjected to man, and the guarantee of this is "we see Jesus" tasting death that he might be crowned with glory and honor. Since the Christian is a "joint heir with Christ" and will be "glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17), when all things are subjected to Christ, and he rules all nations with a rod of iron: "And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron..." and "from his mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it he may smite the nations; and he will rule them with a rod of iron..." (Rev. 12:5, 19:15), then not only shall Christ reign, but Christians will reign with him: "If we endure, we shall also reign with him" (II Tim. 2:12). It is promised "he who overcomes, and who keeps my deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from my Father" (Rev. 2:26, 27). It is then that "the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come...and the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him" (Dan. 7:18, 27). God's redemption of man included the redemption of the creation, but the creation "waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19). It is then that we will see all things subjected to Christ and this will be the earth the meek and the seed of Abraham will inherit (Matt. 5:5; Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:16, 29). To Christ God had promised through the Psalmist that He would "surely give the nations as thy inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as thy possession" (Psalm 2:8). Before his birth it was promised that "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David; and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and his kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:32, 33).

That the saints will reign with Christ (II Tim. 2:12) is made certain when Paul writes to the Corinthians and censures them for not knowing this: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" (I Cor. 6:2, 3). The judges in the book of Judges were administrators and governors, and "judging" is the function of a leader and king (Psalm 2:10, NASV margin). All this means that in eternity the saints will not be floating around on a cloud with a halo on their head and a harp in their hand. Paul is telling the Corinthians to get in some practice while they are living in this present world.

What does all this say about our "going to heaven when we die"? In a recently syndicated column *In My Opinion*, written in the name of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, stated: "Jesus Christ came for one reason: to make it possible for us to go to heaven when we die. Jesus came to take us to heaven forever." Nowhere does the Bible say this. However it does tell us many times just why Jesus came. Some examples: "I came that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John

10:10). "The son of man came to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). "He appeared in order to take away sins...The son of God appeared for this purpose, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3: 5, 8). "But he said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God in other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose'" (Luke 4:43). "And he said to them, 'Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for'" (Mark 1:38).

"Heaven" in Scripture is said to be the place where the future reward of the Christian is now preserved as treasure with God, and is given, not when he dies, but when Christ returns. "Great is your reward in heaven..." (Matt. 5:12). "Behold I am coming quickly and my reward is with me..." (Rev. 22:12). "For the son of man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and will then recompense every man according to his deeds" (Matt 16:27). Heaven is never said to be the destination of the Christian neither at death or the resurrection. Does this not contradict what Jesus said in John 14:1-3 about the many mansions and the place he is preparing for us? A careful study of these verses will show there is no contradiction. The "Father's house" is nowhere in Scripture said to be heaven. Rather it is stated that the church is "the house of God" (I Tim. 3:15; Hebrews 3:6; 10:21; I Cor. 3:16). In His house are many "dwelling places," translated as "mansions" in the KJV. The same word used in verse 23 is translated "abode" or "dwelling place" and refers to the abode of the Father and Jesus in those who love him and keeps his word, not to a mansion in which the Christian dwells in heaven. In His people God has many "dwelling places" (Rev. 21:3). "I go to prepare a place for you" (ver. 2). The place he prepared is not a place for us to live after we die, but a place for us to live now. Hebrews 9:12: "and not through ('taking' RSV) the blood of goats and calves, but through ('taking' RSV) his own blood, he entered the holy place once for all having obtained eternal redemption." We now have a place prepared for us in the holy place (heaven itself Heb. 9:24). So now we can "have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us (Heb. 10:19, 20). He prepared a place for us in the presence of God. "I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am you may be there also" (ver. 3). Did he come again? What did he say in verse 23 concerning the believer? "We (the Father and I) will come to him and make our abode with him." Did he come to us? This happened on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It is by the Holy Spirit that he comes to us. This passage is not speaking of the second coming in the last day, but His coming in spirit to dwell in His body. This would have been no comfort to His grieving disciples were He speaking of an event thousands of years removed from them.

That which causes misunderstanding of this chapter is that interpreters do not read the whole chapter. Notice verse 28 and 29: "You heard that I said to you 'I go away and I will come to you.'" He told them this in verse 3. Now he says in verse 29: "And now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it comes to pass you may believe." Notice "*when it comes to pass you may believe*". How could they have believed it were to come to pass thousands of years beyond their lifetime?

The promise that God made to Abraham and his seed that he would be heir of the world is seen because "the earth He has given to the sons of men" (Psalm 115:16).