

THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISE

By the promise of the Almighty God that in the seed of Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed, He unfolded His magnificent purpose of salvation for mankind. The advent of Jesus Christ who was typified by Isaac, Abraham's son, was the most significant stepping-stone in fulfilling the Lord's purpose; and the impact of his successful mission on the people of the world – Jews and non-Jews alike – confirms the reality of the promise. Indeed the Abrahamic promise is one of the cardinal doctrines of the Holy Bible.

Abraham was a man of high reputation. God brought him into prominence and he lived up to expectation. His faith and bent towards the righteousness of God are the qualities that had made him, by God's grace, a model for all true worshippers of the Lord.

After the death of Abraham's father in Haran, God told him to go out of his own country, from his kinsmen and his father's house, to a land that He would show him. This command was backed with the promise that Abraham would be made great and blessed and that in him blessing would redound to the whole world.

Here is the Bible account:

"Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."—Gen. 12: 1-3.

In obedience to the Lord's command Abraham and his household set out of Haran on their journey to Canaan. Then he was 75 years old.

Abraham stood high in the Lord's favour. His assurance that whoever blessed Abraham was blessed and that curse would go to anyone who cursed him was an evidence of this favour. The lesson to be learnt from this divine statement is that it is dangerous not to wish well anybody who is granted to be in the good graces of God or who is blessed by Him.

It was on the strength of this knowledge that Balaam refused to curse Israel when he was hired by Balak to do so. He said: "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?"—Num. 23: 8.

One of the striking aspects of the Lord's utterance to Abraham is the auspicious promise, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed". When the angels of God were going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah they revealed their mission to Abraham because of the promise God made to him. Said one of the angels: "shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD; to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him."—Gen. 18: 17-19.

At that material time Abraham had two children – Ishmael and Isaac. Sarah – a Jewess—was the mother of Isaac; and Hagar, an Egyptian handmaid of Sarah who became Abraham's second wife, was the mother of Ishmael.

After Abraham had passed through the test of faith in which he was to offer Isaac as sacrifice, God through His angel said to him: "By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this things, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all

the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—Gen. 22: 16-18. It is noteworthy that on this occasion God made His promise not only on oath but also more explicit in that He said that it was through the SEED of Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Who this seed should be – whether Isaac or Ishmael – was not immediately stated though God had earlier indicated, as it pleased Him, His preference for Isaac over Ishmael. – Gen. 17: 19-21.

Both Isaac and Ishmael were blessed by God; but it was clear that Isaac had a greater favour from God than his brother Ishmael. After the death of Abraham it became manifest that the promised seed belonged to the family line not of Ishmael but Isaac. This is proved by the fact that God did confirm His promise to Isaac. As it is written: “And the LORD appeared unto him (Isaac) and said... I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries and I will perform the oath, which I swear unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven. And will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”—Gen. 26: 2-5.

The Abrahamic promise did not stop with Isaac but was passed on to his son Jacob. In a dream God appeared to him and said: “...I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

—Read Genesis. 28: 10-14.

Ishmael

Our Muslim friends believe that Ishmael being an elder brother to Isaac was vested with the right to inherit the promised blessing. And so in their view since Mohammed was a descendant of Ishmael he is the one people should look to for salvation. In a tract published by the Muslim Youth Wing in Warri recently it is stated: “Muhammad claimed lineal descent from Ishmael the first born of Abraham. The law of the Jews favours blessing and major inheritance to the first son of the so-called hated wife: Search your Bible book of Deut. 21: 15 to 17. Allah promised to make Ishmael great also. – Genesis 17: 20-22 Gen. 21: 17-21.

The Bible is not opposed to criticism. Therefore anybody is free to criticize the Christian Faith provided he does so without prejudice and without deliberate distortion of the truth or misrepresentation of facts.

In the first place it must be noted that the right of the firstborn son as stipulated in the Mosaic Law has nothing to do with the election of God. Aaron was the elder brother of Moses but when the time came for God to deliver the Israelites from their afflictions in Egypt it was Moses God chose to be their ruler, judge and deliverer. (Exod. 3: 7-18; Acts 7: 33-35) The anointing of David as a king and prophet—though he was the youngest of Jesse’s sons—is also a case in point. Before David was chosen, Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah and other seven sons of Jesse who were all older than he had been rejected by God. (1 Sam. 16: 1-13) In the light of the foregoing, it is therefore very wrong of our Muslim neighbours or anyone else to quote out of context, portions of the Bible on this matter of Isaac and Ishmael or any other doctrinal issue.

That Ishmael was great it must be admitted. But the fact, which is indisputable and which God Himself made abundantly clear, is that it is through the seed of Isaac all the nations of the earth including Ishmael and his descendants would be blessed. This is the unchangeable will of God. This is the truth; and no matter how much it is distorted it remains the truth.

According to the Scriptures, the promised seed through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed is none other than Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Saviour. Indeed he was born a Jew, a descendant of Abraham of the lineage of Isaac. With regard to his genealogy, St. Matthew wrote: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas (Judah) and his brethren."—Matt. 1: 1, 2; see also Luke 3: 23, 24, 33, 34.

No one who has the understanding of the Abrahamic promise will ever think of the scope of Christ's mission as limited to the Jewish race. The announcement of Christ's birth was described by an angel of God as "good tidings of great joy, which shall be to ALL PEOPLE"; and after his birth Simeon spoke of him as "a light to lighten the gentiles". —Luke 2: 10-11, 25-32.

What is more, it is written: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—John 3: 16.

"Charity begins at home" is a common saying. Jesus Christ began his work on earth from among his own people—the Jews—as purposed by God. (Rom. 15: 8; Acts 3: 25, 26) But knowing that his mission was for the benefit of the human race and having laid the foundation, he at the end of his stay on earth, after his resurrection, said to his apostles: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."—Acts 1: 8.

Moreover, he commanded them: "Go ye therefore, and TEACH ALL NATIONS, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."—Matt. 28: 19, 20

It was a matter of grace that the natural Jews were first given the opportunity to benefit from the ministry of Jesus Christ but, unfortunately, many of them did not understand or appreciate it. (Matt. 23: 37-39; Acts 13: 27-31, 46-48.) The apostles were given to understand that the promised seed of Abraham was no one else but Jesus Christ through whom life-everlasting and other blessings divine would come to mankind.

St. Peter, addressing the Jews declared: "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, and in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."—Acts 3: 25, 26.

The blessings of Jesus Christ are open to anybody in any part of the world but only on the condition that that person believes or has faith in him. Thus it is written: "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."—John 3: 17, 18, 36.

Faith

Since the advent of Jesus Christ faith and not blood relationship has become the mark by which the true children of Abraham – the Spiritual Jews – are identified. And so St. Paul, debating upon the promise of the Lord to Abraham, stated: "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."—Gal. 3: 7-9.

Furthermore, St. Paul said: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ." (Gal. 3: 16) The Jew English Bible renders the text thus: Now the promises were pronounced to Abraham and to his 'issue'. It does not say 'issues' in the plural, but in the singular, 'and to your issue'; and the

'issue' intended is Christ." This proves conclusively that Jesus Christ is the promised seed of Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

Upon Jesus Christ rests the hope of man. He is our Redeemer and Saviour. Concerning him St. Peter said: "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."—Acts 4: 11, 12.

After Jesus Christ had been resurrected by God Almighty the Father, he declared: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." (Matt. 28: 18) This power is already being used by him and he will continue to wield it until the Father's purpose will be accomplished. It is in exercise of this power he is gathering his people in all parts of the world through the gospel into his organisation so that they may be saved; it is by this unique power he will subdue satan the devil and bring iniquity to an end; and it is by the same power he will bring all things to perfection in the New Heavens and New Earth-God's Kingdom of endless peace, glory and happiness.

Jesus Christ holds a pre-eminent position among the creation of God and he is the King of God's universal and everlasting Government. Concerning him it is written: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God. The Everlasting Father. The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this,"—Isa. 9: b, 7.

Daniel who was made to see the vision of Christ's coronation in heaven, said: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before Him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."—Dan. 7: 13,14.

Jesus Christ was quite aware of the royal office he was predestined to occupy, and during his earthly ministry he did not hide his identity. He told Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, art thou a king then? Jesus answered; thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world that I should