

THE PROMISE OF A GREAT NATION (ONE) (23)

In the last lesson we studied about three promises that God made to Abraham in about 2000 B.C. (See Genesis 12:1-3). In connection with the promises, Abraham was to leave his home and head to a new land.

- 1) Abraham was promised a GREAT NATION would come from him.
- 2) He was promised a LAND for his people.
- 3) And most importantly, he was promised that ALL NATIONS would eventually be blessed through one of his descendents.

The **FIRST PROMISE** to be fulfilled was that a **GREAT NATION** would come from Abraham. At the time of the three promises, Abraham and his wife were childless and were already growing old. If they were to make decisions based on what they saw at the present time, they could not have trusted God and left their home. But they followed God by faith.

Ten years went by after the promise, and they still had no children. Abraham, being a wealthy man, had many flocks and servants. One servant had grown up in his house from a child. Abraham thought that maybe this young boy would be his heir and fulfill God's promise of a great nation (Genesis 15:2-3). But God gently assured him, "*This man will not be your heir, but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.*" (Genesis 15:4). Then God told him more details about the future.

Then the LORD said to him,

"Know for certain that YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE STRANGERS IN A COUNTRY not their own, and they will be ENSLAVED AND MISTREATED FOUR HUNDRED YEARS. But I will PUNISH THE NATION THEY SERVE as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." (Genesis 15:13-16 NIV)

God renewed his covenant with Abraham by saying, "*To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.*" (Genesis 15:18)

This chapter in Genesis gives a prophecy that came to pass several hundred years after Abraham. Abraham's descendents eventually moved to Egypt and were made slaves of the Egyptians. God later defeated the Egyptian nation by sending ten catastrophes against them and this led to the freedom of Abraham's people.

When Abraham heard these things, he "*believed in the Lord, and God counted him as a righteous man*" (Genesis 15:6). Abraham's fellowship with God was possible, not because Abraham was a perfect man, but because he trusted God. Abraham's faith is used to illustrate how we can have fellowship with God today.

A few more years went by and still Abraham and his wife (Sarah) had no children. Sarah thought she would speed up God's plan by giving her servant girl to Abraham. Her plan was that the child born to the servant girl would belong to her and Abraham. (This was a common practice in that culture, a woman who could not have children would allow a slave to bear a child for her). Abraham went along with this suggestion and a son, named Ishmael, was born to the slave girl (See Genesis 16). However, Sarah became jealous of her servant, and there was trouble between the two women.

By the time Ishmael was 13 years old, about 30 years since the 3 original promises to Abraham, God came to Abraham and Sarah another time. Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah was 89. God said, *"I will surely return to you at this time next year; and take notice, SARAH YOUR WIFE SHALL HAVE A SON."* (Genesis 18:10) The statement was so wonderful and marvelous that Sarah laughed to herself. As a result, when the child was born the child was called "laughter", or in the Hebrew language, Isaac.

So Abram was 100 years old when Isaac was born. He was the child of God's promise. He had a miraculous birth, born to a couple who were literally too old to have children. It was God's power that allowed this child to be born. The story of Abraham's trust in God can be seen in detail by reading Genesis 12-24. The following quotes are a short summary of Abraham and Sarah's story and their faith.

"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead-- since he was about a hundred years old-- and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet, he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:18-22)

QUESTIONS:

- 1) List the three promises to Abraham again.
- 2) Why would it seem impossible to Abraham that he would have a son?
- 3) Abraham once thought that God would carry out his promise of a great nation by one of his _____ becoming his heir.
- 4) God predicted to Abraham that his descendents would be _____ in a foreign land for 400 years.
- 5) How old was Abraham when Isaac was born?
- 6) Was Abraham in fellowship with God because of his perfection or his faith?