

The Seed of Promise

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THESIS

Jesus Christ *is* the Seed and the fulfillment of all of the promises made by the God of creation to Abraham and to his descendants. These promises included the Gentile nations as well.

INTRODUCTION

By all Biblical account Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. This Messiah's incarnation in Israel is the reason the world was created. In this is the reason there is history and future. He is attested to be God eternal contracted to a span and incomprehensively made Man; the highest of heavens cannot contain Him yet He was there shut up in the womb of a small virgin girl. Each generation must be taught to see Him as the eternal promise and the hope of Israel; this dare not be forgotten or Christianity will lose its grasp of history. Christ is the Seed of Abraham who was to bless the whole world and redeem a chosen people from every tribe, every tongue and every continent. Luke's Gospel, like all Gospels, is foundational to this understanding. As we examine the pages of the Gospel of Luke we will see both Jesus' description of who He was and who those around Him understood Him to be. We will reflect on Luke's Gospel through the epistles to show that Jesus Christ is the "Seed" of Abraham. We will see clearly the purpose of the preservation of a nation, and the progressive revelation of God to His people unveiled.

THE SEED'S ARRIVAL

The fact that Jesus is the Seed of Abraham must be introduced. Let us look at a Bible passage from Luke and begin to see Jesus as Israel's awaited promise. Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham...[1]

This message from Zacharias must sustain us for some time as we introduce the concept of Jesus as the Seed. This Zacharias was the father of John the Baptist, but like any faithful Jew was waiting for the coming of the promised Messiah referring to Him here as a *Horn of Salvation*. To the Jew, the coming of this Messiah was something pledged to Abraham and here Zacharias refers to it as an oath. Abraham was called out of Ur by God in about 2188 BC; that means that this oath was nearly 2,200 years in the making. It was a covenant made to the nation of Israel that began with Abraham. This covenant had various parts including land, protection and prosperity but ultimately was a universal promise of grace unto eternal life for all those who would believe as we shall see by interacting with Luke's Gospel. Zacharias makes the statement above before Jesus was born and clearly sees his son John as the promised forerunner to the day of the Messiah. To understand the majesty of the cross it is essential to see Jesus Christ as that promised Messiah foretold to Israel as Zacharias declared. The concept of Jesus being the "Seed" becomes clear in the Bible through its compound accounts. One such cogent place is found in the Apostle Paul's letter to Galatia as we shall see in a moment where Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, explains that Jesus Himself is in fact the singular "Seed" in the mind of God when He promised Abraham that through him and his seed He would bless all nations. First let us recall the declaration of God to Abraham:

"...Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." [2]

Through New Testament (NT) eyes we can see plainly that Jesus is indeed that promise's fulfillment and exactly what God had in mind all along. We know this of a fact because in Galatians Paul says, "To Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ." [3] By the post Resurrection Apostolic witness we can now see that Jesus is indeed the fulfillment of the promises made through Abraham's seed. The promise restated was that God, through the "Seed" of Abraham, would bless all nations; seed here meaning children or descendants. Jesus,

according to the flesh, is the genealogical descendant of Abraham; He was a Hebrew. This Seed (singular) or descendant is indeed to bless all nations by virtue of that fact that His single redemptive work on the cross was for the whole of humanity. Luke shows us where the Messiah told His disciples that He came to die and spread the Gospel into the whole world by their words. He tells us that Jesus died so, "...That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem"[4] As people are drawn to faith in God through the purchased grace of the cross of Jesus Christ from all over the world in every nation this promise to Abraham is ultimately, eternally and completely fulfilled. This is the Gospel, Jesus is the "Seed," and it is for the world. So, while the nation of Israel as a whole were the seeds (plural) of Abraham, we now know in the fullness of the Bible's progressive revelation that God always intended to fulfill His covenant to His chosen people through His beloved Son and not the nation of Israel as a whole. This truth in no way discards or discredits the beauty of the covenant of God with Israel; rather Israel's glory is shown by it through the faithful. We now see this today as NT believers but there is great history here that must be another facet of our study. We have established how the "Seed" who is Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in its fullness; but let us take some time to examine the relationship of Israel in light of Luke's gospel and the role that the people played as a people in the manifest glory of the "Seed" who was born of its ranks.

SIMEON'S WITNESS

Jesus of Nazareth's maternal genealogy is recorded in Luke 3:23-38 and goes all the way back to Adam the first man created by God. This genealogy seeks only to prove Christ's earthly pedigree. Jesus Himself was actually the first Apostle in the NT. He was sent with a message from His Father as He in turn sent His own out to the world to deliver His message. All men to whom God had revealed Himself to save in the Old Testament (OT) were saved by the grace to come as all men to be saved today are saved by the grace that has already come. In the second chapter of Luke we see a remarkable message from a man named Simeon who blessed his God on the eighth day of his God's earthly life, the day of Jesus' circumcision. Simeon was a devout man prepared for the coming of the messiah who the Bible says was, "...Waiting for the consolation of Israel..."[5] Simeon, we could say, was waiting for the fullness of the promises made to Israel beginning with Abraham. In praise to his God Simeon blessed the infant Jesus as

“The glory of Your people Israel.”[6] The faithful Jew in the nation of Israel indeed should see Jesus as the glory of their history. We need to examine the relationship of Israel and God to see in Luke’s Gospel why Jesus can rightly be referred to as its hope, fulfillment, glory and riches. What made Simeon look for the Messiah as he did? What caused the faithful in Israel to persevere throughout their generations? Scripture says, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.”[7] This was the case for Simeon as he was blessed to be persuaded of the promise of the Messiah and await His coming. Let us look more to Israel as a whole and how their lives before God produced a true people in anticipation of Jesus’ arrival and His Messianic role.

A UNIVERSAL VISION

God’s progressive revelation shows the NT believer that the promises fulfilled to Israel were to prepare a universal grace to people from all nations; this is the Seed’s eternal purpose. Christopher J.H. Wright in his delightful book *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament* goes to great lengths to establish the universal role of the nation of Israel as they relate to the promised blessing of all nations and the consolation of Israel. He seeks to display this in OT reflection through the fullness of the NT. Consider this excerpt:

The Old Testament...goes further in its programme for the nations than casting them in the role of spectators – even clapping spectators. Psalm 47, which is really quite breathtaking in its vista, moves the nations out of the audience in verse 1, right on to the centre of the stage in verse 9:

"God reigns over the nations;

God is seated on His holy throne.

The nobles of the nations assemble

As the people of the God of Abraham

For the kings of the earth belong to God;

He is greatly exalted," Psalm 47:8-9.

The nations before God’s throne are there, not behind the people of God, nor even just alongside them, but ‘as’ the people of the God whose promise to Abraham had them in mind from the beginning. It must have stretched the imagination of our Psalm-singing Israelite (if he had any to

be stretched, any more than our hymn-singing Christian), as to when and how the words he had just sung could ever be a reality.[8]

Luke begins to show us. If Jesus is truly the Seed promised to Abraham through his descendants, the consolation of Israel and a blessing to all nations then this scripture is all about Him as His work will bring a people group to God from all four corners of the earth. Through His death, burial and Resurrection this Psalm's glorious truth is seen clearly. Being born again in the NT and seeing the works of Jesus clearly foretold in the OT is what is meant by seeing the Bible with "NT eyes." The Psalmist may indeed have wondered how God was going to do what was spoken but Christians need not wonder anymore; they ought now only to work for and pray in expectation to see it finished at Christ's Second Advent. For every one time that the Bible mentions Jesus' first advent it mentions His second nine times; Christians should all therefore be like Simeon in waiting to see Him.

A HISTORIC VISION

Seeing the fact that Jesus is from Israel and the promise to it in history is what must be seen in order to appreciate the way that He came into the world. Wright goes on to teach us of the forward looking promise of God to Israel as he teaches us to see Jesus as a type of the historic nation of Israel collectively. There is an inherent lack of historical depth in the theology of many Christians today because they do not understand the historical roots of the Christian faith in Judaism. When they read the OT it seems to only have meaning as ascribed by the NT. While this is not altogether wrong, as the NT completes the OT, when a person learns to see the OT as a viable and glorious testament all its own that laid the foundation for Christ it engenders a beautiful depth that cannot otherwise be at hand. Wright does not want the OT to be seen as a mere prediction of the NT. He writes that we might see Israel in the OT as truly a special people, a historic group, given a glorious role to take part in God's work on earth. To know Israel's history is, as Wright would contend, a way to know the history of Christ and lend great testimony to the Messiah as their Seed in ways only producible by a sovereign God who controls all things. Consider the following as illustration of this point:

Hosea 11:1, quoted in Matthew 2:15, looked back to the exodus. Jesus has been taken to Egypt, but He will return, and so Matthew sees a correspondence with the experience of Israel itself.

Out of Egypt I called My son (meaning Israel, cf. Ex 4:22).

He is not suggesting that the Hosea text was a prediction. His point is simply that what God had done for His people Israel – in fact the greatest thing He had done for them – had its counterpart, even in a purely physical sense, in the life of Jesus.[9]

Hosea 11:1, Wright argues, is not looking forward to Jesus but is looking backward to the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt around 1450 BC; the text's meaning is therefore not solely allotted in the NT. It is in looking backward at the Exodus that we see Jesus' coming out of Egypt as something rooted both in His own earthly life *and* in the history of Israel. This is the depth of understanding gained when passages like Hosea 11:1 are taught to be seen as both historic *and* prophetic. Hosea's words do have a predictive quality, but are written to remember God's own relationship to Israel as a Father's relationship to a son. Elsewhere in the book Wright illustrates places in the scripture where God refers to the nation of Israel as a son. (Deuteronomy 1:31, 8:5.)[10] To see Jesus as the Seed promised and presented through Israel's history is why Paul refers to Him as the singular Seed among the plural seeds. There is much throughout the OT to prepare men in Israel to wait for their Messiah. Going back even further in Israel's history we see that the concept of this Seed's work is present even in the testimony of Moses, the greatest prophet of the OT. Immediately following the infiltration of sin into the world Moses records God's words in Genesis to the Devil saying, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel." [11] Most scholars agree that this is indeed a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah Jesus Himself. Through accumulated instances such as these the faithful Jew was persuaded of things to come concerning the promises made to the nation. The OT taught them to look for a sacrifice. The OT built the understanding of this so well that in the NT Gentile wise men from the east came having recognized the purpose of the coming of this sacrifice when He was but a toddler and presented gifts to Him in worship, one of which was for His burial, Matthew 2:11. Israel was a nation holy unto God for the hope of all peoples and was preserved to be so; Christians must learn to see this nation as precious in the plan of redemption. Let us now look to the sustainment of the promises made to Israel.

GOD PRESERVES THE PROMISE

It is valuable for the Christian to see the preservation of the nation of Israel itself in its entirety as a preservation of the Seed. When God promised Abraham that through his seed He

would bless all nations, He could not let that seed disappear. If there were no children of Abraham alive then indeed the promise made by God to him would be defeated. This is why the nation of Israel remained a nation even despite their history. God did this for His own name's sake as the scriptures of the OT make abundantly clear. The preservation and protection of the descendents of Abraham preserved and protected the covenant promise made from roughly 2188 BC with the call of Abram until the coming of Jesus between 4 and 6 BC. John Calvin in his monumentally brilliant work *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* spends some time discussing the preservation of the children of Abraham focusing on the fact that the NT teaches a remnant of elect children of God within Israel's numbers that God has kept for Himself and that this is the promise fulfilled.

Oh ye seed of Abraham, his servant; ye children of Jacob, his chosen" (Ps 105:6). And after an enumeration of the continual mercies of God as fruits of election, the conclusion is, that he acted thus kindly because He remembered His covenant. With this doctrine accords the song of the whole church, "They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but Thy right hand and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst favor unto them" (Ps 44:3). It is to be observed, that when the land is mentioned, it is a visible symbol of the secret election in which adoption is comprehended. To like gratitude David elsewhere exhorts the people, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people He has chosen for His own inheritance" (Ps 33:12). Samuel thus animates their hopes, "The Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake: because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people" (1 Sam 12:22).[12]

Calvin, like any great theologian, wants us to see the nation of Israel's preservation as much more than frivolous shepherding, but the actual keeping of God's covenant promises. Those covenant promises, though indeed having had many fulfillments to the OT Jewish peoples themselves, had the far reaching implications of God's promise to the nations. We can thus tie Calvin's dealings with the preservation of the descendants to Wright's teaching about the universal purpose of God's Abrahamic covenant to show that Jesus, the *horn of salvation* born and described in Luke's Gospel, is the reason Israel was chosen, prepared and preserved. As we see God zealous for preserving Israel therefore, we see that He is actually preserving the promises made as it were to His own Son. To see this preservation and marvel at its amazing complexity is to begin to see Jesus as the valued Seed. Jesus is what makes the promises of God

to His children Israel eternal. Indeed these works were finished, as were all, from the foundation of the world. Mary, the mother of Jesus, reflected on God's preserving promises to the nation of Israel when her impregnation was confirmed by that of her relative Elizabeth and her husband Zacharias, the Levite family. Mary gloried in God's safeguarded promises to Israel as she blessed the child in her womb saying, "He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers. To Abraham and to his seed forever." [13] God, to preserve the Seed Jesus as foretold and seen in Luke's Gospel, kept the nation of Israel by His own strength for His own glory. Calvin speaks of the glories of all faithful Jews in the magnificence of this truth and God's elect shepherding of all the nations by keeping Israel safe and secure from her enemies. Paul the Apostle writes in this exact notion quoting Isaiah the prophet saying, "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah." [14] If God had not preserved His true Seed through the seed of Israel then all nations would be lost, and become destroyed as Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sin. Paul knew it, Calvin knew it, Wright knows it; they wrote it so that all Christians can share in the marvelous and preserving grace of God attesting that we love Him because He first loved us. Luke's Gospel has thus far shown us several instances of a prepared nation for the coming of Christ. The three previously illuminated Lukan characters: Zacharias, Simeon and Mary have shown possession of the knowledge of the grace of God to Abraham in light of Jesus Christ. They were Israelites even as the disciples of Jesus were Israelites; these people of the seed were waiting for the Seed to whom the promises were made. We can begin to see that God has made the nation of Israel His people to preserve Christ for all generations. Though the Israelites were that chosen nation Luke, like all the Gospel writers, informs us that they were not all faithful or in love with God. Israel, as a nation, rejected the promise and was thus itself rejected. Though the Spirit of God speaks plainly we must not assume that the promises of eternal mercy were made to men just because they were born into a Jewish household.

TO WHOM THE PROMISES WERE MADE

(GOD NEVER FAILS)

Though each Jew was in a privileged position not all believed. Jesus had immense problems with some Israelites in His own day. They were not the faithful. In one place He said to

them, “This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation.”[15] How could a chosen people demonstrating the aforementioned preparedness and glory in some be manifest as evil by so many others? This topic is important for Christians of all generations to remember because we must not think that all of Israel is to be saved despite their participation in God’s worldwide plan of redemption. There is more to being a true Israelite than being born in an Israelite family just as there is more to being a true Christian than being born into a Christian family. While a Jewish heritage does obviously make a person a Hebrew by birth, the true Hebrew was one faithful to God, prepared for holiness by the law and ready to receive Christ when He came. John Reisinger in his book *Abraham’s Four Seeds* teaches about the fact that God never promised to save all of Israel simply because they were descendants of Abraham. This too is clearly seen with NT eyes. The Apostle Paul dealt with this common Jewish objection in the third chapter of the book to the Romans and Luke shows us that John the Baptist rebuked a heritage based false righteousness outright in his day.[16] Reisinger says, “At the bottom line, Paul is saying that “Not all Israel is Israel” simple means the difference between people with special privileges and people who actually possess grace...Israel definitely was in a separate physical category as God’s chosen nation, and she had special spiritual opportunities, but she was not in a special spiritual position before God.”[17]

In the NT we see that the nation itself was actually cut off from grace because of their national disobedience in Romans 11. Though this is the case, the promise of the Messiah to bless all nations as the Seed of Abraham continues; even to the Jew today for whom Christ died. Though Reisinger’s book is an examination and contrast between *Covenant Theology* and *Dispensationalism* there are many places in his presentation that serve to prove the aforementioned fact that God’s covenant, though universal through the nation of Israel, was indeed through Christ for the truly repentant and called of God alone. God never fails. This can make sense of the gross rebellion in the hearts of some Jews. Earlier we mentioned that the physical inheritance of the land to the seed of Abraham was also a fulfillment of the promises made by God. Reisinger teaches us that Luke’s Gospel actually spiritualizes many of the scriptures which, in the OT speak of land, as an inheritance of life in Christ. It is not Reisinger’s intention to obscure the promises made to the Israelites for a place to dwell, but he wishes us to see that while Luke is aware of the land promises made to Israel, he sees more in the Messiah

Jesus as the Seed to all nations, and sees the covenant as having eternal and spiritual ramifications. Consider the following:

“The promise of the physical land is just as much a part of the everlasting covenant that God made with Abraham as the promise that “I will be their God and they shall be my people.”... O descendants of Abraham... He is the LORD our God...He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit." Psalms 105:6-11, NIV.

It seems impossible to compare the above verses with texts like Luke 1:68-79 and not see that the NT scriptures use the same terms in a *spiritual* way. The physical land is without question the heart of the promise in Psalm 105:6-11, but *salvation*, or *spiritual* rest, becomes the heart of the fulfillment of the same promise in Luke 1:68-79 and other NT passages. We do not find even a hint of the physical land of Palestine in Luke’s words. He totally spiritualizes the words found in the OT scriptures.[18]

The point to draw here is that Jesus Christ indeed fulfills the covenant for Luke in his Gospel. Throughout the NT in fact Jesus is seen as not only the short term covenant promises to Israel, but the eternal commitment of God to His people ratified and finished. Reisinger makes the point well that the NT sees many of the promises made to Abraham as far more than earthly or physical. Jesus’ death and difficulty was therefore not with His chosen seed, but with those who were against Him; those who were not His sheep. The promises made were to the remnant within Israel and God has never failed to fulfill them. It is beyond the scope of this letter to begin to exegete the NT’s teaching of “In Isaac your seed shall be called,”[19] but it will suffice to say that God has indeed fulfilled His promises to Abraham though not as many had falsely hoped. God spiritually saved the faithful, not the nation as a whole; though the Seed came through them to bless all nations it was always only for God’s chosen faithful. To this nation nonetheless Messiah came. We must begin to see who Jesus is proclaimed to be in Luke’s Gospel. Who He is allows Him to say and do the things He did.

THE BI-TESTAMENTAL WITNESS

Jesus Christ claimed that He was the only eternal God become flesh. For Jesus to be seen as Messiah and that Seed which was to come there were methods by which God declared Him to be such. God the Father sometimes did this verbally as seen at Jesus' water baptism in Luke 3:22 or on the transfiguration mountain in Luke 9:35, but He also gave men many other fail safes to ensure His sheep of His voice, the physical Resurrection of Jesus being the greatest witness to this truth. The catholic church of Christ has always contended for the fact that Jesus Christ is indeed God become flesh. This is essential Christian doctrine. If a person has this wrong they are not Christian in the least and cannot understand the full revelation of the promises made to Abraham. Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder compiled a great many resources from the history of the faith in a book entitled *Documents of the Christian Church*. This book is used here simply to show the historic Christian affirmation of the Deity of Jesus Christ. Bettenson and Maunder record the Nicene Creed of 325 AD which states, "We believe...In one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God..."[20] This is what all Christians believe without exception. There are many OT scriptures that paint a picture of the Messiah as God, and the NT Gospels show us Jesus as God and the one for whom Israel was arranged. The OT worked to prepare a people ready for Jesus and the NT works to explain who He is and His demands for the world. We will briefly examine how Luke shows us where Jesus fulfilled just three of those OT scriptures by His life to prove His Messianic role. Jesus was attested by miraculous signs and wonders; on one such occasion he cured a man who was born crippled while pronouncing him forgiven of his sins. The people watching responded in various ways. Let us examine a question that the Pharisees posed in opposition to Jesus that day: They asked, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"[21] If Jesus was not God these men would be correct and He would be a blasphemer worthy of death according to the Law of Moses, however, if He is God then He has the power to forgive sins as He went on to declare that "...The Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins."[22] How does this identify Christ and relate to the Seed's promise from the OT? Isaiah the prophet told Israel that there would be a child born that would be called God. This was claimed and fulfilled by Jesus during His life in one sense by forgiving sins. Here was the oracle: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."[23] The forgiveness

of sins is unquestionably the sole prerogative of God. Regarding all things Luke tells us that after Jesus' Resurrection He told His disciples, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." [24] In significant measure we can therefore see Jesus performing the OT role of the Messiah. He came to be understood as the Son of God and one who could in fact be called everlasting Father as He is a member of the Godhead itself. Let us look at another example of Christ as identified in the OT scriptures and how we come to know this Seed as God. In Acts 2 Peter the Apostle cites Psalm 16 as referring to Jesus while attributing the Psalm to King David. Peter quotes, "For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." [25] Later this same Peter, like all Christians, affirms the Deity of Jesus speaking of his salvation in, "...The righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ." [26] Putting this together it becomes inescapable that Jesus is therefore the man spoken of by David in the Psalms who is in fact both the God and Savior of Peter the Apostle. We have examined a text from a major prophet and a Psalmist; let us now look to a text from a minor prophet. The OT prophet Micah told us that this eternally existent Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the City of David. [27] Luke explains to us some of the circumstances of Jesus' birth in that city Luke 2:1-7. We see the fulfillment hence of the promise of the Seed made to Israel demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ in a way impossible to mimic or imitate. To see Jesus as God's Son, part of the Holy Trinity makes the promises to Abraham and the blessing to all nations truly something to tremble at. Luke labors to produce this knowledge in his readers from the life of his God and Savior Jesus Christ who was born in Bethlehem, attested to be God by mighty deeds and rose again from the dead accomplishing everything he knew to be true in accordance with the prophets of Israel. The OT sets up the scene and Christ filled the role as only He could. These immensely powerful Gospel truths presented by Luke show the promise of God in the Seed who is the Messiah. Now that we have seen the promise itself and who it was that actually brought it to pass we will focus on God's progressive revelation to His church. Post Resurrection God began to show His own in Israel the means of the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham for all peoples.

THE SEED TO ALL NATIONS

In Acts chapter 15 we see a decree sent out from the Jerusalem Church to all of their converts assuring them of NT grace against the corruption of some false teachings of their day and declaring the separation between Christ's Gospel and the Law of Moses as a means of justification. It is after this point that history and the Bible's pages show a sharp rise of persecution against the followers of Jesus. Christianity, after this formal division from Judaism, became a *Religio Illicita* (An illegal religion) in the eyes of the Roman Empire. This was not the only cause for the difficulty faced by the early Christians, but marked the beginning of them in many ways. As we have stated numerous times the promises made to Abraham were for the entire world. We quoted Psalm 47 in Wright's book proclaiming the involvement of all the nations before God. We noted the words of Jesus post Calvary that this Gospel was to be preached first in Jerusalem and then into all nations. Despite this teaching, many Jews in the days of the Apostolic Church could not see this clearly; in fact, even the disciples of Jesus did not see this clearly. The Gospel began to spread beyond Jerusalem. Paul called and proved himself to be the "Apostle to the Gentiles." [28] Peter the Apostle too went to others not of Israel. In Acts 10 Peter went into the house of Gentiles and witnessed God's miracle conversion of their hearts to Christ. This event caused Peter no shortage of rebuke from his Jewish counterparts soon after as we see in Acts 11:1-18. The assembly to whom Peter recounted his activities appeared to eventually agree with what Peter had witnessed, but they expressed animosity towards it at the outset. This unexpected Gentile inclusion into the Gospel is summarized well in verse 18 expressing the group's seemingly stunned reaction exclaiming "...Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life." [29] This is not a large issue to Christians in the 21st Century, but to the first century Jewish man who had been a member of the solely chosen nation on earth this was a matter to be contended with and explained. What we see in the Bible is that God's universal plan promised through Abraham was also for the Gentiles. Earlier we quoted Jesus post Resurrection saying "...That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." This had indeed begun in Jerusalem and was now, as commanded, beginning to go out into the other nations. God was now revealing the Seed's universal objective to bless all nations. Justo Gonzalez in his book *The Story of Christianity* speaks of the difficulties that arose in the Apostolic Church as the people of God's choosing began to go to the Gentiles. Consider this:

“The earliest Christians did not consider themselves followers of a new religion. All their lives they had been Jews, and they still were. This was true of Peter and the twelve, of the seven, and of Paul. Their faith was not a denial of Judaism, but was rather the conviction that the Messianic age had finally arrived. Paul would say that he was persecuted “because of the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20). The earliest Christians did not reject Judaism, but were convinced that their faith was the fulfillment of the age-long expectation of a Messiah.” [30]

Quickly note that just as Paul in Acts 28 speaks of a “Hope” to Israel, Luke tells us that Zacharias and Mary likewise revealed in a “Promised mercy” or remembrance of “His mercy” as they praised their participation in His plan to Israel as noted earlier. The Apostles now, by the Holy Spirit, began to see the universal plan of Jesus’ Gospel throughout the OT and began to see Christ throughout its pages. This universal goal of redemption was present for them now in the Gospel. Luke shows us that it was promised to Abraham through a Seed of his descendants, performed by Christ and being preached by the Apostles fulfilling Psalm 47 as John the Baptist assured the world that through Christ “All flesh shall see the salvation of God.”[31] Luke, like the others, begins to see the glory of Jesus for all nations, not just for the seed of Abraham. All of Christianity is based around an immutable counsel of God to fulfill, *for His own glory*, the promises made to Abraham and to his Seed. Luke’s Gospel shows us how Jesus (who is that Seed) gloried in this perfect counsel and said “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.”[32] Luke’s Gospel, like all the Gospel writers, shows us the intertwined glories revealed by The Holy Spirit through NT eyes. We must look to Jesus to see these truths unfold.

JESUS FULFILLS ALL

Jesus is the key to unlocking all things Biblical. We must see Jesus as a teacher with all eternal things in mind while He taught. Indeed there have been movies and books that show Jesus as one not certain of His status in the heavens, but this cannot be so. Jesus Christ knew who He was, what He came to do, for whom He came to do it and that it was all for the glory of His Father in heaven. Luke’s Gospel shows us an eternally minded Jesus fully dedicated to the work He came to perform. In Luke chapter four we see Jesus preaching in Nazareth, the city in

which He spent His youth as Luke tells us in 2:39-40. Jesus is now a man and is before those who knew Him as a youth. Jesus enters the town synagogue and reads the following: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD...”[33] He then sat down as a Rabbi would and told all those present that this scripture was fulfilled by Him. This, in all its far reaching implications, is the message of this letter. Those in the synagogue wanted to kill Him because they knew this scripture to be a foreshadowing of the Messiah Himself, something they rejected in Him. Jesus knew that their vehement opposition would come yet spoke as He did anyway. David Guzik the Bible commentator remarks on the statements of Christ here in the following manner: “In this, Jesus answers two questions: "Who did Isaiah write of?" Jesus answered that question, "Isaiah wrote of Me." "When will this come to pass?" Jesus answered that question, "Isaiah wrote of now.”[34] Jesus is the fulfillment of all; He is the key to all things. In these words from Luke we see the Messiah clearly identifying Himself through the OT. Matthew Henry writes:

Here is Christ’s application of this text to himself (v. 21): When he had read it, he rolled up the book, and gave it again to the minister, or clerk, that attended, and sat down, according to the custom of the Jewish teachers; he sat daily in the temple, teaching, Mt. 26:55. Now he began his discourse thus, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. This, which Isaiah wrote by way of prophecy, I have now read to you by way of history.” It now began to be fulfilled in Christ’s entrance upon his public ministry; *now*, in the report they heard of his preaching and miracles in other places; *now*, in his preaching to them in their own synagogue... This was enough to introduce a great deal: *This day is this scripture fulfilled*. Note, [1.] All the scriptures of the Old Testament that were to be fulfilled in the Messiah had their full accomplishment in the Lord Jesus, which abundantly proves that this was *he that should come*. [2.] In the providences of God, it is fit to observe the *fulfilling of the scriptures*. The works of God are the accomplishment not only of his secret word, but of his word revealed; and it will help us to understand both the scriptures and the providences of God to compare them one with another.[35]

Both of the Bible Commentators above point to the fact stated that Jesus is the key to understanding all things regarding the nation of Israel and the covenant made to their fathers. He spoke it as He knew it to be. These two commentators are writing with NT eyes and they see Jesus as the consummation of all things to Israel. Matthew Henry rightly states that “All the scriptures of the Old Testament that were to be fulfilled in the Messiah had their full accomplishment in the Lord Jesus, which abundantly proves that this was he that should come.” One book reviewer while reviewing R.W.L. Moberly’s book *A Study of Abraham and Jesus* comments on Moberly’s taught need to see Jesus as the interpretive motif of the Bible. He centered on Jesus’ discussion with His disciples on the road to Emmaus saying: “...Christ’s elucidation of Scripture on the road to Emmaus [is] as a key to the Christian interpretation of Scripture. The claim to read Israel’s scriptures as the Old Testament of the Christian Bible depends upon a commitment to the challenge of reading them in the light of Christ.”[36] This is what it means to read the Bible with NT eyes. To this all Christians confirm the genius and beauty of the God’s word. In Luke 4 we see Jesus exactly as He wished us to see Him.

EXTERNAL SUMMARY

Let us now move to a summation of these great and awesome things. Max Wilcox confirms the facts that the NT (specifically Luke’s Gospel) seeks to accomplish in our understanding the clear and defining overlap in the relations of Christ, the nation of Israel and the promises made to Abraham in His day. Consider the following:

The promises made to Abraham in Gen. xii-xxii are behind a good deal of NT thought. In particular the promise of 'seed' or 'offspring' plays an important part in the Lukan writings, certain of the Pauline letters and the Letter to the Hebrews. Echoes of it also appear in Revelation 1. In Luke and Paul the seed is identified as the Messiah and thus as Jesus; perhaps the most striking case of this is Gal. iii. 16, 'and the seed was Christ'. This 'individual' and indeed 'messianic' interpretation of the term 'seed' is all the more interesting in view of the fact that at other points in the same group of writings the expression 'the seed of Abraham' (το σπέρμα Αβραάμ) is clearly taken as a collective, referring to 'Israel' (thus, e.g., Rom. xi. 1; 2 Cor. xi. 22, etc.). There appear, then, to be two quite distinct types of

exegesis of the term το σπέρμα Αβρααμ (and presumably also of the underlying promise-sayings in Genesis and elsewhere): (i) a collective form, referring to the people of Israel as a whole, whether actual or ideal, and equivalent to 'the descendants of Abraham'², and (ii) an individual form, originally designating Isaac, but further identified with the Messiah and hence - in its Christianized variant - with Jesus. In that latter type, as found in the NT, the intention is clearly to argue that Jesus, as Messiah, is the one in whom God has at long last made a reality of the promises to Abraham (and indeed to the 'fathers generally'); or to put it another way, Jesus is the one of whom God-spoke when he made the promise to Abraham. This is...the 'real' meaning behind the words of the Scripture.[37]

There is a historicity and richness to the promises made to Abraham that are seen in Israel and we should seek to understand the richness of the OT in these ways, however, there is under it all and over it all a much more glorious work in the life of Christ. Jesus Christ is the center of the message. It is as if God made the promise straight within the Trinity. The glory of this is seen in that at the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Christian delights in God honoring God. God has shown us His redemptive plan for the world by the life, death and Resurrection of His beloved Son. Those who repent of their sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone will have their sin debt paid and can leave the courtroom of the judgment of God because the Law is satisfied by Christ's propitiation. We see Israel as a nation or seed through whom the promises came and we see Christ as a Seed to whom the promises were made. God never fails and His redemptive purposes were fulfilled exactly as the fullness of Bible declaration explains. This is history, this is future and this is eternally the deposit of the Christian faith.

SUMMARY

The Bible as a whole is a progressive revelation. Luke seeks to bring us a magnificent revelation of God's promises fulfilled to Abraham. He shows us a people prepared by faith and a Messiah worthy of the title Everlasting Father. Along with recording the words and events of Jesus Christ's ministry itself he brings us the confessions of others around Jesus. These faithful Jews were prepared for their Messiah by the law and the prophets. The preparatory resulting universal declaration that we see in Simeon, Zacharias, the Psalmist, and the disciples was that

“...The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”[38]This law was given to Abraham’s descendants to show them the glory of the grace of God in God’s Seed to come. This is the cry of Israel in their Messiah under the Law and it is the cry of every Christian today. Every Jew was saved looking forward to the coming of the Messiah as every Christian today is saved by looking back. In Jesus as Abraham’s Seed “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”[39] To understand Luke is to understand the OT in light of the NT. It is to understand the role of Israel, the promises of God to its descendants, the value of the Seed by His very nature and the only means by which men can escape the just punishment of God in hell for their violations of His commandments. The promises made to Abraham were only made in light of the cross. Christians then conclude the validity, depth and splendor of the promises made to Abraham so long ago by God through NT eyes as “The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”[40]

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FOOTNOTES

[1] Holy Bible, *New King James Version (NKJV)*, Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1982. Luke 1:67-73.

Zacharias' prophecy represents the heart cry of many in 1st Century Judaism.

[2] Ibid. Genesis 12:1-3. When God called Abraham he was told to go to the land of modern day Israel roughly 650 miles west of where he lived. He received a free grace and became the father of Judaism and eventually Christianity.

[3] Ibid. Galatians 3:16. The Apostles unanimously taught Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of all the promises made to Israel here referring to Him directly as the true and total fulfillment of the oath. The fullness of God's progressive revelation in the Bible shows us the fact that Israel as a whole could not keep the Law of Moses to the standard that God demanded, but this Seed Jesus would keep it and fulfill it where they failed.

[4] Ibid. Luke 24:47. Sometimes referred to as "The Great Commission," this statement became a mandate for the early Christians as well as believers in every generation.

[5] Ibid. Luke 2:25. The consolation mirrors consummation here and refers to the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. Many Jews saw this fulfillment as much more earthly and less spiritual than Jesus and the Apostles preached. Jesus said repeatedly that His kingdom was not of this world.

[6] Ibid. Luke 2:32. Jesus Christ, in the eyes of the faithful Jew, represented the crown of the promise and the highest glory to God as He represented all of God's mercy and grace throughout their generations.

[7] Ibid. Psalm 19:7. The Law prepared the Jew for grace by showing him his utter incapability to keep it. God's holiness was feared and shown awesome to Israel and made them seek His mercy alone thus making the simple wise.

[8] Christopher J.H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 49.

[9] Ibid. Pg. 61. Wright argues that Christians often miss the depth of the relationship of God to His people Israel and then as a consequence miss the depth of Christ by failing to recognize the historicity and sovereignty of the God of such prophecies.

[10] Ibid. Pg. 120. Wright seeks to show God's references to the collective nation of Israel as His son.

[11] (NKJV) Genesis 3:15.

[12] John Calvin. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 2008), 611.

[13] NKJV, Luke 1:54-55. Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus here extols her God and acknowledges His faithfulness to keep His eternal promises. This section of scripture is often referred to as the "*Magnificat*" from its Latin translation.

[14] Ibid. Romans 9:29. Here Paul the Apostle Echoes the OT prophet acknowledging God's preserving grace over Israel.

[15] Ibid. Luke 11:29. Luke's Gospel shows us the difficulties Jesus faced as He was presented to the nation of Israel and His subsequent rejection by those to whom He was sent.

[16] Ibid. Luke 3:8. John spoke clearly of those who trusted in their Jewish bloodline yet excused their sin.

[17] John G. Reisinger. *Abraham's Four Seeds. A Biblical Examination of the Presuppositions of Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism.* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 1998), 78-79.

[18] Ibid. Pg. 91. Reisinger seeks to explain that while the land promises contained within the covenant to Israel by God were fulfilled, Luke and the other NT writers see a much larger theme being fulfilled in Messiah; the deliverance from the penalty of sin.

[19] NKJV, Romans 9:7. The promises made were made to the faithful elect, not the collective seed of Abraham's descendants.

[20] Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church, New Ed.* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27.

[21] NKJV, Luke 5:21. The Jewish objection noted here by Luke was predicated on false pretense. Since Jesus was God He had all authority on earth to forgive sins.

[22] Ibid. Luke 5:24.

[23] Ibid. Isaiah 9:6. Only Jesus of Nazareth sustained such claims proving Him to indeed be the promised Messiah.

[24] Ibid. Luke 24:44.

[25] Ibid. Acts 2:27.

[26] Ibid. 2 Peter 1:1. A clear reference to Jesus as Deity.

[27] Ibid. Micah 5:2. Jesus' birth in the city of Bethlehem portrays Him as that Seed prepared by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as He fulfilled the OT scriptures even at His birth.

[28] Ibid. Romans 11:13. Paul's primary work was to people not of Jewish descent.

[29] Ibid. Acts 11:18. This statement represents the understanding of at least some in the group to whom Peter was speaking. The Apostles and early Christians were now seeing God's plan to include the Gentiles with the nation of Israel into salvation.

[30] Justo L. Gonzalez. *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation.* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1984), 20.

[31] NKJV, Luke 3:6. This "all" means all throughout the world.

[32] Ibid. Luke 10:21.

[33] Ibid. Isaiah 61:1-2. This was a partial reading from the text as the whole text itself represented two very separate dispensations of time, one of which Messiah was not yet to

perform namely “The Day of vengeance.” Jesus’ First Advent was to proclaim the Gospel; His Second Advent will be the judgment of the world.

[34] David Guzik. “*Bible Commentary, Study Guide for Luke 4*”. *www.Blueletterbible.org*.

Sowing Circle, (July 31st, 2008). <[http://www.blueletterbible.org/cgi-](http://www.blueletterbible.org/cgi-bin/comm_read.pl?book=Luk&chapter=4&verse=21&Comm=Comm%2F david_guzik%2Fsg%2FLuk_4.html%230%26*David+Guzik%26&Select.x=16&Select.y=6)

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[35] Matthew Henry, “*Commentary on Luke 4*”. *www.Blueletterbible.org*. Sowing Circle, (July 25th, 2008). <[http://www.blueletterbible.org/cgi-](http://www.blueletterbible.org/cgi-bin/comm_read.pl?book=Luk&chapter=4&verse=21&Comm=Comm%2Fmhc%2FLuk%2FLuk004.html%2320%26Matthew%26Henry&Select.x=25&Select.y=10)

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[36] Markus Bockmuehl, “Modern Theology”, 18 no 3 JI (2002), 411.

[37] Max Wilcox, “The promise of the "seed" in the New Testament and the Targumin.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no 50, (1979), 2-3.

[38] NKJV, Galatians 3:24. The law given to Israel placed the nation at a distinct advantage in knowing God’s righteousness above the Gentile nations, but ultimately its greatest function was to show the faithful the need for the Messiah and His atoning work on the cross of Calvary.

[39] Ibid. Colossians 2:3. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, the more a person comes to know Christ the more he comes to know the manifold fullness of the wisdom of God.

[40] Ibid. Colossians 1:26-27. This speaks of the fully revealed counsel of God’s progressive revelation and its completion in this world through His incarnation.