

Lesson 17

The Beginning

In this lesson we will begin a survey of the Bible. We will begin in the first book in the Bible (Genesis) and work our way toward the last book in the Bible (Revelation).

The first verse in the Bible is: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Notice that it does not say that God created the *universe*, though that is certainly true. Instead we read that God created the *heaven* and the *earth*. This is significant because God has an eternal plan for the heaven and an eternal plan for the earth. The rest of the Bible gives us the details of God's plan for heaven and earth.

The First Commission

The Bible begins by telling us about God's plan for *the earth*. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26). Satan led a rebellion against God on the earth. God charged man with the responsibility to "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it . . ." (Genesis 1:28). This was the first commission that God gave to man. It was a great commission since it was given by God and encompassed the entire earth.

Chapter three of Genesis records the failure of Adam and Eve to obey the commission they were given. The woman "took of the fruit" and "gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Genesis 3:6). This is when sin and death entered into the world (Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 5:12). The first murder soon followed as Cain killed Abel (chapter 4). The population on earth increased rapidly, but so did the wickedness. Finally, God sent a flood in the days of Noah and destroyed all people except Noah and seven of his relatives (Genesis 6-8). When Noah stepped out of the ark that had kept him safe, God gave him a commission: "And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 9:1). This is very similar to the commission given earlier to Adam. It involved subduing and renewing the earth.

The Tower of Babel

Some years after the flood mankind united in rebellion against God. God had given them a commission to fill the earth. However, they had different plans: "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). A *tower* is significant in the Bible because it is associated with worship.¹ Mankind decided to unite and form their own religion and government. This was a clear rejection of the true worship of God and submission to His rule over them.

¹ Psalm 18:2; 61:1-3; 144:1-2; Proverbs 18:10

Man's rebellion resulted in God's judgment upon them. "So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city" (Genesis 11:8). Romans 1:18-32 gives a doctrinal explanation of the events in Genesis 11. When mankind "knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:21). God "gave them up to uncleanness"; "gave them up unto vile affections"; "gave them over to a reprobate mind" (Romans 1:24,26,28). Mankind fell out of a position of God's blessing and was given over to their own lusts.

The Covenant With Abraham

God gave up the Gentiles in Genesis 11 as we have seen. However, His eternal plan had not changed. In chapter 12 He chose one man, Abraham, through whom He would carry out His purpose on the earth. God made a covenant with Abraham. "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" (Genesis 12:1-3). Notice that God promised Abraham a *land* and a *nation*.

Abraham was told that God would give to him and his descendants "all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Read Genesis 13:14-18). It is vital to understand that God's promise to Abraham was literal. God promised him land on this earth that he could *see*. The nation that God promised to Abraham was later known as the nation of Israel. Abraham and his descendants were to be blessed by God in a special way. God would then use them to bless "all families of the earth." This was the beginning of the dispensation of promise (Galatians 3:17).

The Covenant With David

Later God made a covenant with David. This covenant built upon the foundational covenant made with Abraham. David was a descendant of Abraham and was therefore included in God's covenant with Abraham. God's covenant with David is recorded in II Samuel 7:12-16. "He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (verse 13). "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (verse 16). David was promised a *king* and a *kingdom*. David was the king of Israel and God promised him that one of his descendants would be a *king* on his throne forever. Thus, the *kingdom* in Israel would be an everlasting kingdom.

Again, it is vital to understand that the kingdom God promised to David was a physical kingdom. There are some who teach that God promised David a spiritual kingdom. A careful reading of the Old Testament makes it evident that David sat on a physical throne in Jerusalem and ruled over a physical kingdom. Clearly David understood God's promise to be about a physical kingdom centered in Jerusalem.

There is another wrong teaching that we must mention here. Some teach that God made a promise of a physical kingdom, as mentioned above, but then withdrew this promise when Israel crucified Jesus Christ. We will study this further in the lessons about the New Testament. However, we will now show that this teaching is false. Psalm 89 deals with the covenant made with David: "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah. " (verse 3-4). God promises that His covenant "shall stand fast" and "his throne as the days of heaven" (verses 28-29).

And what if Israel disobeys God? This is addressed in the following verses. "If his children forsake my law . . . and keep not my commandments" (verses 30-31). Will God break His covenant with David? "Then will I visit their transgression with the rod . . . Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him . . . My covenant will I not break" (verses 32-34). God's faithfulness is further stated: ". . . I will not lie unto David . . . His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah." (verses 35-37).

In our next lesson we will learn more about the *land* promised to Abraham and the *kingdom* promised to David.

Review Questions

True or False

1. Genesis is the first book in the Bible.
2. The book of Genesis is primarily about God's plan for the heaven.
3. Genesis 11 tells about how mankind worshiped and glorified God.
4. God chose the Gentiles to be His people in Genesis 11.

Multiple Choice

5. God made a covenant with:
 - a) Abraham and David
 - b) Isaiah and Abraham
 - c) Abel and David
 - d) Daniel and Jeremiah
6. God's promise to David:
 - a) concerned a spiritual kingdom
 - b) was canceled when Israel crucified Jesus Christ
 - c) was a physical kingdom that would endure forever

d) was a kingdom in heaven

7. The first verse in the Bible says that God created:

- a) the universe
- b) the heaven and the earth
- c) light and darkness
- d) plants and animals

Fill in the Blanks

8. Chapter three of Genesis tells about the failure of ___ and ___ to obey God.

9. Chapter one of the book of ___ explains that God gave up the Gentiles.

10. God promised that He would give Abraham all the ___ that Abraham could see.

For Further Study

1. Read Jeremiah 23:5. Where will the kingdom promised to David be located?

2. How does Genesis 15:18-21 confirm that God's promise of land to Abraham is to be taken literally?

3. List at least three promises that God made to Abraham in Genesis 17:1-8.

4. What do you learn in Isaiah 9:6-7 about the kingdom promised to David?

5. How long are the covenants to Abraham and David valid? (Read Genesis 17:7; Psalm 105:9-10; II Samuel 23:5; Ezekiel 37:25).

Lesson 18

The Kingdom and the Old Testament

In the previous lesson we learned that God promised an everlasting *land* and *nation* to Abraham. We also learned that David was promised an everlasting *king* and *kingdom*. The Old Testament prophets give great detail about this promised kingdom. We will now learn more about the nature and characteristics of this kingdom.

Peace and Righteousness

"And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Read Isaiah 2:1-4). The kingdom will be a kingdom of *peace*. Nations will no longer learn how to make war.

". . . and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor . . . And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins . . ." (Read Isaiah 11:3-5). Unlike judges currently on earth, the king will not be limited to judging according to what he hears and sees. He will judge with perfect righteousness. No clever lawyer will be able to fool him. It will be a kingdom of *righteousness*.

Curse Removed from Animal and Plant Creation

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb . . . and the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together . . . And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp . . ." (Read Isaiah 11:6-9). In the original creation, man and animal were at peace and the animal kingdom was at peace with itself. Only later did animals start to eat one another and a fear arose between man and animal (See Genesis 1:29; 9:2-3). In the kingdom this curse will be removed. The wolf and lamb will live together and the wolf will not eat the lamb. The cow and the bear with their young will live together and the bear will not harm the cow. A small child will play near the den of a poisonous snake and not be hurt. *Animal creation will be tamed.*

". . . for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). Since Adam's sin, the earth has never been full of the knowledge of the Lord. Most people ignore and reject God's Word. Clearly this verse describes a kingdom that has not yet existed on earth. When the kingdom comes *the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.*

". . . the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly . . ." (Read Isaiah 35). The curse on the plant creation will also be removed (Genesis 3:18). Farmers and gardeners will no longer struggle with drought, weeds, insects, etc. The harvest will be plentiful. *The plant creation will also be tamed.*

Physical Healing

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing . . ." (Read Isaiah 35). The physical disabilities and ailments that men suffer with today will be healed. This curse also will be removed. [Notice that this healing is not promised until Christ, the King, returns. ". . . your God will come with vengeance . . . Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened" (verses 4-6).] *There will be physical healing in the kingdom.*

"There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" (Read Isaiah 65:19-25). *The human life span will be greatly lengthened.* Someone

who dies at the age of one hundred will still be considered a child. The only reason for death prior to one hundred years of age will be because of judgment upon sin.

A Physical, Eternal Kingdom on Earth

Daniel chapter two contains a dream of Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation. The dream concerns four kingdoms on earth. The first kingdom is Babylon, the second one is Media-Persia, etc. All four of these are, of course, physical kingdoms on earth (not spiritual kingdoms). Then we come to the final kingdom on earth. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed . . . and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:44). We continue to emphasize that this will be *an everlasting, literal, physical kingdom on the earth* because many churches deny this truth. They teach that the kingdom is only spiritual. However, we have seen many verses in this lesson and in lesson 17 that prove the physical and eternal nature of this kingdom. There are literally hundreds of verses in the Old Testament about this promised kingdom. It is impossible to understand the Bible without understanding this kingdom that is so prominent in the Old Testament.

When did the Old Testament Begin?

Most Christians would say that the answer to this question is obvious. They would say that the Old Testament began in Genesis 1:1, the first verse in the Bible. It is true that the Bible is commonly divided into the Old and New Testaments. In this division the Old Testament, of course, begins in Genesis 1:1. However, there is another way to answer this question. A testament is a covenant (compare Hebrews 8:7-8 with Hebrews 9:15). The "old testament" can also be called the old covenant. The old covenant or "first covenant" was given to Moses. *The old testament formally began in Exodus 24:7-8* when Moses sprinkled blood from an ox upon the people of Israel and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words."

Salvation through Israel

In lesson 17 we learned that Israel was God's chosen nation. God gave up the Gentiles in Genesis 11. Was it possible for Gentiles to be saved during Old Testament times? If so, how?

God spoke to Abraham about this matter. "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Read Genesis 22:17-18). The Gentiles were to be blessed through Abraham's descendants, the nation of Israel. Isaiah also answers our question. In Isaiah 2:1-3 we are told that "all nations shall flow" unto Jerusalem during the kingdom. The word of the Lord will go out from Jerusalem to all nations. Thus, we can conclude that during Old Testament times the *Gentiles could only be saved through the nation of Israel*. Israel was to bring blessing to all the nations.

An Earthly Hope

Many people are surprised to learn that God did not promise Old Testament saints that they would go to heaven! And that Abraham, Moses, and David had no hope of spending eternity in heaven! Nevertheless, this is true. God promised the Old Testament saints a kingdom on earth. Abraham, Moses, David, and all the Old Testament saints hoped to spend eternity in a kingdom on earth. Job gave the following testimony: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26). Job believed that when he died and his body was destroyed, he would be resurrected and would see God *upon the earth*. Notice the location of the kingdom prophesied by Jeremiah: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth" (Jeremiah 23:5). Jeremiah, like all Old Testament saints, looked for a kingdom *in the earth*.

Old Testament Summary

All of the people who lived during Old Testament times lived in what Ephesians 2:11 calls "**time past**." "Time past" was different from the present time in many ways. Beginning with Moses, they lived under the law. We live under grace. God favored Israel above all nations in "time past." God does not favor any nation today (Romans 10:12). Those in "time past" were looking for a kingdom on earth. We are awaiting the time when we will go to heaven for all eternity. Gentiles in "time past" were saved through Israel. Gentiles today are not saved through Israel, but by grace through faith in spite of Israel's rejection of her Savior. The beginning of the old testament brought to an end the time from "Adam to Moses" and started the time from *Moses to Christ* (law to grace) spoken of in Romans 5:13-16. The rest of the Old Testament is the time period of *Moses to Christ*.

In Genesis and the first portion of the book of Exodus we read about the time referred to as "**Adam to Moses**." When the law is given to Moses, the time of **Moses to Christ (law to grace)** begins. [See Romans 5:13-16]

"The promise" starts with Abraham and continues through the rest of the Old Testament. "The law" begins with Moses and also continues through the remainder of the Old Testament. [See Galatians 3:17]

Review Questions

True or False

1. God promised Abraham an eternal home in heaven.
2. The kingdom promised to David will be a kingdom of righteousness.
3. Due to man's wickedness the earth will never be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

4. The kingdom promised to David is a spiritual kingdom and many will continue to suffer from physical ailments such as blindness and deafness in the kingdom.

Multiple Choice

5. Daniel chapter two confirms that the kingdom:

- a) will be in heaven
- b) will be a literal, physical kingdom on earth
- c) is in our hearts
- d) cannot be understood by man

6. During Old Testament times Gentiles were saved:

- a) by water baptism
- b) by being sincere
- c) in exactly the same way that Gentiles today are saved
- d) through the nation of Israel

7. All those who lived during Old Testament times lived in:

- a) time past
- b) the ages to come
- c) the dispensation of grace
- d) the time of "Adam to Moses"

Fill in the Blanks

8. "The promise" started with _____ and "the law" with ____.

9. ". . . neither shall they learn ___ any more" (Isaiah 2:4).

10. "The ___ also shall dwell with the ___ (Isaiah 11:6).

For Further Study

1. Read Isaiah 60:1-3. What will the Gentiles do when God's glory shines upon Israel?

2. Read Zechariah 8:23. What will the Gentiles do during the kingdom?

3. What possession does God the Father promise to the Son in Psalm 2:8?

4. What information about the kingdom is given in Jeremiah 31:12?

5. During the kingdom the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord and what else? (Psalm 72:19)

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