

“ISRAEL MY GLORY”

Israel’s Mission, and Missions to Israel

by

John Wilkinson

Copyright © 1894

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROMISES TO THE FATHERS, NEITHER ANNULLED NOR TRANSFERRED, BUT CONFIRMED BY CHRIST

It has been hastily thought by many devout and intelligent Christians, and even by entire sections of the Christian Church, that the purpose of God to bless the world through Abraham’s natural seed has been changed in consequence of Israel’s national rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah. That Israel’s position is lost, her privileges forfeited, and her mission transferred to the Church, commonly but unscripturally designated a *Spiritual Israel*—in short, that this so-called spiritual Israel has superseded the national Israel as an instrumentality for blessing the world. Let us see how this looks in the light of the Word of God.

“**The promises made unto the fathers**”—What are they?

To the father of the elect nation God promised,

- **“I will make of thee a great nation;”**
- **“I will bless thee;”** and **“make thy name great;”** and **“thou shalt be a blessing;”**
- **“I will bless them that bless thee,”** **“and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”**
- **“Unto thy seed will I give this land”** (Genesis 12:2, 3, 7).

These promises are without conditions, and therefore absolute; they are God’s promises, and therefore sure.

These promises were ratified by covenant resting on accepted sacrifice, as recorded in the fifteenth of Genesis. Abram had no child. He thought his Damascus servant Eliezer, must be his heir. No, saith the Lord, **“This man shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.”** **“And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness”** (Genesis 15:4, 6).

From this transaction dates the Covenant of faith made with Abram years before he was circumcised, which will be referred to in subsequent pages. In this covenant Abram becomes the father of all believers—circumcised and uncircumcised.

The Lord attached much importance to Abram's faith, because Isaac, in the circumstances of his birth, was destined to furnish a type of God's beloved Son, in the aspect of His miraculous birth; for Isaac's birth was a miracle as real as was the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, although Divine power was not manifested in exactly the same form. On Abram believing God about a promised Isaac in whom the seed would be called, God ratified His former promises by covenant.

“In that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates” (Genesis 15:18).

The sacrifice had now been offered and accepted, as proved by **“the smoking furnace and a burning lamb that passed between these pieces.”**

We pass over, for the present, the seventeenth chapter of Genesis which relates to the covenant of circumcision as entered into with Abram when 99 years of age, and in connection with which his name was changed to Abraham. Circumcision became the initiatory rite into the privileges and blessings of the national covenant. Abraham is now promised, not only that he shall be the father of **“a great and mighty nation;”** but also that he shall **“be a father of many nations”** (Genesis 17:4).

In a natural seed both these promises have received their primary fulfillment; the former in the nation of Israel; and the latter in the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar, and in the powerful peoples, the descendants of Abraham by Keturah. These promises will be more exhaustively fulfilled in the conversion of Israel as a nation, and in the blessing of all nations through Israel, for then all who are truly blessed in Christ will be Abraham's seed. **“If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise”** (Galatians 3:29). **“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are children of Abraham”** (Galatians 3:7).

The promises given in the twelfth chapter of Genesis, ratified by covenant founded on accepted sacrifice in the fifteenth of Genesis, are now confirmed by solemn oath on Abraham's obedience to God in offering his son Isaac. There are no afterthoughts with God. He needs never to go back to correct or improve anything.

Abraham's faith in God as to the miraculous birth of Isaac typifying the miraculous birth of His beloved Son, was so honoring and pleasing to God, that his faith was counted for righteousness, and he himself regarded as **“the friend of God.”**

Another event in the history of Abraham's faith and obedience is made the occasion of the *oath* of God. God swears. God demands the sacrifice of Isaac, and by the father's own hand. God did prove Abraham. He was equal to the occasion. **“Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac”** (Genesis 22:2).

How this sounds like the only-begotten, the well-beloved Son, even Jesus, whom it pleased the Father to bruise. In Abraham's obedience God secures another type of His beloved Son, setting forth at once the Father's love-gift, and the Son's voluntary sacrifice.

“And the Angel of the Lord called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, because thou hast done this thing, 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” (Genesis 22:15-18).

It is most interesting and instructive to ascertain from Scripture why God swears, when His bare word of promise cannot be broken. It is not necessary to examine every instance in which God has sworn to ascertain the meaning of the oath of the LORD. Anything instituted by God for a temporary purpose had no oath attached to it, and could thus be set aside or abolished when its purpose had been fulfilled, but anything confirmed by oath remains unaltered.

For example: The Aaronic priesthood was instituted by God, and under such solemn sanctions, that we are told **“no man taketh the honour unto himself, but when he is called of God, even as was Aaron”** (Hebrews 5:4).

But this Aaronic priesthood could be changed, and was changed, to make way for the priesthood of Christ and the spiritual priesthood of all believers in Christ. A literal priest is **“taken from among men . . . that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins”** (Hebrews 5:1).

As the priesthood of Christ abolished the priesthood of Aaron, it necessarily abolished the law of sacrifices also; for a priest has no place without an altar and a sacrifice. **“For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law”** (Hebrews 7:12).

Why then could the priesthood of Aaron be changed? Because it was instituted *without an oath*.

“For those priests were made without an oath” (Hebrews 7:21). But Christ **“hath an unchangeable priesthood”** (Hebrews 7:24). Why? Because **“The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever”** (Hebrews 7:21).

The priesthood of Aaron was typical and temporary; the priesthood of Christ was antitypical and abiding; so that the Levitical priests were **“made without an oath; but this (Christ) with an oath.”**

So then the oath of God added to promise not only strengthens our faith in the fulfillment of His bare word, but also teaches us that nothing can be altered or fail that is sworn to. God has sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more cover the earth. We may thus be perfectly sure that another universal flood is impossible. God has sworn by His holiness that he will not lie unto David.

“His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me.” “I have sworn unto David my servant; thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations,” (Psalm 89:35, 36, 3, 4), so that anyone who doubts the future occupancy of David’s throne believes that God can not only break a promise but also violate an oath.

It may be asked here, but what is the nature of the blessing secured by the oath of God to the entire world through the seed of Abraham? Nothing less or other than the gospel of Christ. **“The scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen by faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed”** (Galatians 3:8).

As this promise reaches to the end of the millennial era, it is plain we shall have the same glorious old gospel in the millennium as now. It is therefore unscriptural to speak of the present dispensation as *the gospel dispensation* in contradistinction from the millennium. It may scripturally be spoken of as an elective dispensation, or, the dispensation of the Church; to be succeeded by the millennial era, in which all nations as such will be blessed through the seed of Abraham with the gospel of Christ.

It may now be well to ascertain the exact meaning and application of the term **“seed of Abraham,”** whose mission it is to bless the world.

The first application of the term **“seed of Abraham”** is made to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the procuring cause of the blessing itself, **“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”** (Galatians 3:16). The second application of the term **“seed of Abraham”** is made to all believers in Christ—circumcised or uncircumcised. **“And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise”** (Galatians 3:29).

It may well be asked here, “What constitutes a believer in Christ, uncircumcised in flesh, a son of Abraham?”

By being united to Christ, he is linked to Abraham in a covenant of faith made with him before he was circumcised, that is, when he was as much a Gentile as a Jew, for he was neither the one nor the other. On Abraham believing God about a promised Isaac, as recorded in Genesis 15, several years before he was circumcised, he became the father of all believers.

All believers in Christ are thus by the authority of scripture Abraham's spiritual seed. But this does not imply that believers of Gentile origin are *spiritual Israelites*. One does not *include* the other; one *excludes* the other.

No one but a converted natural Israelite is properly and scripturally a spiritual Israelite. The very fact that I, a believing Gentile, am a child of Abraham by faith, is the very reason why I am not a spiritual Israelite. Israel was a name given by God to only one man—Jacob—whose children were children of Israel, and whose descendants were and are designated Israelites. The term Israelites legitimately applies to all the descendants of Jacob, and to none others.

Are not believing Gentiles spiritual Israelites? No, certainly not. Why not, if they are children of Abraham? Are not the terms “spiritual seed of Abraham” and “spiritual Israelites” one and the same as to their meaning? They are not the same thing in themselves, though they both apply equally to all truly converted natural Israelites, they being spiritual Israelites and spiritual seed of Abraham also.

Why are not believing Gentiles spiritual Israelites? Because Israel was a term applied to Jacob after he was circumcised, and is never applied to any but Jacob's circumcised descendants. Abraham became the father of believers—circumcised and uncircumcised—in a covenant of faith made with him years before he was circumcised; so that blessings flowing out of this covenant might reach all nations, whilst blessings affecting Israelites as such would be confined to the elect nation. This teaching will become perfectly clear by a careful study of Romans 4 and Galatians 3.

The former part of Romans 4 speaks of a righteousness by faith, and of the blessedness of forgiven sin. **“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness”**—quoted from Genesis 15:6 and, **“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin”** (Romans 4:3, 8). Then the question comes in verse 9, **“Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.”**

Thus in the covenant of faith made with Abraham while uncircumcised, all believers in Christ, though uncircumcised in flesh, are Abraham's spiritual seed.

Now what is Abraham to the unbelieving Jew?

He is simply a father according to natural descent and national covenant, entitling him to a share in earthly blessings in Palestine.

What is Abraham to the believing Jew?

He is also a father according to the covenant of faith. **“And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised”** (Romans 4:12).

Thus Abraham's spiritual seed are indifferently believing Jews or believing Gentiles; whilst spiritual Israelites are believing Jews only the former interested in a covenant made in uncircumcision; the latter term—Israelite—applied to a circumcised people only. Some say, but what do you make of such passages as, **“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile”** (John 1:47), **“The Israel of God”** (Galatians 6:16); and **“He is not a Jew who is one outwardly . . . but he is a Jew who is one inwardly,”** &c. (Romans 2:28, 29).

As to the expression, **“Behold an Israelite indeed,”** it must be remembered that Nathaniel, of whom this was said, was both a natural and spiritual Israelite, just as we now say of a professing Christian, who is consistent and real, he is a Christian indeed, or he is a true Christian. Again, **“he is not a Jew who is one outwardly,”** &c.

This passage has substantially the same meaning.

The Jew has always prided himself in his national election as the favored people of God, and thinks that his circumcision, which entitles to the privileges of national election, secures his eternal salvation. No, by no means; he must be an **“Israelite indeed;”** a **“Jew inwardly,”** circumcised in heart as well as in flesh; in plain words, he must be converted, born again.

But does not the term **“Israel of God”** include believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews? No, we think not. Why not?

In the first place the Apostle of the Gentiles, in Galatians 6:16, prays for a blessing on believing Gentiles, and then, besides and beyond these, also **“upon the Israel of God.”** **“And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God”** **“The Israel of God”** here evidently refers to some other people than believing Gentiles.

Again, the expression **“Israel of God,”** may not be meant to describe believing Jews alone, but may, and most probably does, include unbelieving Jews, that is, the whole of the elect nation. A prayer from the Apostle Paul for his own people was in perfect harmony with his known state of heart towards them; for his heart’s desire and prayer to God was for their salvation; and he could even wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren’s sake, his kinsmen according to the flesh. We understand, then, by **“the Israel of God”** the elect nation, elect to be a channel and an instrument of blessing to the world.

This will greatly simplify the Word of God to the ordinary reader.

If Christ’s, then Abraham’s seed, whether Jew or Gentile, by virtue of the covenant of faith made with Abraham in uncircumcision, that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised. Israel, being a name given to Jacob *after* circumcision, the term Israel or Israelite applies only to the circumcised natural descendants of Jacob, whom God called Israel.

The practical application of this teaching is most important.

Now the natural descendants of Jacob are entitled to all the promises made to Israel, as truly as that they are exposed to all the curses denounced on that name. How readily has the Christian Church for ages past given a literal interpretation to all the curses on Israel, and applied them, and justly so, to the natural Israel; and with equal readiness has she given a spiritual interpretation to all the promises to Israel, and applied them, and most unjustly so, to Gentile believers.

We believe there is not one single instance in the Word of God, Old Testament or New, in which the term Israel can legitimately be applied to any but the natural descendants of Jacob. Take a few passages relating to threatened curses and promised blessings.

“I have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches” (Isaiah 43:28).

“He that scattered Israel will gather him” (Jeremiah 31:10). The gathering will surely be as literal as the scattering, and of the same natural and national Israel.

- **“Let Israel hope in the LORD, for with the LORD there is mercy”** (Psalm 130:7).
- **“Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and for ever”** (Psalm 131:3).
- **“O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel”** (Jeremiah 31:7).
- **“O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When the LORD bringeth back the captivity of His people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad”** (Psalm 14:7).
- **“Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation . . . In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory”** (Isaiah 45:17, 25).

This application of the term Israel, so just, so simple, so natural, has a tendency to awaken in Christian hearts the deepest interest in the salvation of God’s ancient people.

We have now ascertained two distinct applications of the term **“seed of Abraham,”**

- First, Christ;
- Second, all believers in Christ.

We have yet a third application— Abraham’s natural descendants: **“But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend”** (Isaiah 41:8).

The promises were made to Abraham, renewed to Isaac, and confirmed to Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. Israel, we have seen, is a term applied only to the natural descendants of circumcised Jacob, so that to the elect nation of Israel belong the promises, and through the elect nation of Israel will come the world’s blessing.

“But now, thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel: fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine . . . The people which I formed for myself, that they might set forth my praise” (Isaiah 43:1, 21).

Our blessed Lord emphasized this doctrine by declaring, **“Salvation is of the Jews.”**

But have not the Jews forfeited the promises by their unbelief? No, certainly not. **“For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged”** (Romans 3:3, 4). The unbelief of some Jews, even the majority, cannot change or thwart the purpose of God.

But it may be objected, the Jews have broken the law given under the awful solemnities of Sinai; has not their transgression of law annulled the promises? Let the Apostle Paul, by the authority of the Holy Spirit, answer again. When was the law given, before or after the promises? **“And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise”** (Galatians 3:17, 18).

Now here we plainly see that promises given four hundred and thirty years before the law have not been annulled to the Jew nor transferred to the Gentile by the breach of that law; especially as the promises were confirmed in a covenant made beforehand by God.

The important question arises, have these promises been confirmed? and in what does Scriptural confirmation consist?

Divine confirmation does not mean ecclesiastical confirmation, but it means the oath of God added to the promises of God, in order to strengthen the faith of His people, and to set forth the unchangeable character of His purpose, as we have already seen.

Have then these promises been sworn to, and thus confirmed? They were sworn to by God on the occasion of Abraham's willingness, in obedience to God, to sacrifice Isaac, as recorded in Genesis 22. **"By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, because thou hast done this thing 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 the 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"** (Genesis 22:16-18).

The oath of God to Abraham has confirmed and made unalterably sure the promises of God to Abraham and to his seed.

This is further set forth in the Divine letter to the Hebrews.

"For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Hebrews 6:13-18).

Here we see the oath of God is final for confirmation, and further illustrated in Galatians 3:

"Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no one maketh it void, or addeth thereto" (Galatians 3:15); so that we are not at all surprised to find the promises good to Israel still, unaffected by their conduct since the promises were made and sworn to: and lest anyone might suppose that by the Jews' rejection of Christ the promises had been annulled, the Apostle Paul is authorized to state, **"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name"** (Romans 15:8, 9).

Notwithstanding the awful and repeated disobedience of the Jews under the old covenant of law, the promises confirmed by oath have travelled safely down to Christ; and as His rejection was in the line of the Divine purpose, the promises were not annulled but confirmed by Christ.

Now they are, if possible, safer than ever; **“For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us”** (II Corinthians 1:20).

These wonderful promises, God’s promises, made to Abraham and to his seed, belong to-day to the natural and national Israel, and not to the Church; promises which secure blessing to Israel, and blessing through Israel to the whole world.

Peter, in Acts 3, addressed the people as **“Ye men of Israel,”** and then told them, **“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”** (Acts 3:25), and Paul, when expressing his deep interest in the salvation of his kinsmen according to the flesh, in Romans 9, speaks of them as **“Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and *the promises!*”** (Romans 9:4).

The promises are still theirs, and the blessing to the whole Gentile world awaits the fulfillment of these promises to the natural and national Israel.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
