

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – The Priority of the Promise – 29 July-4 August 2017

Christ is the surety of our inheritance. “For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise” (Galatians 3:18). Read Galatians 3:15-18. All these verses are necessary to the subject this week, yet they will be considered in connection with next week’s study.

The Promise Was Made to Abraham – All who believe are blessed with believing Abraham. They who are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse, in order that the blessing of Abraham might come on us. “To Abraham and his seed were the promises made.” “If the inheritance *be* of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.” Thus it is clear that the promise to us is the promise that was made to Abraham, and in which we share as his children.

The Promise Concerns an Inheritance – Galatians 3:18 agrees with Ephesians 1:13-14, that the Spirit is the pledge of a possession that has been purchased. “The promise of the Spirit” is an inheritance. The Spirit not only promises us an inheritance, but the possession of the Spirit is the surety of the inheritance. When, therefore, we read that Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith, we can see that it is the same as saying that Christ hath redeemed us from the curse, in order that we might receive an inheritance. So we read in Hebrews 9:14-15 that Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, will purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God; because “He is the Mediator of the new covenant, that by means of death, for the remission of transgression under the first covenant, they which are called might receive *the promise of eternal inheritance.*”

What the Eternal Inheritance Is – The last words of the preceding paragraph set us on the track of the answer to this. It is an “eternal inheritance.” This follows from the fact that Christ has redeemed us from the curse in order that we might receive this inheritance; for the curse is death, and whatever we receive as the result of being saved from death, must be eternal. But we must turn to the direct record of the promise to Abraham, and there we shall find the matter clearly stated. The promise is many times repeated; to save time we shall take one statement of it. In Genesis 17:7-8 we read these words of God to Abraham: “I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

Here we see most clearly that the promised inheritance is land – the land of Canaan. But, let it be borne in mind, it is an “everlasting possession.” Abraham himself, as well as his seed, possess it to eternity. Therefore the possession of the land of Canaan, according to the promise to Abraham, involves the possession of everlasting life in which to enjoy it; but immortality is bestowed only at the coming of Christ and at the resurrection. This Abraham well understood; for even while he was in the land of Canaan, he sojourned in it as in a strange country, desiring and looking for “a better country, that is an heavenly” (Hebrews 11:9-16); and the fact that he “died in faith, not having received the promises” shows that he knew that he was to receive it at the resurrection. But when the land of Canaan is thus given to Abraham for an everlasting possession, the restoration of all things will take place (Acts 3:20-21), so that the possession of the land of Canaan will be in reality the possession of the whole earth. So Paul, speaking with direct reference to the record in the seventeenth of Genesis, says: “For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Romans 4:13). Therefore we, “according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). This is the promised inheritance, the possession of which is assured to us by the Spirit of Christ.

An Inheritance without a Curse – “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse; ... that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” This “promise of the Spirit” is the possession of the whole earth made new redeemed from the curse; for “the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.” The earth, fresh from the hand of God, perfect in every respect, was given to man for a possession (Genesis 1:27-28, 31). Man sinned, and brought the curse upon himself. Christ has taken the whole curse, both of man and of all creation, on Himself. He redeems the earth from the curse, that it may be the everlasting possession that God originally designed it to be, and He also redeems man from the curse, that he may be fitted for the possession of such an inheritance. And this, let it be noted, is the sum of the Gospel. The whole Gospel has reference to this, and to this alone. Man redeemed, but with no place to live in, would present an incomplete work. While the cross of Christ is the sole agent of redemption, yet “Christ crucified” would be nothing if it did not include Christ risen. But Christ risen means Christ risen to the right hand of the Majesty on high; and this means: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne” (Revelation 3:21). Without this “blessed hope” our faith would be vain, and we should yet be in our sins; for the power by which we are redeemed is the power by which new heavens and earth are made. Their freedom from the curse guarantees our freedom from the curse, for God created the earth not in vain, but formed it to be inhabited, and “some must enter therein.” Then will be an earth without any curse, inhabited by people without any curse, inhabited by people wholly freed from the curse of sin and death. “And there shall be no more curse” (Revelation 22:3).

The Covenant of Promise – That the covenant and promise of God are one and the same thing, is clearly seen from Galatians 3:17, where it appears that to disannul the covenant would be to make void the promise. In Genesis 17 we read that God made a covenant with Abraham to give him the land of Canaan and with it the whole world – for an everlasting possession; but Galatians 3:18 says that God gave it to him *by promise*. God's covenant with men can be nothing else than promises to them: for "who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" (Romans 11:35). God does not make bargains with men, because He well knows that man could not fulfil his part. Knowing that man is "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17), God counsels him to buy "without money, and without price" of Him everything that is needed. He promises man everything he needs. We give Him ourselves, that is, nothing, and He gives us Himself, that is, everything. That which makes all the trouble is that even when men are willing to recognise the Lord at all, they want to make bargains with Him. They want it to be a 'mutual' affair, – to be a transaction in which they will be considered as on a par with God. Whoever deals with God must deal with Him on His own terms, that is, on a basis of fact – that we have nothing, and He has everything and is everything.

The Covenant Confirmed – The covenant, that is, the promise of God to give men the whole earth made new, after having made them free from the curse, was "confirmed before of God in Christ." He is the Surety of the new covenant, even the everlasting covenant. "For how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea; wherefore also through Him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us" (2 Corinthians 1:20). In Him we have obtained the inheritance (Ephesians 1:11), for the Holy Spirit is the first-fruits of the inheritance, and the possession of the Holy Spirit is Christ Himself dwelling in the heart by faith. Confirmed by an Oath of God: "When God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself; ... 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 show 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; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:13-20).

It was the oath of God, therefore, that confirmed the covenant made to Abraham; that promise and oath to Abraham are our ground of hope, our strong consolation; they are "sure and steadfast," because the oath sets forth Christ as the pledge, the surety, and "He ever liveth," – the covenant is confirmed in Him, and no one can disannul it or add anything to it. The Gospel today is precisely the same in every particular that it was in the days of Abraham: God will give to men "the first dominion," the earth free from all curse; the promise is to all without exception, and the fulfillment is to all who believe in Christ, "in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Just as the earth was given to Adam in the beginning, without his having done anything to earn it, even so the new earth is a free gift, – the inheritance is solely by promise; but this inheritance is an inheritance of righteousness, and this necessary righteousness God gives to us, creating us new creatures in Christ, even as in the beginning He created Adam a perfect man. And all this is assured to us by the oath of God, in which He pledged His own existence. But this oath was in Christ crucified, and the cross of Christ, bearing the curse everywhere, is the assurance that God in Christ ever liveth – that is the Gospel!

An Unchangeable Covenant – God is not a man, that He should lie or change. Man is changeable, yet even a man's Will/covenant, if it once be confirmed, cannot be disannulled or added to. No change whatever can be made in it. How much more, then, must this be the case with God's covenant? "Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever; nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it; and God doeth it, that men should fear before Him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14). "When God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself ... 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 show 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" (Hebrews 6:13-18). The covenant, confirmed by God's oath, is unchangeable as God is.

Abraham and Christ – "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." Christ is the Seed of Abraham, the covenant was confirmed in Him. There is no difficulty about the question of Israel if this one fact were remembered. *Christ is the Seed of Abraham, and there is no other*; for "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy Seed, which is Christ." Abraham and Christ are inseparably linked together. "To Abraham and his seed were the promises made," how many soever they were. Nothing was made to Abraham that could be obtained in any other way than through Christ; and Christ never comes into the possession of anything that was not promised to Abraham. This is plainly stated in the text. Christ is spiritual, that we know, for no one can call Him Lord, except by the Spirit; but He is also very literal: "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; handle Me, and see." We are glad to know that the literal can also be spiritual; were it not so, then we would be yet in our sins. To *Abraham and his Seed* were the promises made. The Seed must be as literal as Abraham, even though He be spiritual; Christ "took on Him the seed of Abraham." It is enough for us at present to hold to the fact that Abraham and Christ are equally concerned in this promised inheritance, which is spiritual because the Spirit is the first-fruits of it. If we are of faith, then we are the children of Abraham and sharers in the blessing.