

Shewing That the Messiah Was Promised to Abraham, and What Advantages the Nations of the World Were to Receive by Him.

by John Gill

The Messiah, Jesus, is the promised seed of Abraham through whom all nations will be blessed with redemption, justification, peace, and pardon of sin.

Scripture: Genesis 22:18, Isaiah 49:6, Jeremiah 31:34, Matthew 1:1, John 3:16, Acts 10:43, Romans 10:20, Galatians 3:8, Ephesians 2:17, Hebrews 2:16

Topics: "Messiah", "Universal Salvation"

Description

John Gill emphasizes that the Messiah was promised to Abraham, highlighting that through Abraham's seed, all nations would be blessed. He explains that this seed refers specifically to Jesus Christ, who fulfills the prophecy by offering redemption, justification, and peace to both Jews and Gentiles. Gill argues against the notion that the blessings were limited to the Israelites, asserting that the Messiah's coming was intended for the salvation of all people. He outlines the various advantages the nations would receive, including the outpouring of the Spirit and the abundance of knowledge. Ultimately, the sermon underscores the universal significance of the Messiah in God's plan for humanity.

Transcript

The Prophecies Respecting the Messiah

CHAPTER II.

Shewing that the Messiah was promised to Abraham, and what advantages the nations of the world were to receive by him.

The next prophecy, respecting the Messiah, or discovery that was made of him to the sons of men, was made to Abraham, (Gen. 22:18). And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Now, in the former prophecy, it was left undiscovered and undetermined, out of what people or nation the Messiah should arise, and only, in general declared, that he should be the seed of the woman; but in this it is expressed in plain terms, that he should be of the seed and posterity of Abraham; as Jesus, the true Messiah was, who (Heb. 2:16) took not upon him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham, and is

therefore justly called (Matt. 1:1) Abraham's son.

But, for the better understanding of this prophecy, two things should be inquired into, 1. Who is meant by the seed of Abraham, in whom all nations should be blessed? 2. What advantages the nations of the world should receive by this promised seed? First, It will be proper to inquire, who is meant by the seed of Abraham, in whom all nations of the earth were to be blessed? Now this seed cannot intend Isaac, the immediate seed of Abraham, because this blessing in the extensiveness of it, was never verified in him: Besides, it is carried down to his posterity (Gen. 26:4), as not terminating in him, it not being intended of him; and for the very same reasons, it cannot design Jacob, the immediate seed of Isaac, (see Gen. 28:14), nor has it ever received its completion in the whole body of the Israelitish nation, the posterity of Jacob; for what advantages have the nations of the world ever received from them? or when, and how have they been blessed in them, or the Jews ever been the occasion of any blessing to them?

Whilst they continued in their own land, they dwelt alone, and were not reckoned among the nations; they kept themselves at the utmost distance from other people; their religion, laws, and customs being different from them; they would have no communion with them, either on a civil or sacred account; nor any conversation; they would not perform any civilities to them, no, not even the common offices of humanity; nay, there was a real enmity in the Jews against the Gentiles; The former thought it no crime to do any hurt or mischief to the latter, either in person or estate; nay, their hatred has ran so high as even to do all they could to hinder their everlasting salvation, and all arising from a mistaken sense of Deuteronomy 23:6.

And since the destruction of their civil polity, and their dispersion, the nations have received no advantage from them; they have not been in a capacity to give them any assistance so that as the nations of the world never have been, they never are likely to be blessed in those people, who have always been so far from being accounted a blessing to them, that their name has been used by way of reproach, and as a proverb, a taunt, and a curse, wherever they have been driven. From whence it appears that the nations of the world never took up this, as a form of blessing among them, God bless you, as he did the Israelites or seed of Abraham; which a late author (SLP, pp. 132, 133) thinks to be the sense of the phrase here, from its use in all other places; in which sense it is true, he has the concurrence of the greatest part of the modern Jews; authorities which he at other times treats with the utmost contempt: But no one instance can be produced, when the nations of the world ever used such a form of blessing as this; nor does the use of the phrase, in all other places, determine this to be the sense of it here: (see Deut. 29:19; Ps. 72:17; Isa. 65:16; Jer. 4:2); where there is not the least foundation for such an interpretation.

Besides, in parallel texts, the word is used in Niphal, in a passive form, as in Genesis 12:3 and chapter 18:18 and 28:14, which directs us to the plain sense of the words in this. And as to Genesis 48:20, the only place produced in favour of this sense, the word is purely active, and so no proof of the use of it in a different form; and though that text informs us what would be a usual form of blessing among the Jews; yet neither that, nor any other text, nor any history either sacred or profane, acquaints us, that that, or any other Jewish form of blessing, would be used among the Gentiles.

Now, as it appears that this prophecy never had its completion, either in the more near posterity of Abraham, as Isaac or Jacob, or in his more remote, even the whole body of the Jewish nation, in any age, or period of time, it remains, that some other person or persons must be fixed upon, which can be no other than the Messiah, even our Jesus, to whom the apostles have applied it (Acts 3:25, 26; Gal. 3:8). The import of which is, that the Messiah should be of Abraham's seed, and that the Gentiles should be blessed

in him; and though Modern Jews have coined other interpretations of this prophecy, yet the ancient ones understood it in the sense now given.

Two things are principally objected by modern Jews against the application of it to the Messiah, and in favour of its intending the whole body of the Israelites: 1. They say the word seed cannot be understood of a single person, but is used collectively of a large number; but instances have been given, in the preceding chapter, where the word seed is used of a single person; so that St. Paul is to be justified, when he says (Gal. 3:16), 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. 2. They object that no blessing comes to the nations of the world, but through the Jews to which I answer; it is true that salvation is of the Jews; that to them belong (Rom. 9:4, 5) the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the glory of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever; from whom the nations of the world receive all their blessings; but then we deny that the Gentiles receive any blessings from them, but only as through the Messiah, Jesus, one of their nation, who was made a curse, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles.

But, Secondly, Let us now consider the advantages which the nations of the world were to receive from the Messiah, this promised seed. And it is to be observed, that by all the nations of the world, every individual person therein is not intended, but only some in all nations, who, with Abraham, believe in the same promised seed, as the apostle has taught us to explain this prophecy; So then, says he (Gal. 3:9), they which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham. The Jews look upon it to be a sufficient verification of this prophecy, that some of the Gentiles, by means of their patriarchs, have been brought to the knowledge of the being, unity, providence, and omnipotence of God, which knowledge is the cause of all true blessedness: but the plain meaning of the prophecy is, that though the Messiah was to be of Abraham's seed, yet his posterity alone were not to receive the advantage thereof; but his divine blessings were to extend to the several nations of the world.

The calling of the Gentiles, by the Messiah, was the great mystery, which in other ages was not made known so clearly, as it is now under the Gospel dispensation; there were indeed frequent intimations of it in the Old Testament, and the Jews could not be altogether strangers to it, though nothing was more displeasing and provoking to them: This temper of theirs, God long ago foretold by Moses, saying (Deut. 32:21), I will move them to jealousy, with those which are not a people, I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation; that is, by calling and blessing them.

Isaiah, of all the prophets, spoke most largely concerning the blessings designed for the Gentiles by the Messiah; but the apostle says (Rom. 10:20), that he was very bold on that account; for he was sure to incur the displeasure of the Jews; nay, run the risk of his life for being so. Near the time of the Messiah's coming, this controversy was much agitated in the schools of Hillel and Shammai, namely, Whether or no, when the, Messiah came, the nations of the world would have any advantage by him?

A vast majority were on the negative side of the question; though some few, such as old Simeon, and others, knew, that he was to be a light to the Gentiles, as well as the glory of his people Israel: but the greater part were so far from thinking that the Gentiles would be redeemed by the Messiah, that they firmly believed they would be all destroyed at his coming, and have no favour or mercy shewn them. This notion Jesus and his apostles much opposed, and is the true reason of the grace and redemption of Christ being

expressed in those universal terms, they so often are in the New Testament.

The controversy was not then, as it is now, between the Arminians and Calvinists, Whether all and every individual of human nature were to be redeemed by Christ; but, Whether any of the Gentiles should be redeemed by him, or no? which, as I said before, was determined in the negative: But Jesus and his apostles declared against it: Our Lord, in a discourse of his with one of their learned Rabbis, says (John 3:16), God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

By the world here, Christ means the Gentiles, as distinct from the Jews, as manifestly appears from the words of the apostle John, who lay in the bosom of Jesus, and must be allowed to be the best interpreter of his words. Now he tells us, that Jesus was (1 John 2:2) the propitiation for our sins, meaning the sins of the Jews; for John was a Jew; and, says he, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world; wherein he explains the words of Jesus, and, at the same time, struck at the darling notion of the Jews.

The apostle Paul uses the word in the same sense (Rom. 11:12, 15), for there was much the same distinction then as now; there were Israel, and the nations of the world, as now the church and the world, the former of which the Jews claimed to themselves, and the other they gave to the Gentiles, whom they looked upon as rejected of God; but Jesus gave himself a ransom for all, for Gentiles as well as Jews, and the grace of God hath appeared unto all men; the doctrine thereof, after the resurrection of Jesus, was no more confined to Judea, but carried into the Gentile world, by the first preachers thereof, who had a commission from Christ to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; whereby the blessings of the Messiah were conveyed to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews; which brings us to consider the several advantages which the nations of the earth were to receive from the Messiah, the promised seed, which are as follow: 1.

Redemption, which is the source and spring of all the rest. The Messiah is frequently spoken of, in the Old Testament, under the character of a Redeemer, and the Jews always expected him as such; many instances might be produced from thence as proofs of it: I shall content myself with mentioning one, which I the rather choose, because it is cited in the New. The passage is in Isaiah 49:20. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord.

This, says Aben Ezra, is the Messiah. St. Paul cites the text in Romans 11:26 after this manner, There shall come out of Sion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness, from Jacob. The Jews quarrel with this citation, and charge the apostle with a perversion of the prophet's words, which, how justly, will appear by considering the principal differences between them the prophet says, The Redeemer shall come to Zion; but, according to the apostle it is, There shall come out of Sion the deliverer: For the reconciling of which, it ought to be observed, that the servile letter ל sometimes signifies from, as well as to, when it is put in the room of מ, of which, some instances may be produced; (see Ex. 16:1. and 19:1; Num. 33:38; Ezra 3:8; 1 Kings 12:24; compared with 2 Chron. 11:4).

Besides, the Messiah was to come out of Zion: Hence says David (Ps. 14:7), O that the salvation or Saviour of Israel were come out of Zion: so that our apostle fitly expresses the faith and expectation of the old Jewish church in this citation. The other difference is, in Isaiah; it is said, that this Redeemer should come to those that turn from transgression in Jacob; when the apostle says, that when he is come, he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. The Jews, who quarrel with him for his version of this clause, would do well to consider, that this is exactly agreeable to the Septuagint version, the authors of which

were all Jews: besides, the Targum on the place favors our apostle's version and sense, which paraphrases it thus, "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and so turn the rebellious ones of the house of Jacob to the law."

From the whole it appears that they have no reason to charge the apostle with a false citation or perversion of Isaiah's words, which not only declare the character of the Messiah, as a Redeemer, but also acquaints us with the nature of his redemption; not a deliverance from the Roman yoke, as the Jews vainly expected; but this Redeemer was to remove ungodliness from Jacob; he was to redeem Israel from all her iniquities: Salvation by him was to be an everlasting salvation, and not a mere temporary one and such a salvation old Jacob expected, who, whilst he was blessing his sons, a little before his death, breaks out in this pathetic manner (Gen. 49:18), I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.

Remarkable is the paraphrase of Jonathan ben Uzziel on these words; " When Jacob saw, says the paraphrast, that Gideon the son of Joash, and Sampson the son of Manoah, were appointed to be redeemers, he said, Not for the redemption of Gideon do I wait, nor for the redemption of Sampson, because their redemptions are but temporary; but for thy redemption, O Lord, do I wait; because thy redemption is an everlasting one." Some copies read the last clause thus; "but for the redemption of Messiah the son of David."

Much to the same purpose also is the Jerusalem Targum on the place. From whence it appears, what sort of a redeemer, and what kind of redemption the ancient Jews expected; even such a Redeemer as Jesus is, whose name was called so, because he saves his people from their sins, who is become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. Now of this salvation and redemption, by the Messiah, the Gentiles were to partake as well as the Jews; for God gave him to be (Isa. 49:6) a light to the Gentiles, that he might be his salvation unto the ends of the earth; and accordingly the Gospel is become the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Though salvation is of the Jews; the author of it came from among them, and to them it was first preached, yet it does not belong to them only, all the nations of the earth being to be blessed, in the Messiah, with this blessing. The writings of the Old Testament abound with intimations of the Messiah, as a Redeemer, and the nature of redemption by him (Isa. 9:6); nor are they wanting to give us an account of the greatness of his person; they represent him as the mighty God, God's equal and fellow (Zech. 13:7), as the Adon or Lord (Mal. 3:1), whom the Jews sought, of whom, in a time to come, it should he said, Lo (Isa. 25:9), this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation; though they also often speak of him as a man, as a son bore, and a child given, as one that should be exposed to very great sorrows, hardships, and sufferings, nay to death itself; hence it appears, that the Jews had no reason to quarrel with Jesus, as they did, for that he being a man made himself God; especially when his works declared him to be so for the Messiah of the prophets was to be both God and man. 2.

Another blessing which the nations of the earth were to be blessed with, in the Messiah, or advantage they were to receive by him, is justification from all sin and condemnation; the apostle seems to have this blessing, designed for the Gentiles solely in view, namely, citing Genesis 12:3, he says (Gal.3:8), And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. The people of God, under the Old Testament, were sensible that there was no justification before God, by any righteousness of their own, which they knew and acknowledged to be as filthy rags, wherefore they desired (Ps. 143:2) that God would not enter into

judgment with them; for in his sight no man could be justified, that is, by any works of his own.

Now one part of the Messiah's work was (Dan. 9:24) to bring in everlasting righteousness, for the justification of those that believed in him; hence one of his famous names and titles is, The Lord our righteousness (Jer. 23:6), and from him, they expected their justifying righteousness, surely (Isa. 45:24, 25), shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength--in the Lord, or according to the Chaldee paraphrase, in or by the Word of the Lord, the eternal LogoV , shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory; which blessing the Jews were not to enjoy alone, for the Gentiles were to share with them in it, who were not only to see this righteousness in others, but to enjoy it themselves; for all the Messiah's people, whether Jew or Gentiles, were to be all righteous, and indeed at present the latter have the greatest share in this righteousness; for while Israel (Rom. 9:30, 31), which followed after the law of righteousness, have not attained to the law of righteousness; the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith, which they have not from themselves, but from the Messiah, Jesus, who is the (Rom. 10:4) end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes, by whom they (Acts 13:39) are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. 3.

Another blessing, which the Gentiles, as well as Jews, were to receive from the Messiah, is peace. Peace and abundance of it were promised to be in the days of the Messiah; many (Ps. 72:3, 7; Isa. 9:6, 7; Hag. 2:9) prophecies speak of it, one of the Messiah's titles is Prince of peace; nay, he is called The peace; because all true peace is owing to him, he is both the author and donor of it, which Gentiles as well as Jews participate of; for the Messiah was to (Zech. 9:10) speak peace unto the heathen, which Jesus has done, by preaching peace to them which were afar off and to them which were nigh (Eph. 2:17; compare Isa. 5:7, 19): the same phraseology is used in Zohar in Num.

Fol. 89.3), that is, to the Jews, who were a people near unto the Lord; and to the Gentiles, who were afar off from him; the one also being upon the spot where Jesus and his disciples first began to preach, the other at a distance from them; and this Jesus did, as having an equal right unto, and a real concern for both, being Lord of all. 4. Pardon of sin is another valuable blessing, which the nations of the earth were to be blessed with in the Messiah, as well as the posterity of Abraham.

This is one of those consolations in Isaiah 40:2 which Kimchi acknowledges shall be in the days of the king Messiah; it is part of the covenant (Jer. 31:34), which was then to be more fully and clearly opened; this God promised, and this the ancient Jews expected on the score of the Messiah's being wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities; though now they have lost the true notion of atonement for sin, which they expect not from the death of the Messiah, but from their own death; which, in their form of confession used by sick persons, their desire may be for the pardon, remission, and atonement of all their iniquities, transgressions, and sins, which is owing to their ignorance of the true expiation and forgiveness of sin, by the death of Christ, who is the propitiation, not for the sins of Jews only, but for those of the Gentiles also, for (Acts 10:43) to him give all the prophets witness, that whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins; which valuable blessing we have in Jesus, whose blood was shed for many to obtain it. 5.

Submission to the Messiah's laws and government, in and among the nations of the earth, as well as among the Jews, was Promised and might be expected in the days of the Messiah. The apostle Peter seems to make the completion of the prophecy, now under consideration, so far as it respected the seed of Abraham, chiefly to lie in this, his words are these (Acts 3:25, 26), Ye, says he, speaking to the Jews,

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.

Unto you first, God having raised up his son Jesus, hath sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. Now, though the Messiah was sent to the Jews, and first made known unto them, the gospel first preached among them, and some of them turned to him; yet, by far, a greater number among the Gentiles, which was predicted in many prophecies; that when Shiloh was come, the gathering of the people, the nations of the world, was to be to him as soon as ever the root of Jesse was set up as an ensign to the people, the Gentiles were to seek unto it, nay, the isles afar off were to wait for his law, and would readily embrace it, upon its first promulgation; all which have been more or less fulfilled since the times of Jesus. 6.

A very great effusion of the Spirit was promised and expected in the days of the Messiah; which was eminently fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, quickly after the ascension of Jesus, to verify the prophecy of Joel, in chapter 2:18, which many Jewish writers acknowledge belongs to the days of the Messiah. 7. The nations of the earth were to be blessed with abundance of knowledge, when the Messiah came; the earth was to be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as thy waters cover the sea; so that there would be no need for every man to teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they were all to know him, from the least of them unto the greatest of them and this was so current an opinion, and so universally known and embraced, that the poor woman of Samaria could say (John 4:25), I know the Messiah cometh, which is called Christ, when he is come he will tell us all things; which character well agrees with Jesus, who has opened the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, has made an ample discovery of his Father's mind and will, has brought life and immortality to light by the gospel, and diffused the savor of his knowledge in every place.

In fine, all blessings here, and everlasting happiness hereafter, were promised unto, and might be expected from the Messiah, by the nations of the world; of which blessings, the gospel of Christ has brought them the joyful tidings for the salvation of God has been sent unto them, and they will hear it. And seeing it is so, no wonder that this promised seed of Abraham should be so much expected, so ardently prayed for, and earnestly desired as he was; it need not therefore seem strange that he should be the delight of the Jewish nation, and the desire of all others.

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