

THE PROMISE

It began in the Garden of Eden. It continued to be repeated through the centuries---in many ways and to many people. As one traces the promise through the Old Testament and sees it fulfilled in the New Testament, he can only stand in awe at the workings of God.

Of those who received the promise---or continued to confirm it---there can be little doubt that few, if any, of them had much understanding of what it all meant. Peter tells us (I Peter 1:10-12) that prophets who were foretelling it did not understand *themselves* what they were talking about. They even inquired of God as to the meaning of their words---only to be told that the meaning would be known only later! (Even the angels were kept in the dark as to what it all meant---and they *wanted* to know!)

The first to hear the promise was---of all people---Satan (Genesis 3:15). We can only wonder how much he understood God's statement that the descendant of Eve would "crush your head". Could he have understood that the time would come when Christ would overcome Satan's power of death?

We may also wonder how much Abraham understood when God promised him that through his seed all nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Certainly the Bible does not record everything that God revealed to Abraham. Hebrews 11:10 reveals the intriguing information that Abraham looked for a city designed and built by God. How much more did Abraham know?

In Deuteronomy 18:15 we find the promise by Moses about a future prophet like himself whom God would raise up. Again, how much did Moses know? As in the case of Abraham, there is evidence that the Lord revealed a great deal more to Moses than we find in the scriptures. We find a startling bit of information about him in Hebrews 11:26, "He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward". What did he know about the still-unborn Christ? What did he know about a future reward?

By now it has become evident that the "promise" concerned the coming of Christ and the work he would do, including the establishment of a new kingdom and a new priesthood (unlike the Levitical priesthood).

In Psalms 110:1 we find these words from David, "The Lord said to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'". "The Lord" clearly refers to God the Father. Whom did David have in mind when he said "My lord"? Peter quotes this passage in Acts 2:34, indicating that "my lord" refers to Jesus. Did David understand this---or was he among those who inquired of God as to what his words meant?

Also in Psalms 110 (verse 4) David stated that this person would be a priest "in the order of Melchizedek"---the first mention of this king and priest since Genesis 14, where he is mentioned briefly---and somewhat mysteriously. Did David understand that the Mosaic law under which he and his ancestors had lived for so long would be terminated along with its Levitical priesthood in order for a different priesthood to be established? (See Hebrews 7).

As time drew closer for the promise to be fulfilled, the details began to become more specific. Isaiah 53 provides remarkably accurate predictions about the coming messiah: he was to be “despised and rejected”; he was to be “pierced for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities”---exactly what happened when our Lord was tortured and crucified on our behalf. Isaiah also mentioned “the punishment that brought us peace” (through having our sins forgiven), and “by his wounds we are healed”.

Isaiah also made some specific promises about the beginning of the kingdom (the church) in chapter 2. We learn that it was to occur “in the last days”, it was to begin in Jerusalem, and many nations (not just Jews) were to be involved---all fulfilled in Acts 2.

Jeremiah (31:31) promised that a new covenant (or agreement) would be established by God, replacing the covenant that came through Moses. (The end of the Law of Moses must have been hard for the Jews to comprehend.)

In Daniel, chapter 2, we read of a dream by King Nebuchadnezzar which was interpreted by Daniel. The statue in the dream represented four kingdoms, the last of which clearly refers to the Roman empire. In verse 44 Daniel indicates that the new kingdom was to be established during the time of this empire---exactly as it happened.

It is perfectly natural and reasonable for one to want assurance that his faith in Christ and his message has a solid foundation. When one traces the promises of God over many centuries---and sees them fulfilled in numerous details---he can only conclude that this is all the work of God. There is no other way all this could have happened by sheer coincidence!