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# Messiah, The Seed of Abraham: Promise and Fullfilment

Caleb Otniel Traian Nechifor

## MESSIAH, THE SEED OF ABRAHAM: PROMISE AND FULLFILMENT

Caleb Otniel Traian NECHIFOR<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT:

*MESSIAH IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. THE PROMISES OF THE MESSIAH'S ANCESTORS WERE VERY MANY AND, IN THE SAME TIME, VERY PROFOUND. ABRAHAM IS THE FIRST MAN WHEREOF GOD PROMISED TO BLESS THROUGH HIS SEED. THE TERM "SEED OF ABRAHAM" CAN BE PHYSICALLY UNDERSTOOD, HIGHLIGHTING A CERTAIN PERSON OR A GROUP OF PEOPLE, OR IT CAN BE SPIRITUALLY PERCEIVED, DESCRIBING MESSIAH. THIS ARTICLE INTENDS TO DESCRIBE BOTH SENSES OF THE TERM "SEED OF ABRAHAM", PROVING THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT ROLE OF ALL PROMISES TO ABRAHAM WAS TO SHOW MESSIAH WHO WILL BE THE INITIATOR AND THE PROTECTOR OF HIS CHURCH.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Messianic prophecies, the seed of Abraham, Messiah in the Old Testament.

### INTRODUCTION

From the moment of Sem's blessing (Gen. 9:26-27<sup>2</sup>), the previous messianic prophecy, of chronologically, till the release of the first promise recorded from Abraham's life, have passed almost 365 years. In this period, were born many generations of people and the event at the Tower of Babel (Gen.11), determinate a dispersion of civilization without any previous. Briggs

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<sup>1</sup>PhD Student, Faculty of Reformed Theology, "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca, Romanian, E-mail: [cotnike@yahoo.com](mailto:cotnike@yahoo.com).

<sup>2</sup> Genesa – the first book from *The Bible*.

accentuates that from all the Semitic tribes left on Euphrates, tribes whose religion degenerated very fast, God chose a single couple, Abraham and his wife, Sara.<sup>3</sup> For the first time in Old Testament, God is promising to Abram<sup>4</sup> that he will bless him since from when he is located in Mesopotamia, before he will move his location to Haran (Acts 7:2).

Concerning the importance of Abraham, is unanimously accepted that this is one of the most prominent character<sup>5</sup> from the whole Bible, in many cases being called even “father of those who believe” (Matt. 3:9; Rom. 4:12,16; Gal. 3:7), and in Gen. 17:5 due to his belief, “father of many nations”.

Due to the limited space of this paper and the vastness of this topic, it is obvious that we do not claim to address all issues related to him (and even all promises given to him), but what we want in the article is to describe from the perspective of those promises referred to his “seed”, more exactly to remark in what way all that it was promised to his descendants has fulfilled, respectively are to be fulfilled.

## 1. THE PROMISE

Emphasizing the promise of blessing for Abraham began in Gen. 12. This man stands out among all (both Terah - his father and Nahor - his brother) by not remain capped at Haran. Gen. 11:31 points us that Terah, Abram's father took initiative to start with his big family (with Abram and his wife Sarai and Lot, his nephew) from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to reach to Canaan. However, instead of stopping only in Canaan, the Bible emphasizes that they only went up to Haran and sat there, so that in years to come Terah would die there (Gen. 11:31c). Abram, unlike Terah, his father, doesn't content only with the Haran. His desire was to reach from where he started: Canaan. And this dream would be impossible to come true if God would not be revealed in a unique way to convince that he has to go. This revelation of God to Abram is described in Gen. 12 and it involves quitting his own family, relatives and his father's house and starting at the location that would be revealed by God. Abram when came out from Haran was seventy-five

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Augustus Briggs, *Messianic Prophecy: The Prediction of the Fulfilment of Redemption Through the Messiah*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1886), 83-84.

<sup>4</sup> In this article for Abraham I will use both his names (Abram and Abraham).

<sup>5</sup> Importance of Abraham in the Bible can be highlighted even by frequency of his names, namely name of אַבְרָם (WTT namely “Abram” appears 67 times and the name of אַבְרָהָם (WTT, “Abraham”) 260 times, and in total 327 times in 291 distinct verses, and at this are added those contexts, where does not appear his name but it is obviously him, apud *BibleWorks*<sup>8</sup>. The importance of Abraham in Bible it's revealed by the fact that Kingdom of Heaven it's described as “Abraham's bosom” (Luca 16:22; 13:28).

(Gen. 12:4) and has this force because God called him in a special way and made him promises, specially:

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”(Gen. 12:2-3 – NIV)

וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְאֲבָרְכֶךָ וְאֲנִדְלָה שְׁמֶךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה  
וְאֲבָרְכָה מִבְּרַכְיֶיךָ וּמִמְקַלְלֶיךָ אֲאִר וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְּךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחַת הָאָדָמָה

(Gen. 12:2-3 – WTT)

These two verses outlines 7 promises distinct addressed by Lord to Abraham, namely: (1) Lord will make from him a “great nation” (לְגוֹי גָדוֹל – WTT); (2) Lord will bless him; (3) He will make a “great name” (אֲנִדְלָה שְׁמֶךָ – WTT); (4) Abraham and his seed will be bless by others; (5) Lord will bless those who will bless Him too; (6)Who will curse Him will be cursed; (7) By Abraham and his seed Lord will bless all nations of the world. At this 7 prophets add the 8th from Gen. 12:7, said while Abraham went from Sichem to Palestine, in which Lord promises that country of Canaan will be given to him and his *seed* (יִרְעֶךָ - WTT).<sup>6</sup>

The promise made to Abraham about “his seed” was reaffirmed at least 5 times, namely:

- (1) Gen. 13:14-16 – after the breakup between Abraham and Lot, God promises, much as *seed* will inherit the entire nearby country (verse 14), as he’s *seed* will be “the dust of the earth”(v.16);
- (2) Gen. 15:5 – after the defeat of the emperors Amraphel, Arioch, Chedorlaomer and Tidal (14:1), God shows himself to Abraham who updates the promise made in Gen. 12:7, assuring him that the *seed* will be “the stars of the heaven”- KJV (impossible to count- Gen. 22:17);
- (3) Gen. 15:18-21 – God, after has disclosed to Abraham that Jewish people will be enslaved for a time of 400 years, made a covenant with Abraham and told him „To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18 - NIV);

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<sup>6</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, (Michigan Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 46.

(4) Gen. 17:6-8 – the age of 99 years (a year before the birth of Isaac), God is showing again to Abraham. In this situation God promises that the covenant<sup>7</sup> that you did with him will be valid and for your seed, being a covenant forever with the sign circumcision. Also, after changing his wife's name from Sarai to Sarah, promises Abraham's that son, which will be born of Sarai is son of promise and that the seed his will enter everlasting covenant with He (Gen. 17:19,21) ;

(5) Gen. 22:17,18 – On mount memory God reconfirmed his promise saying: „through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed” (Gen 22:18 - NIV).

At these six<sup>8</sup> contexts, we add the promises from the life of Isaac (Gen. 26: 4.23-24) and then from the life of Jacob (Gen. 28: 4, 14-15; 35: 9-12), who reconfirm the promises given to Abraham.<sup>9</sup>

Returning to the eight promises of Genesis 12, we point out that all this are reaffirmed in the book of Genesis.<sup>10</sup> From the 8 promises three describe destiny “seed of Abraham”, namely:

- (1) “He will make you into a great nation” (Gen. 12:2 - NIV);
- (2) “All peoples on earth will be blessed through he” (Gen. 12:3 - NIV);
- (3) “To your offspring I will give this land.” (Gen. 12:7 - NIV).

First promise is accentuated by comparing Abraham's seed with:

- ✓ „the dust of the earth” (KJV) or *פְּעֵפֶר הָאָרֶץ* – WTT: Gen. 13:16<sup>11</sup>
- ✓ „the sand on the seashore” (NIV) or *כְּחֹל הַיָּם* – WTT: Gen. 22:17b<sup>12</sup>;
- ✓ „the stars of the heaven” (KJV) or *כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם* – WTT: Gen. 15:5; 22:4,17<sup>13</sup>.

In plus, God says clearly to Abraham that „will greatly increase your numbers” (Gen. 17:2,6; 22:17; 26:24 – NIV), that he will be the father of many nations (Gen. 17:4 - NIV) and kings will come from he (Gen. 17:6 – NIV – this promise is reaffirmed in Gen. 27:29a, because

<sup>7</sup>This covenant is remembered in the Bible several times, namely: Ex. 2:24; Lev. 26:42; 2Imp. 13:23; 1Cr. 16:16; Ps. 105:9; Fapte 3:25; 7:8.

<sup>8</sup> (1) Gen. 12:2-3; (2) Gen.13:14-16; (3) Gen. 15:5; (4) Gen. 15:18-21; (5) Gen. 17:6-8; (6) Gen. 22:17,18.

<sup>9</sup> Kaiser, *The Messiah in OT*, 46.

<sup>10</sup>The second promise („I will bless you”: Gen. 12:2 - NIV) is reaffirmed in Gen. 22:17a and partially fulfilled in Gen. 24:1,35; third promise („I will make your name great”: Gen. 12:2 - NIV) is reaffirmed in Gen. 17:5; fifth promise („I will bless those who bless you”: Gen 12:3–NIV), and sixth (“whoever curses you I will curse”:Gen. 12:3–NIV) are confirmed by events that took place in Egypt (Gen. 12:5) and in Gherar (Gen. 20:3,18). These last two promises are reiterated in the blessing pronounced by Isaac of Jacob (Gen. 27: 29), and the fifth promise was renewed in his life Jacob (Gen. 32: 28), and in the life of Joseph (Gen. 41: 5).

<sup>11</sup>Appears in the time of Jacob (Gen. 28:14) and in the time of Balaam: „Who can count the *dust* of Jacob or number the fourth part of Israel?” (Num. 23:10- NIV)

<sup>12</sup>Appears in: Gen. 32:12; Is. 48:19; Ier. 33:22; Hosea 1:10;

<sup>13</sup>Appears in: Gen. 26:4; Ex.32:13.

when Isaac blessed Jacob, he said: „May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.” (Gen. 27:29 - NIV) Also, this promise receives spiritual dimensions because in the forever covenant God made with Abraham there is promise that „to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.” (Gen. 17:7 - NIV).

The promise (2) is reaffirmed in Gen. 22:18, where it clearly says that blessing of Abraham is also for the seed of Abraham.

The third promise is reaffirmed in: Gen. 13:15,17; 15:18-21; 17:8; 22:17; 24:7; 26:3,4.

So it can be seen very clearly from Gen. 17:7 all promises made to Abraham are not confined to him as an individual, but they shall have regard to the people who will come from Abraham, using this expression “the seed of Abraham”. This last expression appears in Bible at least 21 occurrences.

The term „seed” (in Hebrew: זֶרַע (*zera'* – WTT)) appears in *The Bible* (DCV) 235 times<sup>14</sup>, of which 66 occurrences relate to the seed as followers<sup>15</sup> of man<sup>16</sup>. Petercă<sup>17</sup> claims that there are a few lines of interpretation regarding this term:

- (1) Seed refers to posterity will never male gender<sup>18</sup> (Gen. 21:13; 15:3,4);
- (2) Survivors in the direction of spiritual posterity („he shall see *his* seed” Is. 53:10 – KJV);
- (3) Iahve promises salvation Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 12:7) and David’s descendants (2Sam. 7:12-15);
- (4) After exile, the term of seed shall be oriented to the concept of remnant (Is.10:22; 28:5 - NIV);

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<sup>14</sup> *BibleWorks 8.0*. In Hebrew Bible the term זֶרַע appears 231 times or 232, if consider the Aramaic term from Deut. 2:43. Only in Genesis this term appears 59 times, apud T. Desmond Alexander, „Messianic Ideology in the book of Genesis” in *The Lord's Anointed Jesus*, ed. Hass Richard, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995, 22.

<sup>15</sup> „The seed of Abraham” appears 34 times and „the seed of David” appears 13 times.

<sup>16</sup> In Bible the term seed It is used with the meaning of animal seed or seed of plants (approx. 45 times); as a symbol of the Word of God (17 times) and that male seed (semen –7 times).

<sup>17</sup> Vladimir Petercă, *Mesianismul în Biblie*, (Iasi: Polirom, 2003), 44.

<sup>18</sup> The term “seed” in most contexts describes a child of male. See the reaction of the first mother (Eva) both from the birth Cain, when she said: „With the help of the LORD I have brought forth *a man*” (Gen 4:1 - NIV), and from the birth Set, when she said: „For God, hath appointed me another *seed* instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.” (Gen 4:25 - KJV). In addition, in the Hebrew culture by seed is understood in generally posterity of gender male, in fact noticeable in most genealogies from the Old Testament and even from the New Testament. These describe just the people of male who were born in the course of time, even if during this period of thousands of years were born quite a lot girls/women: Gen. 4:17-22 (the seed of Cain); 5:1-32 (genealogy from Adam to Sem); 10:1-32 (genealogy of Noe); 11:10-32 (genealogy of Sem); 25:13-15 (the sons of Ismael); 35:22-26 (the sons of Jacob, only boys, although it has had and on Dina); 36:9-43 (genealogy of Esau); 46:8-27 (the children of Israel).

(5) During the period of the second Temple, the significance of seed term was linked to the Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:19).

Therefore, the time limit for seed (*zera'*) can have two meanings: a mass caterer of people or an individual. The expression “the seed of Abraham” as emphasizes Apostle Paul in Gal. 3:16, refer at a specific individual, because in all prophetic passages is singular (“seed”), not to plural (“seeds”). Thus, even if in a general way this term covers many people, the term “seed” follows a itinerary genealogical. “The seed of Abraham” it only shows on Isaac (not on her sons Keturah or Ishmael), and then just Jacob (not on Esau, even though they were twins), and then to the house of Judah (even if Judah was the fourth son of the 12)<sup>19</sup>. So, it is noted manner in which prophecies relating to seed Abraham's indicate specifically to a single individual (from each generation) which will fulfill the prophetic plan, following clearly to complete in a single person, namely: Messiah.

## **2. FULFILLMENT**

Fulfillment of the three promises selected for analysis can be observed in at least two different points of view, namely: the literary fulfillment and spiritual one.

### **2.1. LITERARY FULFILLMENT**

If we are referring to physical fulfillment, you need to notice that the time limit of the seed of Abraham's has its fulfillment in the first row in the person of Isaac.

Sarah for the first time when appears in Bible is described that barren (Gen. 11:30 – “she had no children” (NIV). The paradox is that in the next chapter almost everything he promises towards God is linked directly to her son.

Due to the time periods which have been carried out at the time of issue of the first promises regarding a son and its anticipation of many other contexts (condition of aging of Sarah), Abraham was tempted to levy that God considers Ishmael as the heir (Gen. 17:18), but God certifies that his “seed” will be his son, who will be born from his wife, Sarah (not a slave). And to entrust the fulfillment of His promises, He even tells him the name that will wear his son,

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<sup>19</sup>Ruben loses the right of blessing because sinned with Bilha (Gen. 49:3-4), apud Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies: Lectures*, translate from Samuel Ives Curtiss, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 33; and Kaiser, *The Messiah in OT*, 49.

namely: Isaac, which he says about: “will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.” (Gen. 17:19 - KJV). After twenty-five years from the first promise made to Abraham (relating to seed, “at the set time of” (Gen. 21:2 KJV)) God gives Sarah, as He promised, their first son, Isaac (Gen. 21:2-3).

God continues to fulfill promises made Abraham's in several passages from VT had confirmed that people who has come out of Abraham became numerous „as the stars of the heaven” (Deut. 1:10; Heb. 11:12)<sup>20</sup>, „the dust of the earth” (2Cr. 1:9) and „as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude” (Jos. 11:4 - KJV; 1Kings 4:20,29)<sup>21</sup>.

God keeps His promises and gives Abraham the Land of Canaan. After forty years of travelling, God shows Moses the promise land before he passes away reminding him that „This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob”, saying, “I will give it unto thy seed” (Deut. 34:4 – KJV). Also, in very much cases is told that God fulfilled this “the LORD swear unto thy fathers, Abraham...” (Deut. 9:5 - KJV) (“he swear by himself” (Heb. 6:13 - KJV)) namely that He will give him the Promise Land (Ex. 6:8; 32:13; 33:1; Num. 32:11; Deut. 1:8; 6:10-11; 9:5; 29:13; 34:4; 30:20; 2Chr. 20:7; Micah 7:20; Luk. 1:73).

In the end, the entrance of the Jewish people in the promised country is done by Joshua and Caleb (only two of all the people who have started in Egypt - Num. 32:11), in addition, the new generation of people.

The promise for the kings that will come from the seed of Abraham, is reconfirmed for seed of Jacob (Gen. 35:11), and then, to the Jewish people who were in the middle of bondage rampant, when, Lord reminds them the power of His promise made to Abraham and certified its fulfillment affirming that: “Thus saith the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; Then will I cast away the *seed of Jacob*, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his *seed* to be rulers over the *seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.” (Jer 33:25, 26 – KJV)

Slowly, the promise concerning the seed of Abraham is reaching its final purpose and obvious more important than the blessing of Abraham and his successors about the promised

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<sup>20</sup>This expression appears in: Deut. 10:22; 28:62; 1Chr. 27:23.

<sup>21</sup>This expression appears in: 2Sam. 17:11; Ev. 11:12.

land and the ultimate goal of the prophecy from Gen. 12 was the embodiment of Him, the Messiah, as Abraham's seed.

## 2.2. SPIRITUAL FULFILLMENT

After thousands of years from the moment of the prophecy, the first results started to be seen as a practical fulfillment of its power.

When Mary visited Elizabeth (her cousin) she was pregnant (with Jesus) and she describes God as the One who "He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers." (Luk 1:54-55 - NIV)

In John 8:39, the Lord Jesus sustains that Abraham's sons (the seed of Abraham) are not only the physical descendants, but those who prove a character as Abraham's ("You would do the things Abraham did." (NIV). So, the signification of the term „the seed of Abraham” is not limited only to the physical part but it also highlights the idea of a spiritual following. Furthermore, apostle Paul writes to the Romans, and emphasizes another aspect of this term confirming that the sons of Abraham are the ones who truly believe, and they're not only circumcised, because Abraham believed before to be circumcised and that faith was considered holy. So, Abraham is in fact the father of all believers even if they are circumcised or not. (Rom. 4:9-11; Gal. 3:6-10). The Epistle of Romans proves to us that through the seed of Abraham, we can't understand only the physical sons, but mostly promise's children, because Abraham, even though he had lots of children, but God said "In Isaac shall thy *seed* be called." (Rom. 9:7 - KJV)

The plan of blessing other people on earth is not ending at the material of psychological parentage from Abraham, it means that God did not limit Himself at a material blessing through Abraham, but His plan was that His embodiment to become the „the seed of Abraham” (Gal. 3:16) because afterwards to save all the Jews and in final all other people, despite their nationalities. For that matter of fact, Paul, the Apostle, after the healing of the man crippled from birth at "the temple gate called Beautiful" (Act 3:2 - NIV), he was preaching repentance (Act 3:19-20) to all gathered and he remembers them that they „are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham,” And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” (Act 3:25 - KJV<sup>22</sup>).

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<sup>22</sup> *The Bible*, KJV, accessed June 18, 2013, <http://www.bibleserver.com>.

So, Jesus was from the seed of Abraham „the seed of Abraham” (the son of Abraham that physical descending – Matt. 1:1,2; Luk 3:34; Gal. 3:16,19), and “he helps Abraham’s descendants” (Heb 2:16 - NIV) – that spiritual descending, I mean all those who would believe in Him (Gal. 3:29; Heb. 2:16) – In order for you to be able to give them from the status of sons of God, and at the same time his brothers (Heb. 2: 11-13).

## **CONCLUSION**

So, this promise assumes a waiting in two dimensions: the first, which clearly refer to the Jewish people whose existence will be in forever and the second wait, spiritual one which charged the term of “the seed of Abraham” as the Church of Christ, namely all those who want to believe in Messiah (which was Jewish - descendant of Abraham's), which will be made Abraham's deeds and finally they will inherit life. (Gal. 3:29).

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