**THE FIRST PROMISE - OFFSPRING**

**THE CORPORATE OFFSPRING IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS**

Paul identified the body of believers with the offspring of Abraham (Romans 4:13-18; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:7,23-29). He did not limit the concept to Christ. Identifying the offspring with the people of faith seems to broaden the concept beyond its scope in the patriarchal accounts where it seems to naturally have the physical descendants of Abraham in mind.

The offspring of Abraham are primarily a spiritual community in Paul’s writings. He did use the term in a more nationalistic sense in Romans 11:1 and 2 Corinthians 11:22 but those usages were incidental to his main purpose. He defined the true offspring of David as a community of faith (Galatians 3:7,29) producing positive righteousness which was not the result of adherence to the Law (Romans 4:13-15).

In Galatians 3:7 Paul wrote ‘*Understand then, that those who believe are children of Abraham*.’ In 3:6 he supported his argument by appealing to Genesis 15:6: ‘*Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.*’ Paul affirmed the primacy of faith in the administration of the Abrahamic covenant by pointing out that faithful obedience (the obedience of faith) on Abraham’s part was the ground of his participation in the benefits of the promise.

Jesus equally affirmed this in His denunciation of the idea that those who descended from Abraham were automatic recipients of God’s favour. In Matthew 3:9,10, He said that if all God wanted were physical descendants of Abraham, He could raise them up out of the stones on the ground. God wants the fruit of repentance (3:10 c.f. 3:8)

This same principle is found in the Old Testament, beginning in **Deuteronomy** where faithful obedience is noted as an important characteristic of the descendants of Abraham. In 4:37,38 Moses says that because the Lord loved their forefathers and chose their descendants, (Hebrew: *zera* – offspring), He brought the Israelites into the land of Canaan. But 4:40 makes it clear that continued appropriation of the promise of security in the land was not a national privilege. It was dependant on faithful obedience to the ‘*decrees and commands’* of the Lord. The people were to keep the ‘*decrees and commands’* that they might live long in the land the Lord their God gave them.

In 10:16 the command was given to the Israelites to circumcise their hearts and not be stiff-necked. As in the previous passage above they are referred to as descendants (*zera*) of the forefathers (10:15). Because they are chosen offspring, they are to reflect the very nature of God (10:16-19). This is done by maintaining purity of heart and sensitivity to the will of God reflected in the concept of heart circumcision (10:16). The offspring are a people with a spiritual responsibility. They are not only a national entity but also a people who, by virtue of God’s faithfulness to His promise (10:22), owe to God the debt of obedience to His commands.

A similar concept is reflected in 11:8-10 where the promise of the land, both possession (11:8) and continued security (11:9), is based on faithful obedience: ‘*Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today …*’ (11:8).

**The prophets** set forth the same principle. National privilege alone is not the guarantee of continued existence in the land. Both Israel and Judah were exiled from the land because of their failure to reflect the ethical demands of the Law (Jeremiah 29:17-23; Ezekiel 5:5-12; 6:8-10; Daniel 9:8-10). The prophet Amos cried out against the popular belief that, because Israel was an elect nation established by God, the people would be protected, despite their hardness of heart (2:6-16; 3:2,9-11; 7:7-9; 9:7,8).

As the promise of the offspring unfolds through both Old and New Testaments, two patterns emerge. First, there is an expansion. The initial promise said that Abraham’s immediate descendants would become as numerous as the stars. The New Testament continues this expansion by including in that multitude all the people of faith. One man becomes the father of uncounted multitudes who follow his example of faithful obedience.

The second pattern is a narrowing. Within the dramatic expansion of the offspring, one figure begins to emerge. He is the offspring of David, the ‘seed.’

This two-fold pattern lies at the heart of understanding the covenantal expression of the promise.

This study is a summary of ‘*The Covenants of Promise’* by T. E. McComiskey, (Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England, 1988, pp.35-38)