

“Seed” or “Seeds” (in Galations 3:16)?

By David Pyles

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. – Gal 3:16

Paul has received much criticism from unbelievers and pseudo-believers for his argument in this text. They complain that the Hebrew word for “seed” can be either singular or plural, even as is the case in English. However, the complainers are not thinking at the depths of the apostle. His argument is not based on grammar but on principle that is prevalent in the Bible.

All Bible students know that natural objects and events in the Old Testament were commonly symbolic of higher spiritual truths. For example, the blood placed on the doorposts in the Passover portended the crucifixion. The rock in the wilderness was a symbol of Christ. The water that flowed from the rock represented the Holy Spirit. Countless other examples could be given.

Now in their natural application, the promises made to Abraham were to only one of his seed, namely, to his second son Isaac. These promises did not, in any natural sense, apply to Ishmael or to the sons of Abraham that were conceived by his second wife Keturah. While these promises served to the benefit of thousands after Isaac, all of these became beneficiaries on account of their being “*in Isaac*” in the sense that they were his natural descendants. This is why God said to Abraham, “*in Isaac shall thy seed be called,*” (Gn 21:12). What was true of the natural sense was a shadow of the higher spiritual meaning. The spiritual promises made to Abraham were directly applicable to the Messiah alone, and became applicable to others by virtue of their being accounted and blessed in Him.

That Paul intended such reasoning is evidenced later with:

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. – Gal 3:27-29

Hence, all the spiritual beneficiaries of the promises to Abraham are accounted and blessed as one in Christ.

This type of reasoning is common to scripture, especially to the writings of Paul. Scriptures represent the elect of God as being one with Christ in many ways. In particular, they are represented as dying when He died (Gal 2:20, 2Tim 2:11) and as being resurrected when He was resurrected (Jn 11:25-26, 1Thes 4:13-14). His righteousness is represented as being their righteousness (Rom 8:3-4, Phil 3:8-9). His glorified body implies their glorified body (1Cor 15:47-49, 1Jn 3:2-3). His eternal life implies their eternal life (Col 3:3-4, Jn 14:19-20). His access to God implies their access to God (Eph 2:18, Jn 14:13-14). His inheritance is also their inheritance (Rom 8:16-17, Eph 1:11); hence, His kingdom is their kingdom (Dn 7:27, Lk 12:32).

All these deep spiritual truths were symbolized when the natural aspects of the covenant were channeled to their recipients through one natural seed. Paul's critics are therefore swimming at the shallow end of the pool.

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