The Promises of God for Arabia

Arabia is the cradle and heartland of the Muslim World, even so, as we work and pray for those God has called us to in Arabia, we have the assurance of an abundant harvest **because of the testimony of God's Word**. God's promises are always fulfilled and His worldwide promises are not put in such a way as to exclude anyone from any people group or region of the world. The Bible tells us that many false prophets will arise and deceive many, but it doesn't for a moment allow that the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus will divide the peoples of the earth only ruling some of them, leaving the rest in the bondage of the Evil One.

"In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His Cross." [Col. 1:20]

"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands." [Jn. 3:35]

"God has exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name ... far above all rule and authority and power and might and dominion and above every name that is named not only in this world but also in that which is to come." [Phil. 2:9; Eph. 1:21]

"That at the name of Jesus every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." [Phil. 2:11]

So at the moment we may see the Muslim World growing in influence and triumphing in places, but the future belongs to the Lord Jesus! We proclaim:

"Who is it that overcomes the world, except the one who believes Jesus is the Son of God?" [1 Jn. 5:5]

So the divinity of the Lord Jesus, denied by Muslims, decides the destiny of all worldly kingdoms.

Some general Old Testament promises relating to worldwide mission

There appears to be a failure among many believers to realise the number and importance of God's promises in the **Old Testament** as to what will happen in the future. Here are some:

Genesis 12:3 – God's promise to Abraham: ***"And I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you … and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."***

Genesis 18:17-18: ***"The Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?' "***

Genesis 22:18: ***" …. and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."***

Genesis 26:4: ***"I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed …."***

Genesis 28:14: ***"Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed."***

Numbers 14:20-21 – This is after Moses has interceded for the people who had rebelled against God: ***"Then the Lord said, 'I have pardoned according to your word. But truly as I live and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of God ….' " Then*** God goes on to say that none of the people will enter the land of promise except Caleb and Joshua.

Isaiah 2:2 – Isaiah was speaking of the mountain of the house of the Lord: ***"… the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills and all the nations shall flow to it and many peoples shall come and say, 'Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord … that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths.' "***

Isaiah 2:18: ***"… And the idols shall utterly pass away."***

Jeremiah 3:17: ***"At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord and all nations shall gather to it and to the presence of the Lord … and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart."***

Daniel 7:13-14: ***"I saw in the night visions and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came One like the Son of Man and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and His Kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed."***

Joel 2:28: ***"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh …."***

Jonah Chapters 3 and 4 – when the evil and cruel people of Nineveh repented:

3:10: ***"When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster He had said He would do to them and He did not do it."*** He relented because He loves all He has made.

4:11: ***"And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons*** (often interpreted as young children) ***who do not know their right hand from their left and also much cattle?"***

Micah 5:4-5: ***"And He shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God…. And they shall dwell secure, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth. And He shall be their peace."***

Habakkuk 2:14: ***"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."***

Zephaniah 2:11: ***"The Lord will be awesome against them;*** (those who taunted and boasted of their gods in their pride) ***for he will famish all the gods of the earth and to Him shall bow down, each in its place, all the lands of the nations"*** !

Haggai 2:6-7: ***"For thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in and I will fill this house with glory' says the Lord of Hosts."***

Zechariah 9:10: ***" …. and He shall speak peace to the nations; His rule shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth."***

Zechariah 14:9: ***"And the Lord will be King over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be One and His name One."*** (implying a universal, true monotheism)

Malachi 1:11: ***" 'For from the rising of the sun to its setting My name will be great among the nations and in every place incense will be offered to My name and a pure offering. For My name will be great among the nations' says the Lord of Hosts."***

The Great Commission, given by Our Lord Jesus, was based on these tremendous Old Testament promises. For example: Acts 1:8, ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."*** [See also Mt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:25; Luke 24:46-47 and John 20:21]

For a very long time all the nations of the world have been in God's plan! Is it not remarkable that many of these Old Testament promises are grouped around the names of countries in the Middle East that are now the heartlands and strength of the whole Muslim World?

Acts 15:18 (KJV): ***"Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world."***

So it cannot be true that these worldwide promises to ***"all nations"*** do not involve Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and the seven countries in Arabia – the core and heartlands of Islam. They too must be included in God's plan of redemption! Is there not a special blessing for the lands that border Israel when the Lord shall comfort His people and restore all her waste places? Isaiah 19:24-25 says:

"In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria (Northern Iraq) ***and Assyria will come into Egypt and Egypt into Assyria and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth,*** (!) ***whom the Lord of Hosts has blessed saying, 'Blessed be Egypt My people and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.' "*** (Is. 19:24-25.)

As portrayed in the New Testament, the Muslim World is in no better condition and no worse condition than the rest of the world. The needs of both are the same and we have the same duty to share the Gospel with all Muslims and all peoples everywhere. We have the same promises of God's blessing on our work of witness. Muslims too are ***"without excuse"*** (Rom. 1:20, 32), ***"without hope"*** (Jn. 3:36, Eph. 2:2), ***"without peace"*** (Is. 58:22), ***"without feeling"*** (Eph. 4:19). ***"They have become callous."*** They are ***"without Christ"*** (Rom. 13:13-14) as are all the peoples of the world. Our responsibility towards them is no less and, more importantly, neither is the power of God's love to win them.

The rock of **the Sonship of the Lord Jesus** is the major stone of stumbling and rock of offence to our Muslim friends. But on this very rock the Lord Jesus is building His church (Mt. 16:18 – see context). So it is the Deity of the Lord Jesus that is the foundation of all churches. ***"And the foundation of God stands secure."*** (2 Tim. 2:19)

Writing on this subject, a worker in North Africa says: "Blessed be God, we are not left to carry on this warfare on our own, ***'He who sent me is with me'***, says the Master and He who sends His servants now is surely with them for the promise stands, ***'Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the age'.***" (Mt. 28:20).

In our efforts to see men, women and children saved, we are dependent on the power of the Spirit of God; for no man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit. But if those of us in our home countries are conscious of this, those who work among Muslims realise it even more intensely. At home in England we contend mostly with indifference, but in the Muslim World there it is deep-rooted prejudice – and in many cases **hatred** – towards the Lord Jesus as the Son of God. But the battle is not ours, it is the Lord's and we are but instruments to carry out His words and purposes. The Holy Spirit has been sent from the Father, ***"To convict the world of sin"*** (Jn. 16:8) and we are not justified in making any exceptions in the case of Muslims. Should we not expect that **if** there is a nation, a race or a religion on earth more inaccessible than another, more adverse to the Gospel, more hardened against its teachings, then **that is the place** where the Lord Jesus will show, ***"the immeasurable greatness of His power?"*** (Eph. 1:19) by calling out many from their midst whom He may make 'chosen vessels' to bear His name to others of their people? I believe in this 21st century, He is doing just this.

Specific promises for the peoples of Arabia and the Desert Lands near Palestine

There is no land and no people (with the exception of Palestine and the Jewish people) that bears such a close relationship to God's covenant promises as Arabia and the Arabs. The promises of an abundant spiritual harvest for the Kingdom of God in Arabia are many, definite and magnificent!

These promises group themselves around seven names that have been identified with the Arabian Peninsula from time immemorial:

- **Ishmael**
- **Kedar and Nebaioth**
- **Sheba, Seba,**
- **Midian and Ephah**

There are numerous and glorious promises concerning the desert. The people in Palestine always referred to the "desert" or wilderness as the Sinai and what is today northern Arabia – part of Syria, Iraq and Jordan – i.e. under the Fertile Crescent – as well as the Arabian Peninsula. We will look at some promises from Isaiah and Ezekiel. They speak of the land and plants but refer to the people of the land:

Isaiah 35:1-2: ***"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like a crocus. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it and the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God."***

Isaiah 40:3: ***"A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.' "***

Isaiah 41:18-20: ***"I will open rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the Cedar, the Acacia, the Myrtle and the Olive. I will set in the desert the Cypress, the Plane tree and the Pine together. That they may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it."***

Isaiah 43:19: ***"Behold I am doing a new thing; now it springs up, do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."***

Isaiah 51:3: ***"For the Lord comforts Zion; He comforts all her waste places and He makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song."***

Ezekiel 34:25: ***"I will make them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods."***

Ezekiel 47:8-9: ***"And he said to me, 'This water flows towards the eastern region*** (i.e. the Dead Sea) ***and goes down to the Arabah*** (south of the Dead Sea to Aqaba) ***and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea the water will become fresh … so everything will live where the river flows.' "***

Specific promises given to the children of Ishmael

In order to understand the promises given to the sons of Ishmael, we first need to know the relationship of Ishmael to the Abrahamic covenant and the place Ishmael occupies in God's plan for the nations as outlined in the book of Genesis.

Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, seems to have occupied a prominent place in Abraham's household and she appears to have had a deep inward participation in the faith of the God of Abraham. She was probably added to the family of faith during Abraham's stay in Egypt and she probably occupied the same position towards the female servants that Eliezar of Damascus did towards the male servants. It is when she was driven into the desert by the jealous harshness of Sarah, that we have the first revelation of God concerning Ishmael and his children. It was both a promise and a prophecy:

Genesis 16:7-15: ***"The Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness – the spring on the way to Shur ..... and he said, 'Hagar, servant of Sarah, where have you come from and where are you going?' She said, 'I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarah'. The Angel of the Lord said to her, 'Return to your mistress and submit to her.' The Angel of the Lord also said to her, 'I will***

surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.' And the Angel of the Lord said to her, 'Behold you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael (meaning 'God hears'), ***because the Lord has listened to your affliction. He will be a wild donkey of a man. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him and he will dwell over against all his kinsmen'. So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, 'You are a God who sees me', for she said, 'Truly here I have seen Him who looks after me'. Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi (the well of the Living One who sees me). The well lies between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar bore Abraham a son and Abraham called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael."***

Shur is in the desert area in the north of the Sinai Peninsula not far from the Mediterranean Sea. It is on the road between lower Egypt and Canaan. Possibly Hagar thought of going home to Egypt. Today the well is called 'Ain Qudeirat. It is in the Negev in Israel.

It is plain from the context that the Angel of the Lord and the Lord Himself are identified here as the same person – a theophany – a manifestation of God that is tangible to human senses – a visible appearance of God in the Old Testament. Here the Angel speaks for God in the first person (Gen. 16:10) and attributes the experience to God directly. (Gen. 16:13)

Why should this "Angel" first appear to Hagar? He spoke to her four times. Clearly, when Hagar was harshly treated and found herself a lonely fugitive in the desert, God showed her His mercy and His personal care. Lange suggests the following in his commentary:

"The Angel of the Lord, as Christ who was to come through Isaac, had a particular reason for assisting Hagar, since she, for the sake of the future Messiah, is involved in this sorrow."

Some commentators suggest that Hagar was truly astonished that she had seen God and remained alive. Some translations translate Beer Lahai Roi: *'The God who allows Himself to be seen'* and the well as: *'The well of seeing alive'.*

So the very first appearance of the Angel of the Lord is to a woman who was an outcast and a fugitive. Is there not reason to see in this person and His appearance in this way, a significant anticipation of the incarnation and its crowning wonder in the Man, the Lord Jesus? We were once outcasts and fugitives from God's presence but were given to see God in the Lord Jesus and not to die but to live and indeed to find true life in Him.

There is a lovely incident in the ministry of the Lord Jesus where an outcast had his eyes opened so he could see. We read (Jn. 9:35-38), ***"Jesus heard they had cast him out and having found him said, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?' He answered, 'Who is He that I may believe in Him?' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen Him and it is He who speaks to you.' He said, 'Lord I believe!' And he worshipped Him."***

In any case the special revelation and the special promise were given not only to Hagar but to her descendants as well. The Lord Jesus, if we may so express it, outlines the future history and character of the children of Ishmael as well as their strength and glory. He also gives them a great spiritual promise in the God-given name, Ishmael – Elohim will hear! It is very interesting to me that so many of Ishmael's children today also have visions of the Lord Jesus and He speaks to them. Perhaps the majority of believers from a Muslim background in the Arab World have had a similar experience to that of Hagar.

The fulfilment of the promise that Ishmael's seed would greatly multiply has clearly been fulfilled. Arabia, whose population consists mainly of Ishmaelites, is and has been a living fountain of men and women. Arabs have migrated to many parts of Asia (Malabar in India, Aceh in Indonesia), across North Africa, down the east coast of Africa and in the 20th century almost everywhere. Where there has been such a clear fulfilment of the promise of natural increase are there not grounds to believe that God will hear and pour out great spiritual blessing?

Thirteen years after the first promise to Ishmael, we hear the promise renewed just after the instruction of circumcision – the sign of the Covenant of Faith:

Genesis 17:18: ***"And Abraham said to God, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before You!' But God said, 'No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you ...' "***

What is the significance of Abraham's prayer for Ishmael? Is it probable that he merely asks for temporal prosperity and length of life? This doesn't explain why the prayer asks that Ishmael may live **before** God. The prayer of Abraham arose out of his anxiety that Ishmael should not be excluded from the blessings of the Covenant that God had just made with Abraham – an everlasting Covenant (Gen. 17:13). The fact that God's answer contains no denial of the prayer of Abraham is in favour of this interpretation. In his prayer Abraham was expressing the possibility of an indefinite – perhaps even infinite – neglect of Ishmael by God and that was very painful to his parent heart. So Abraham asks for life for Ishmael in its highest sense – life in the presence of God (i.e. before God). And God gave Abraham the assurance that what he had asked would be granted. This is what the circumcision of Ishmael means (Gen. 17:23). It is a rite that ratifies the Covenant of God with Abraham and to his seed including Ishmael and his descendants. They would also be in the sphere of the blessings of God. However much the Arabs may have departed from the faith of Abraham over all these millennia, they have remained faithful to the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant by the rite of circumcision.

The Repentance of Ishmael – Genesis 21:8-21

For the third time we read of a special revelation (a theophany) to prove God's love for Ishmael. In the pathetic story of Hagar's expulsion, Ishmael is the central figure. His mocking of Isaac was its cause. He was probably 13 or 14 years old. Sarah said to Abraham, ***"Cast out this slave woman, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac."*** Abraham gave Hagar bread and water and sent her away. She went down into the Negev. When the water in the bottle was gone Hagar separated herself about 200 metres from Ishmael for she said, ***"Let me not look on the death of the child."*** And as both of them got ready for death – Hagar quietly crying – the Angel of the Lord called to Hagar:

Gen. 21:17-20: ***" 'What troubles you Hagar? Fear not, for <u>God has heard the voice of the boy</u> where he is. Arise, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.' Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water ... and God was with the boy."***

This story shows Ishmael's repentance. **God heard his voice**. God forgave his sinful mocking. God saved his life. God was with the lad! When Abraham died, ***"In good old age and full of years … his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah … with Sarah his wife."*** (Gen. 25:8-10)

No mention is made here of the sons of Keturah at Abraham's death except Isaac and Ishmael. Clearly there was a reconciliation. In Gen 25:12-16 the names of the sons of Ishmael are given. The names of the sons of Ishmael and Isaac are given again in the Covenant genealogies of I Chronicles 1:28-34. They are recorded in full in order to bind together the prophecies of Genesis with the Messianic promises for the seed of Isaac.

The Twelve Princes

The twelve 'princes'– sons of Ishmael whose names are given in Gen. 25:12-16 – were undoubtedly the patriarchs of many Arab tribes. In Biblical times they mostly lived in north west Arabia. Some of the names can be distinctly traced through history and are easily identified with modern tribes in Arabia. The fourth son, Mibsam, corresponds to the Nejd tribe of Bessam. The fifth son, Mishma, is most likely the tribe called the Beni Misma.

Before looking at the descendants of Nebaioth and Kedar, here is a brief mention of Biblical references to some of the lesser sons and their descendants.

6th son – Dumah: the descendants of Dumah gave their name to Dumah – capital of a district known as the Jawf (al Jawf) in northern Saudi Arabia. Today the ruins are called Dumat el Jendal. It was a town well-known to both the Assyrian and Babylonian empires in the 6th and 7th centuries BC.

7th son – Massa: his descendants also settled in Northern Arabia. A Greek historian wrote that they lived North East of Dumah. Some Bible translators think that Mesheck should be translated as Massa. There is a possibility that in the introduction to both Proverbs 30 and 31 the Hebrew word 'hammassa' (usually translated 'oracle') should be read as a place name. So both Agur and Lemuel are descendants of Massa. King Lemuel must have had a spiritually discerning mother to have written Proverbs 31!

8th son – Hadad (or Hadar in the KJV/AV)

9th son – Tema: this also became the name of the district the tribe settled in. It is mentioned together with Dedan and Buz (Jer. 25:24) as the place where the people, ***"Cut the corners of their hair"*** ! These places were famous for the caravan trade on the incense route from south Arabia to Syria and the Mediterranean. It is about 250 km north-west of Medina on the edge of the Nafud.

10th son – Jatur/Iturea (Yᵉṭûa in Hebrew): This tribe is mentioned in 1 Chron. 5:19 as a tribe with Israel who lived east of the River Jordan. In 105-104 BC the Jews fought against them and captured some of their land. In New Testament times they were usually called 'Syrians' and sometimes 'Arabians' by Josephus, Pliny and others.

11th son – Nephish: the location of this tribe has not been determined, but they are mentioned in 1 Chron. 5:19 as an inter-tribe consortium – called the Hagarites – made up of the descendants of Jetur, Nephish and Nobad – a tribe of which nothing else is known. The consortium was conquered by the combined Jewish tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh with a great loss of livestock!

12th son – Kedemah: this may be the tribe called elsewhere in the Bible 'Kadmonites' – i.e. 'easterners' (beni qedem). Job was called the greatest of all ***'the people of the east'***. (Job 1:3). So possibly Job was an Ishmaelite. The 'East' in the Bible is often the Trans-Jordan area from the east of the Gulf of Aqaba up to the area of the Hauran south of Damascus.

Aside from these Biblical references, the first two sons of Hagar stand out clearly in history – **Nebaioth** and **Kedar**. As long ago as Pliny in the second century, they are mentioned together in his **Natural History** as 'Nabatoi et Cedrei'. It is these two names – whose identity no-one questions – that are at the centre of glorious promises. Isaiah 60 is well known as one of the greatest Old Testament passages containing special promises. Many don't realise that much of it contains special promises for Arabia.

Firstly some historical data and then the promises:

Nebaioth: the Nabateans are considered to be the descendants of Nebaioth. The Nabateans are mentioned in Assyrian history (650 BC). But they grew to prominence at the end of the Persian Empire and the beginnings of the Greek Empire. A historian writing in 50 BC describes them as a nomadic desert tribe who straddled the 'frankincense route' from Basra across northern Arabia and from Yemen in the south. Their capital was Petra about 50 miles S.S.E. of the Dead Sea. The Greek king after Alexander had two military expeditions to Petra in order to gain control of the trade (312 BC). Petra was a 'stronghold'. Nabatean engineers constructed a well-developed system of water conservation and water distribution that enabled a large town to grow up and more importantly enabled cultivated land. Many of their dams and reservoirs are still usable today. Petra is surrounded by huge cliffs pierced by narrow ravines **–** an almost impregnable defence.

The Nabateans grew richer and richer. They built other towns including Medain Saleh in Saudi Arabia near the village of Al Ula on the old Turkish railroad.

In the third century A.D. the rise of the city of Palmyra diverted some trade from the Gulf and the Silk Road that formerly went to Petra. Slowly Petra began to decline as a trading centre. Interestingly an

article/booklet has been written by Jeremy Smyth called **The Mecca Question**. It is part of a larger book by Dan Gibson entitled **Qur'anic Geography** (ISBN 978-0-9867144-4-3) – see www.indipress.ca

This article provides detailed evidence to demonstrate that Petra, not Mecca, was the birthplace of Islam! The Kaaba was not located in Mecca and early Islamic writings all point to Petra and not Mecca as the "Holy City". Apparently Mecca didn't exist much before A.D. 900 – i.e. about 250 years after Muhammad's death. The change took place in a war in A.D. 683 between the Umayyads in Damascus and Abdullah Ibn al-Zabayr who declared himself Caliph of the "Holy City". Ibn al-Zabayr lost the war, demolished the "Holy City" and dug out many of its support structures as well as the "Black Stone" which he removed to Mecca and built the present Kaaba. The Umayyad army set out to destroy Petra (AH 73-74).

[AH is after the Hegira – the flight from Mecca to Medina ~ Sept. AD 672. This year became AH 1. However the Muslim year is not a solar year but a lunar year of 12 'new moons' and so is shorter.]

The current ruins of Petra were caused by a huge earthquake in A.D. 713. In about AH 82 mosque buildings began to change their Qibla [the direction of prayer] from Petra (not Jerusalem but Petra) to Mecca. So Petra as a trading centre died after the birth of Islam largely due to a number of earthquakes. Dan Gibson's book, **Qur'anic Geography** is well worth reading.

The Biblical promises relating to Kedar and Nebaioth

Kedar: Isaiah 42:10-13, 16

10. ***"Sing to the Lord a new song,***
His praise from the ends of the earth.
You who go down to the sea and all that fills it,
And coastlands and their inhabitants.

11. ***Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice***
The villages that Kedar inhabits.
Let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy.
Let them shout from the top of the mountains.

12. ***Let them give glory to the Lord and declare His praise in the coastlands.***

13. ***The Lord goes out like a mighty man;***
Like a man of war He stirs up His zeal.
He cries out; He shouts aloud,
He shows Himself mighty against His foes.

16. ***And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know,***
in paths that they have not known I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I do and I do not forsake them."

This is a summons to the whole world to sing and to sing a new song in response to a new realisation of the goodness and faithfulness of God. Kedar represents the Bedouin of Arabia in a generic sense. So here in a generic way these verses speak of the Bedouin of the desert, the Arab fishermen of the Red Sea reefs and the pearl divers and fishermen of the Gulf.

When will these prophecies be fulfilled? It more and more describes the present and future state of the peoples of Arabia! Kedar have forsaken their nomadic tents and have been urbanised. Riyadh in the Nejd currently has a population of nearly 5 million people. New cities are being created in Arabia – on the coastlands, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE and Oman are all increasingly urbanised. The only proper name in this passage as a geographic centre of the entire chapter is Kedar. In two other

prophecies (Is. 21:13-17 and Jer. 49:28-33) that have no Messianic character, Kedar is referred to as synonymous with the Bedouin.

The whole passage is in the context of an immense spiritual battle. The mighty warrior is the Mighty God! Clearly a time is coming when the Bedouin increasingly forsake their tents for cities. God has been silent for nearly 1500 years in Arabia during which time Muhammad apparently said Arabia should only be inhabited by Muslims **–** a period of divine restraint (v. 14). The Mighty Warrior (the Lord Jesus) also became a Rescuer **–** leading the blind (the work of a slave!). Also He will overcome ignorance – (***"a way they have not known"***) and He will remove barriers so there is no hindrance (***"turn darkness into light"***) and no one will stumble (***"the rough places smooth"***). There is a great revelation of divine determination! In Is. 42:17 there is a description of how this great Warrior God comes face-to-face with His Satanic enemy and how Satan falls before him – ***"Utterly put to shame and his followers are doomed"***.

These verses read in conjunction with all the other promises of a more general character, leave no room for doubt that these sons of Ishmael have a great place in the coming glory of the Lord and the brightness of His rising. This has only been delayed by our neglect in evangelising the Arab peoples of the Peninsula.

Nebaioth: the firstborn son of Ishmael

Isaiah 60:1-7: The context of this passage is the coming of the Anointed Conqueror (59:14-63:6). This passage speaks of the Lord's city and the consummation of all the promises of Abrahamic blessings. It is the consummation of the worldwide purposes of God!

1. **"*Arise, shine, for your light has come,***
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

2. ***For behold, darkness shall cover the earth***
***and thick darkness the peoples*.**
[This is true of all Muslim peoples!]
<u>But</u> the Lord will arise upon you,
***and His glory will be seen upon you*.**

3. ***And nations shall come to your light,***
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

4. ***Lift up your eyes all around and see;***
they all gather together they come to you,
your sons from afar and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.

5. ***Then you shall see and be radiant,***
your heart shall thrill and exalt …
And the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

6. ***A multitude of camels will cover you, young camels of Midian and Ephah;***
all those from Sheba (Yemen) ***will come, they will bring gold and frankincense,***
and will bear "good news" of the praises of the Lord.

7. ***All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth will minister to you.***
***They will go up with acceptance on My altar and I shall beautify My glorious house.*"**

Isaiah is the only Old Testament prophet who uses the metaphor of "light" to a notable extent. The people who come to the light are not merely bathed in light; they are irradiated – inwardly charged with new outshining life! Why? ***"For your light has come"*** is aimed at a world in need. The Lord's glory – i.e. the Lord in all the glory of His person and majesty – has appeared. The **dawn** of His brightness was over 2000 years ago and a worldwide re-gathering is happening – the winning of the nations by the Gospel being preached. And as they gather, they come telling the "good news" of the Lord's praises. And the Lord fully accepts their offerings and gifts.

So this is the list of Arab peoples:

Midian – Abraham's son by the concubine Keturah [they lived on the East Bank of Jordan among the Moabites and in Gideon's day had perfected highly mobile warfare using camels. So the dreaded spoilers of Gideon's day now become the welcome worshippers.]

Ephah is east of the Gulf.

Sheba (Yemen) is in the deep south.

Nebaioth is the west side of the Arabian Peninsula.

Kedar is in the centre of Arabia.

So these Arabian peoples are converted, but more, they are seen as "evangelists" – bringers of the "Good News"!

Their flocks are accepted, not to provide animals for the altar but as partaking of the benefits of the altar (the Cross). The rest of the poem is a wonderful description of the nations serving in the New Jerusalem and being transformed by the Lord and the Lord being the light of the new city (Revelation 21:22-27).

Sheba and Seba

Another group of special promises for Arabia cluster round the names **Sheba** and **Seba**.

Sheba is the land in south west Arabia – modern Yemen – whose Queen visited Solomon. Seba (both the people and the land) were closely related to Sheba.

Psalm 72:10: " ***… may kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before Him, all nations serve him."***

Psalm 72:15: ***" ... long may He live, may gold of Sheba be given to Him …!"***

This is clearly a Messianic Psalm.

Isaiah 60:6: ***"All those from Sheba will come; they will bring gold and frankincense and will bear "good news" of the praises of the Lord."***

Before the rise of Islam there was quite a large number of Christians in Yemen.

The people of Sheba for much of the 1st millennium BC were heavily engaged in commerce. Gold, frankincense, spices and jewels were transported from Aden up to the Mediterranean ports by camels. Joel 3:8 mentions that they were also engaged in the slave trade.

The successive capitals were Seba, Sana Zaphar and now Sana'a. Seba, the oldest capital, is identified with the present Marib. In the past, the land of Yemen was a land of gold and incense and of great opulence and glory – especially at the height of the Himyarite Kingdom of Yemen. The Romans called Yemen "Arabia Felix" (happy Arabia).

The Beginning of the fulfilment of all these promises

Acts 2:11 - On the day of Pentecost it mentions that ***"Arabians"*** heard the Gospel as the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke in Arabic about the mighty works of God.

The growth of the church in Arabia is told in a paper **Christianity in pre-Islamic Arabia**. It is a story of great encouragement but also with a sad end.

Conclusion

Although Arabia has this tremendous wealth of promises, it is not an area to exercise feeble faith. Yet **because of these promises** we can learn to look at this spiritually barren land with the same reckless, calculating, defiant confidence in which Abraham, ***"Without being weakened in faith, faced the fact that his body was as good as dead … but did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but grew strong through faith giving glory to God."*** (Rom. 4:19-20)

The promises are great because the obstacles are great so that the glory of the plan, as well as the glory of the work, may be to God alone.

The peoples of Arabia need men and women who will believe 'as seeing One who is invisible' – the All-victorious Lord Jesus. The dumb spirit of Islam has possessed the peoples of Arabia for over 1400 years! In Mk. 9:14-29 we read the account of a dumb boy being brought to the disciples by his father. But they were not able to cast out the evil spirit that was the cause of the dumbness. The Lord Jesus came and said to the father, ***"All things are possible for one who believes"***! The disciples asked Him afterwards why they couldn't cast him out. He said, ***"This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer"***!

Everlasting life for the peoples of Arabia must come from the Life Giver. We often declare, **"I believe in the Holy Spirit"**. So the abundant harvest is going to come to Arabia and this will demonstrate that all the promises of God have proved, in every particular and to their fullest extent, to be completely true.

So Abraham's prayer, ***"O that Ishmael might live … As for Ishmael I have heard"*** will be fulfilled completely. There is a poem, **Hagar**, by Isaac Da Costa, a great Dutch poet of Jewish descent. It gathers together some of these great promises for the sons of Ishmael.

Hagar

Mother of Ishmael! The word that God hath spoken
Never hath failed the least, nor was His promise broken,
Whether in judgement threatened or in blessing given;
Whether for time and earth or for eternal heaven.

The patriarch prayed to God, while bowing in the dust,
"Oh that before Thee Ishmael might live!" his prayer, his trust.
Nor was that prayer despised, that promise left alone
Without fulfilment. For the days shall come
When Ishmael shall bow his haughty chieftain head
Before that Greatest Chief of Isaac's royal seed.
Thou, favoured Solomon, has first fulfilment seen
Of Hagar's promise, when came suppliant Sheba's queen.
Next Araby the blest brought Bethlehem's new born King
Her myrrh and spices, gold and offering.
Again at Pentecost they came, first-fruits of harvest vast;
When to adore the name of Jesus, at the last
To Zion's glorious hill the nations joy to share
The scattered flock of Kedar are gathered there,
Nebaioth, Hefa, Midian .....
Mother of Ishmael! I see thee yet once more,
Thee, under burning skies and on a waveless shore!
Thus comfortless soul, storm-tossed, tempest shaken
Heart full of anguish and of hope forsaken.
There, too didst find at last God's glory all thy stay.
He came – He spake to thee. He made thy night His day
And then, so now. Return to Sarah's tent
And Abraham's God and better covenant,
And sing with Mary, through her Saviour free,
"God of my life, Thou hast looked down on me".