

# Old and New Towns

SOUTHPORT is a small town in England about 15 miles north of Liverpool. It was founded as a village in 1792, near a stream called the Nile, and now has a population of more than 90,000 people. It is world-famous for its Birkdale golf course. In 1838 the exiled prince Louis Bonaparte stayed there before returning to France and becoming Emperor. It has a popular main shopping street.

Apart from these facts, Southport is little known outside of the United Kingdom, and no one world famous was born there. Its shopping street and the whole town have changed dramatically over the past 200 years.

## An Ancient Civilization

Thousands of miles away and thousands of years ago, in what is now Southern Iraq, there was a town called Ur. Critics of the Bible had questioned its existence, but in the 1920s the archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley found the remains of Ur.

It had been highly civilized with a system of religion and a huge temple. It had houses, many of which were luxurious with lobby, courtyard, kitchen, toilet, bedrooms and reception rooms.

The women had beautifully intricate clothes and jewellery. The people were skilled in mathematics, astronomy and reading and writing.



Ur has also changed dramatically. The once-magnificent city is now dust, with some relics in museums.

However, in approximately 2000 BC a very famous person lived in Ur. Abraham lived there with his wife Sarah and he is the father of all Jews and Arabs; a fact of which they are all very proud. Much of the trouble in the Middle East is between the offspring of Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

## The Friend of God

God told Abraham to leave Ur and to go to a land that He would 'show him' (Genesis 12:1). This land was Canaan, now known as Israel, which at that time was less civilized than Ur. Abraham's life was radically changed as he never settled in Canaan and lived in a tent rather than in a house.

Abraham had amazing faith in God and is referred to as 'faithful' or 'believing' (Galatians 3:9), 'friend of God' (James 2:23). This was because of his willingness to leave Ur but also his obedience when God asked him to sacrifice his very special son Isaac. Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:17–19), but God did not make him go through with the sacrifice. Consequently, He regarded Abraham as 'righteous' or 'right with God' (Romans 4:3).

Isaac was a precious son because he was born when his parents were too old to have children naturally. He was a miracle child (Hebrews 11:8–12). Also God had promised Abraham that His special promises would come true through Isaac.

## Promises from God Himself

God made life-changing promises to Abraham:

- ◆ He and his offspring would inherit the promised land (Israel) for ever (Genesis 13:14–17).
- ◆ His offspring would become a great nation and people who blessed this

nation would be blessed while those who cursed them would be cursed (Genesis 12:2–3).

- ◆ All nations would be blessed through a very special descendant of Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22:15–18).

## The True Gospel Message for Us

In the New Testament, the inspired apostles refer back to these promises to Abraham, showing that they are absolutely fundamental to the Gospel message (Romans 4:13–16; Galatians 3:6–9, 16; Hebrews 6:12–18). The Gospel message was, and still is, about 'the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ'. This is what the apostles preached (Acts 8:12). It was also 'preached to Abraham' through the promises God made (Galatians 3:8).

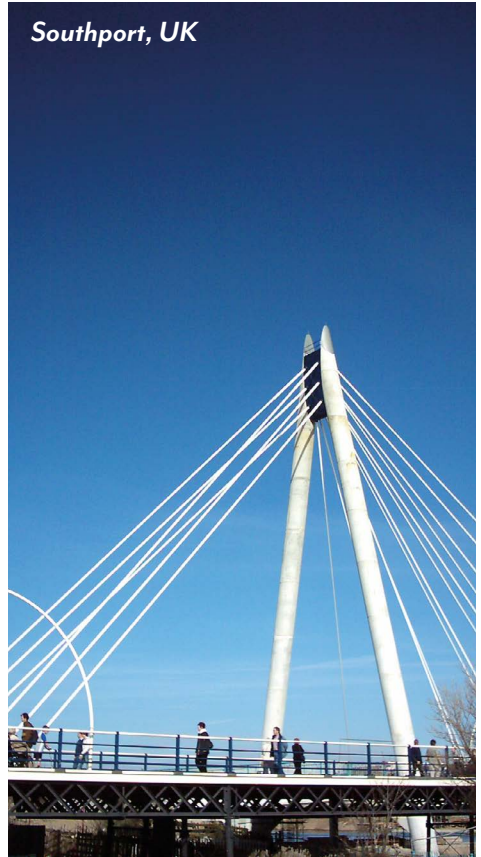
The Kingdom of God will be on earth, centred on Israel. Abraham never inherited the land he was promised and even had to buy a small plot in which to bury Sarah (Genesis chapter 23; Acts 7:2–5). But he will be in the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:28; Hebrews 11:39–40). The Jews are God's special people who have survived despite the odds and still have an important part to play in God's plan for the earth (Romans 11:25–28).

But above all, the special descendant promised to Abraham was Jesus, who is called the 'son' (descendant) of Abraham in Matthew 1:1. His name means 'God saves' and as God's only Son he is unique. Without the sacrifice of Jesus, no one

*Ruins of Ur, Iraq*



*Southport, UK*



would be in the Kingdom. We are naturally disobedient and selfish, and so enemies of God. But because of the perfect life and cruel death of Jesus we can be forgiven.

We need to have Abraham's faith and try to live like him. And this faith has to be in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:10-12). If we do this we can also be counted as righteous and, like Jesus now and Abraham after his resurrection, be made immortal. This offer is open to both Jews and non-Jews – all nations, as promised to Abraham.

## **Unchanging Promises**

Ur has changed – it is now just a ruin. Southport has changed too, over its 200 years. But God does not change. He will keep His promises to Abraham. It is up to us now to decide whether or not we want to be included.

*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29).*

**Chris Clarke**