

Genesis Chapter 15 – God’s Promises to Abram.

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”² But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”³ Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.”⁵ Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”⁶ And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.⁷ Then He said to him, “I *am* the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.”⁸ And he said, “Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?”⁹ So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.¹¹ And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him.¹³ Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.¹⁴ And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.¹⁵ Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.¹⁶ But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete.”¹⁷ And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.¹⁸ On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—¹⁹ the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites,²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

Introduction

Today we are concentrating our studies on Genesis Chapter 15. However last week we covered Chapter 13 so we do need to fill in the gap with a summary of chapter 14. This will act as an introduction to Chapter 15.

There are 3 important things in chapter 14.

1. The first is that the Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and some neighboring cities were controlled for 12 years by the King of Elam.

The king of Sodom and Gomorrah decided to rebel against the King of Elam. A Battle took place around the “salt sea”. As a result of this, Lot was captured and all his goods were taken. Somebody escaped from this battle and told Abram that his nephew Lot had been captured.

2. The second thing in this chapter is that Abram decided to try and rescue his nephew Lot.

He had 318 trained servants and went out with the purpose of bringing him back.

He decided that his best tactic was to attack by night and to divide his little army into groups. Abram was successful in his night raid and managed to bring back Lot and his goods as well as the women and children.

You will remember that last week Lot made the choice of pitching his tent near Sodom. This choice has already got him into trouble. However through God’s “GRACE” Abram rescued him.

3. The third thing we need to note in chapter 14 is that when Abram returned from his successful mission, he was met by two Kings.

These were the King of Sodom and the King of Salem.

Salem was another name for Jerusalem. The King of Salem who was called Melchizedek, was also a priest, came out and blessed Abram.

It is interesting to note that he blessed him in the name of the God most high and possessor of heaven and earth.

It is clear that he was one person who held on to the true knowledge of God in a sea of Canaanite rebellion against the true God.

Also Melchizedek gave Abram and his servants' bread and wine. Abram gave a tithe of all he had to Melchizedek. This shows us that tithing started long before the Law of Moses. It also teaches us that Melchizedek was well respected by Abram. His name means "King of Righteousness". Although he makes a brief appearance on the Biblical stage, we can't ignore him because he is referred to by David in Psalm 110: v.4, and in Hebrews chapter 7. It appears that Melchizedek is viewed as a "Type" of Christ. Lots of scholars have different views but I am happy with the "typology" solution.

The King of Sodom tried to intervene in this situation. He said to Abram "Give me the persons and take the goods for yourself." The King of Sodom was trying to bring Abram under his authority and influence. Abram was not interested in his offer, he had already declared his allegiance in his tithe given to Melchizedek.

He said "I have raised my hand to the Lord God most high, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, least you should say, I have made Abram rich."

Abram was determined not to get sucked into the influence and control of an evil King.

With this background in mind we now proceed to chapter 15 for our main focus and application today.

Chapter 15 is a very important chapter in Genesis because God's promises are confirmed through a covenant.

You will remember that back in Genesis chapter 8 that God made a "Covenant" with "Creation". God promised that "while the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease." (Gen.8:v.22)

God was about to make a "Covenant" with Abram concerning the promises that He had made to him back in Chapter 12.

I will divide this chapter into three sections.

These are:

1. The Promises of God remove fear – v. 1-5
 2. The Promises of God encourage Faith – v. 6-8.
 3. The Promises of God reveal the future – v. 9-21.
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1. The Promises of God remove fear – v. 1.

The first three words in chapter 15 are “after these things”. Having briefly looked at chapter 14 we now know that the things being referred to are Abram’s allegiance to the “God most high” and a rejection of the influence of the King of Sodom.

Abram had decided to reject wealth from an ungodly King, and instead, after being faithful with his tithe, he was ready to trust the God of heaven and earth.

What is interesting here is that after Abram had turned down great wealth from the King of Sodom, he must have been a little fearful. The first thing that God said to Abram was “do not be afraid”. God knew his heart and his mind. God knew what Abram was thinking. Yes Abram was a little fearful, even though he had done the right thing.

God said that He Himself would be Abram’s shield. God was saying that He would protect Abram completely. God also promised an exceedingly great reward. God promised that He would do the providing and not rich ungodly Kings.

It is important that we see this promise by God in the context of the situation.

Abram had made a choice to reject the provisions of an evil King, and trust in the provisions of a righteous God.

Note: There is a spiritual lesson here. If you are a Christian and you get into financial difficulties, or have any problems, you must turn to God and seek help from the Church where you are a member, not go to ungodly people who are likely to use your situation for their own ends.

Back to the passage now.

Abram still had a certain amount of fear in his heart and mind.

A passage of time had gone by with no evidence of God fulfilling his promise to bless Abram. We are not sure of the time scale here but there are 24 years between chapter 12 and chapter 17. So realistic giving Abram time to go down to Egypt and back on foot and fight a war etc., we are talking about at least 5 years or more.

So a long period of time had gone by from God’s original promise to Abram. It is no wonder that Abram was getting a little fearful about his situation.

Abram’s problem of fear was that he was living in the gap between “Promise and Reality”.

He had the promise from God, but nothing had changed in his circumstances.

Abram said to God “What will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus.?” Why did Abram say this?

Well Abram was concerned that time had passed and they still had no children.

Perhaps God meant that the families of the earth would be blessed through him, but then he was not necessarily going to be the seed or Father of these people.

In v.3 Abram reminds God of the normal procedure that a servant can be a person’s heir if he remains childless.

God replies to Abram in v. 4. He says “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.”

God was clarifying that the promise of blessing had to come through his own body, his own seed. It could not come through anybody else.

It was obviously night time and God took Abram outside into the darkness. He asked him to look towards heaven and count the stars. God promised Abram that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

God was repeating the promise that he made to Abram in chapter 13: v. 16.

¹⁶ And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, *then* your descendants also could be numbered.

However this time the visual aid was the stars and not the earth.

He could look at the stars most nights and meditate on the promises of God.

Application

It is important that we make an application here to our daily lives. There is no doubt that God still speaks today through His word the Bible. He makes promises personally to individuals, and also there are promises made to all believers, when they become children of God.

However when we are living in the gap between promise and reality, it is not always easy. Sometimes we question our understanding of the promise God has made to us, just like Abram did.

We also question the time scale on when those promises will be fulfilled. We often think that things will happen immediately, or within a few weeks.

However God is always working to His time table / schedule and not to ours.

I am sorry to repeat this example but it is the only one that I have that fits this situation exactly.

In 1992 my wife and I and our 4 children left Japan to return home for a 1 year assignment in England, working for our missionary society. At that time my wife Wendy received a promise from God in Genesis chapter 28: v.15.

¹⁵ Behold, I *am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

1993 came and went we didn't come back to Japan. In fact 23 years passed by and we still hadn't returned to Japan for ministry. Had Wendy got it all wrong? Did God really promise to Wendy that God will bring us back to Japan?

Oh YES He did, but He didn't promise it would be in our time scale, He did it in His timing.

Because His timing is always best. God spent 23 years preparing my wife and I to return to Japan one day for ministry. What God promises to us, He had the power to fulfill.

Our job is just to believe Him, and let Him work out all the details, including the timing.

Maybe you are waiting for God to fulfill a promise that He made to you some time ago.

My advice is to leave it with God, He will bring it about, according to His time scale. When it happens, you will realize that His timing is perfect.

It is interesting that it was about 25 years between God's promise of a child to Abram and Sarai and the birth of Isaac. That is a long time to wait to have a baby!!

2. The Promises of God encourage faith – v. 6-8.

Verse 6 is one of the key verses in the entire Old Testament.

⁶ And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. This verse is the link between the Old Testament and the New Testament as far as the doctrine of justification by "FAITH" is concerned.

Abraham's faith was accredited to him for righteousness before he was circumcised and more than 400 years before the Law was given to his descendants.

I would like to explain this verse very simply, because it is very important, and I want us ALL to get it.

We can all understand when the verse says "And he believed in the Lord....."

It means that he believed what God said, He had faith in God's word, He knew God to be trustworthy, and his confidence is in God alone.

True belief is built upon fact and not on feelings. When you sit in a chair, you trust that it will hold you up. You don't sit in a chair because you have wonderful feelings about the chair. You observe that the chair is substantial, and based upon that fact, you sit on it.

Abram's faith rest upon fact, this was God's promise.

It was a matter of simple arithmetic.

God said you will have a son + God is the creator, all powerful God

= Abram will have a son.

It is not the amount of "FAITH" that you have, but in "WHOM" you are placing your trust.

(Repeat this verse)

So Abram believed in the Lord, we hopefully have got that bit now.

However now God said HE accounted it to him for righteousness.

Some translations use the word "credited" instead of "accounted"

The word "credited" carries the thought of settling a monetary account through a payment. This term has a common use today if you have a bank account. We like to see money being credited to our bank account. It means that we receive the money in our bank account.

Firstly we need to remember that all of us, including Abram have a certificate of debt.

As a result of our sin, we all have an overdrawn sin account. We have no righteousness whatsoever in our spiritual bank account.

So it was like God saying to Abram "Abram", because you are trusting in Me, I am going to make an advance payment on your sin account.

I am going to place my perfection on your spiritual bank account. You can now consider that your sin debt is paid by Me in advance"

God was saying that because of what I am giving you, that is my righteousness, it will not only take care of your sin debt now, but it will provide you with all the perfection needed to live with Me in heaven.

This is why Paul in Romans chapter 4 uses Abram as an example of trusting God by faith.

I would like to quote Romans 4 in the New Living Translation which makes the passage very understandable. (N.L.T.)

Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? ² If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way. ³ For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." ⁴ When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. ⁵ But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. ⁶ David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it: ⁷ "Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. ⁸ Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of sin." ⁹ Now, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles? Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith. ¹⁰ But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised! ¹¹ Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith. ¹² And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised. ¹³ Clearly, God's promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was based not on his obedience to God's law, but on a right relationship with God that comes by faith. ¹⁴ If God's promise is only for those who obey the law, then faith is not necessary and the promise is pointless. ¹⁵ For the law always brings punishment on those who try to obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!) ¹⁶ So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe. ¹⁷ That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, "I have made you the father of many nations." This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing. ¹⁸ Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, "That's how many descendants you will have!" ¹⁹ And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah's womb. ²⁰ Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. ²¹ He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. ²² And because of Abraham's faith, God counted him as righteous. ²³ And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was recorded ²⁴ for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God.

This is also why Paul says these words in Galatians 3: v. 8-9. (N.L.T.)

⁸ What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would make the Gentiles right in his sight because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "All nations will be blessed through you." ⁹ So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.

So when it comes to us, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to give us Salvation and assurance of eternal life in heaven, it is no different.

We put our faith in the facts of God's word, we believe them with our heart and we confess them with our mouth. When we do this God credits our spiritual bank account with is Righteousness.

So if you are not a Christian yet, don't feel that you need a bright light and a voice from heaven like Paul had when he was converted. Just simply trust in God's word about the offer of Salvation through Jesus Christ.

If you are not a Christian today I would like to challenge you to read the following chapters in the Bible.

1. Genesis Chapter 1-3
2. John Chapter 1-3
3. Romans Chapter 1-3.

After reading these 9 chapters you should have enough information tell you what you need to know about God, Sin, and Jesus Christ.

3. The Promises of God Reveal the Future – v. 8-21.

In v. 8 Abram questioned God. He said "How shall I know that I will inherit it"

Abram was lacking assurance in his heart. So what did God do for Abram to give him the assurance that he needed? It is something quite amazing and the application to us is very real.

Firstly I need to explain about how people in those days made covenants with each other.

A Covenant in those days was an agreement that could not be broken, it was a very serious agreement. What used to happen was this;

You used to cut an animal in half and both parties would walk through between the animal to seal the covenant agreement.

What you were in fact saying was this. If I do not keep my part of the agreement, then you can cut me in half like we have done to the animal. Everybody knew about this type of Covenant making.

So we now come to verses 9-10

⁹So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

Abram knew that God was about to make a Covenant with him. However there was something different about this covenant compared to other covenants that were made at that time.

The difference was that they didn't both walk through between the animals. It was only God who walked through those animals in the form of a smoking oven and a burning torch.

This was very significant, because God was saying that I am the only one who is responsible for keeping this Covenant.

This is very significant as we will come to in a moment.

While this was all going on God spoke to Abram about the future of his descendants.

Genesis 15: v. 13-16.

¹³Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is not theirs*, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. ¹⁴And also

the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.
¹⁵ Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.
¹⁶ But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

This is an amazing prophecy about the future of Abram and his descendants.

We now know that God fulfilled this prophecy in full. The Jewish nation were held captive in Egypt for 400 years and they did indeed leave with great possessions. Also Abram did live to be a good old age.

The last part of v. 16 gives us an insight into the Grace of God. It says that the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. God was giving them a chance to repent, however they only got worse and worse, so God judged them through his own people.

Finally in v. 18-21 God lays down the dimensions of the land that He is promising Abram and his descendants. The Jewish nation has never fully controlled all the land that God promised them. However it is the belief of the Christian Zionist movement that one day it will happen.

(The Map on the slide shows the present boundaries of Israel)

What is interesting about the map is that Islamic State (I.S.) is trying to control the area that God has promised to the Jewish Nation. Why are they trying to do this?

The answer is that they are trying to destroy the Jewish Nation and the Jewish people.

However if Islamic State do control this part of the land and try to destroy Israel, then God will see to it that Israel destroy the Islamic State. In doing so, Israel might well possess that land, thus fulfilling the promise made to Abram. Watch the world news!!!

So what application can we make out of this chapter?

We have already made some applications as we have gone along, so I only want to make one application and it is the most important one.

Remember we learnt from v. 17 that it was only God who went through the cut animals in order to confirm the covenant.

Abram was put in a deep sleep by God. He couldn't have been part of it if he wanted to. However he should have walked with God through the cut animals if it was a human covenant.

However God wanted to teach Abram that it was HIS responsibility to fulfill the covenant.

This points forward to another covenant that God made with Abram's children. We are Abram's children if we believe in that covenant.

Turn with me to Jeremiah 31: v. 31

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—

Now turn with me to Mark 14: v. 22-26.

²² And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” ²³ Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ And He said to them, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. ²⁵ Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until

that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”²⁶ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Yet again only God was responsible for fulfilling that “Covenant” through Jesus.

Now we come to the climax of the application.

Remember that in v. 8 Abram said to God, how will know that I will inherit the land?”

God replied by making a covenant with Abram, that only He could fulfill. It was God’s responsibility.

Now you may be sitting here today or listening on the internet and you might be saying “How will I know that the Bible is true? How will I know that God loves me?, How will I know that God is real?”

The answer I will give you is that you DO know because Jesus Christ fulfilled the New Covenant by shedding His blood on a cruel cross 2000 years ago just for YOU.

The work has been done by God, and you CAN NOT do anything yourself to fulfill God’s covenant in Jesus. God has done ALL the work by Himself.

ALL you have to DO is to BELIEVE IT.

It says in Romans 10: v. 9 – 13

⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³ For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

Amen.