

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“God’s Covenant With Abram”

Genesis 15:1-21

Introduction

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible teaches that salvation is by faith alone! But salvation by faith alone offends our natural thinking. We assume that a righteous standing before God should be the reward of those who do good and withheld from those who do evil. We want to get our salvation the old fashioned way, “We want to earn it!”

Fortunately, this flies in the face of everything the Bible teaches – beginning with Gen 15.

I The Word Of The Lord Came To Abram

The scripture says that “in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways: Heb 1:1-2

1. By a personal appearance of God
2. By God’s audible voice
3. By visions or dreams
4. By the ministry of angels
5. By the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit
6. Through the reading of God’s Word
7. Through the ministry of a prophet or preacher

A. The Lord’s 1st Word to Abram [Verse 1]

1. Do not be **afraid**, Abram

Fear = Yare' = “To be frightened or to dread”

Why would Abram be afraid?

He had just won a great victory over Kedorlaomer and the three other eastern kings. But he knew that they wouldn’t take this humiliating defeat sitting down. A vicious counter attack was inevitable!

Application:

Ps 27:1 “The LORD is my light and my salvation -- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life -- of whom shall I be afraid?”

Is 41:10 “... do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

2. I am your shield

Shield = Magen = “A protector or defender”

These words undoubtedly provided a great deal of comfort to Abram’s anxious heart.

Ps 18:2-3 “The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my

stronghold. I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.”

Application:

Are you afraid of something today? Are you facing an enemy in your life? God is always the answer! He is your Refuge and your Strength, your Tower of Refuge, your Rock, your Mighty Redeemer and Deliverer! If God be for us, who can be against us? If God is our shield, whom should we fear? In Hebrews 13:5-6, “God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

3. I am your very great **reward**

Great = “Exceedingly great”

God assures Abram that, although he had just forfeited the king of Sodom’s great reward, God Himself would be his reward.

Heb 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Job 22:23-25 “If you return to the Almighty ... He will be your gold, the choicest silver for you.”

B. Abram’s response [Verse 2-3]

1. What can you give me?

a. Since I remain **childless**

After ten years of waiting, I imagine that Abram must have thought to himself, “What good is it that You are my shield and reward if I have no one to pass it on?”

Prov 13:12 “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.”

b. Since my heir is Eliezer of Damascus

Eliezer = “God of help”

In the Ancient Near East it was a common practice for a childless couple to adopt one of the servants born into their household. This adopted son would care for them in their old age and would inherit their possessions and property at the time of their death.

2. You have given me no children

a. So a **servant** will be my heir

Application:

It is a great temptation to find human-based answers to God-based promises.

Heb 10:35-36 “So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”

C. The Lord’s 2nd Word to Abram [Verse 4-5]

1. Eliezer will not be your heir
2. Your heir will be a **son** from your own body

It wouldn’t be an adopted son or a spiritual descendant who would inherit the promise, but an actual flesh-and-blood descendant.

Gen 17:15-16 “God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

3. Your offspring will be as numerous as the **stars** of the heavens

God not only *tells* Abram the promise again (Gen 12:2; 13:15-16), but He *confirms* it by stating that his “descendants will be as numerous as the stars of heaven.”

And one of those descendants would be the ***Bright and Morning Star*** (Rev 22:16).

D. Abram’s response [Verse 6]

1. He **believed** the Lord

Believed = 'aman = “To trust or accept”

Believed what? Abram believed God!!

1. That he would have an heir (Isaac) - Gen 15:4
2. That he would have innumerable descendents - Gen 15:5
3. That he would be given the Promised Land - Gen 15:7
4. That all the nations would be blessed through him - Gen 18:18
5. That he would inherit a heavenly dwelling - Heb 11:10
6. That God would send a Messiah - the Savior of the world

John 8:56 “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

His confidence was not in the promises themselves, but in the Person making the promises!

Rom 4:18-25 “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be.”

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead-since he was about a hundred years old-and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness-for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

Application:

John 6:28-29 "Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

2. God **credited** it to him as righteousness

Righteousness = Tsadaq = "To cleanse or to make morally right"

This doctrine is so important and fundamental to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to the Christian life that it is quoted repeatedly in the New Testament (Rom 4:1-3; 4:9-10; 4:19-24; Gal 3:5-7; James 2:23)

Application:

Abraham was credited with righteousness, not after he made some great sacrifice, or after purifying himself of all sin, or when he got his act together, but at the moment he simply believed God (Gen 15:6).

Gal 3:6-9 "Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

We come to God on the very same basis; simply by taking God at His word and believing in His promised Son, Jesus Christ. At that moment a person is made righteous in Christ Jesus and all his sins -- past, present and future -- are forgiven and he becomes a friend of God.

E. The Lord's 3rd Word to Abram [Verse 7]

1. I am the Lord:

a. Who **brought** you out of Ur

Acts 7:2-5 "To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.' "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living."

b. Who will give you this **land** to take possession of it

Gen 12:7 "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."

F. Abram's response [Verse 8]

1. **How** can I know that I will gain possession of it?

Abram had believed God regarding the promises of a son, but he had doubts about God's promise regarding the land. Both were humanly impossible, but the promise of the land was so outrageous that Abram couldn't grasp how it could possibly happen.

Illustration:

Luke 1:18-20 "Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." ... And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

So he asks God for some sort of assurance that he will indeed gain possession of it.

II The Covenant Of The Lord With Abram

A. The Lord instructed Abram to: [Verse 9-11]

1. Bring a heifer, goat, ram, dove and pigeon
2. **Cut** them in half and arrange them

In Abram's day, legal and binding agreements were not drafted by attorneys and then signed by the parties involved. Instead, legal agreements were formalized by means of a very graphic covenant ceremony.

The covenant was sealed by the dividing of an animal. In fact, the Hebrew term means to "cut a covenant". The animal was cut in half and the two parties would pass between the halves while repeating the terms of the covenant. By doing so, the two parties were stating, "If I fail to fulfill my commitments to this covenant, may I suffer the same fate as this animal."

Jer 34:18-20 "The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth."

B. Abram fell into a deep sleep [Verse 12]

1. A thick and dreadful darkness came over him

Job 33:14-18 "For God does speak--now one way, now another -- though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword."

Illustration: God forewarning me of a year full of challenges

C. The Lord said to Abram: [Verse 13-16]

1. Your descendents will be **strangers** in a foreign country

Ps 105:11-15 "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit." When they were but few in number, few indeed, and strangers in it, they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another. He allowed no one to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings: "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm."

2. They will be **enslaved** and mistreated for 400 years

Ex 12:40-42 "Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD's divisions left Egypt."

3. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves

Acts 7:6-8 "God spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.'"

4. Afterward they will come out with great **possessions**

Ex 3:21-22 "And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians."

Ex 12:35-36 "The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians."

5. You will **die** and be buried at a good old age

Gen 25:7-8 "Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people."

6. Your descendents will come back here in the **4th** generation

- a. When the Amorite's sin had reached its full measure

Over the next 430 years, two programs were simultaneously at work. The Canaanites were growing more and more wicked, and their day of reckoning was steadily approaching. At the same time, the nation of Israel was about to be born, growing rapidly in number, and in spiritual maturity, preparing for the day of possession.

Deut 9:4-6 “After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, “The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.” No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

Application:

All of these predictions were perfectly fulfilled to the very letter. Abram’s descendants did go down into Egypt (a land that was not theirs), and there they were oppressed, afflicted, and enslaved for 430 years. Then, God sent Moses to deliver them from slavery, to judge Pharaoh and Egypt, to plunder Egypt, and to bring Israel back into the land of Canaan. It happened exactly as God had told Abram.

Josh 21:45 “Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.”

D. The Lord affirmed His covenant [Verse 17]

Covenant = Beriyth = “To cut or make a compact by passing between pieces of flesh”

1. A smoking **firepot** with a blazing torch:

a. Appeared after the sun had set

God represents Himself by two emblems:

The **smoking firepot** reminds us of the pillar of cloud representing the presence of God (Exodus 13:21-22), the smoke on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18), and the cloud of God’s Shekinah glory (1 Kings 8:10-12).

The **blazing torch** reminds us of the pillar of fire representing the presence of God (Exodus 13:21-22), of the burning bush displaying the presence of God before Moses (Exodus 3:4), and of the fire from heaven which sometimes consumed sacrifices God was well pleased with (1 Kings 18:38, 1 Chronicles 21:26, 2 Chronicles 7:1).

b. Passed **between** the pieces of animal

Abram watched as God passed through the animal parts by Himself. By the Father’s won choice, it was a **unilateral and unconditional** covenant!

Hebrews 6:13-14 “When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.”

E. The Lord's 4th Word to Abram [Verse 18-21]

1. To your **descendants** I give this land

a. From the river of Egypt to the Euphrates

Deut 11:24-25 "Every place where you set your foot will be yours: Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the western sea. No man will be able to stand against you. The LORD your God, as he promised you, will put the terror and fear of you on the whole land, wherever you go."

b. The land of the "Ites"

Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Gergashites and Jebusites

The geographical boundaries are specifically and clearly defined, and even the peoples who were to be dispossessed were named. What more reassurance could be asked?

Gen 17:7-8 "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

Conclusion:

Today you may be wondering, "God how are you going to fulfill your promises in my life?"

2 Peter 1:3-4 "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

No wonder the writer to the Hebrews 6:11-12 says: "We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

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