

GENESIS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Genesis chapter 15 as we continue our study through the Word of God. In our last study we saw four powerful eastern kings invade the Jordan Valley or the area around the Dead Sea or Salt Sea. And for 12 years they were able to make five kings and their kingdoms serve them. Then, in the thirteenth year these five kings rebelled against them, they had enough. And by the fourteenth year these four eastern kings rose up and they came down hard upon them. In this invasion Lot, the nephew of Abram was taken captive.

When Abram hears what has happened to Lot, he gathers up his 318 trained Special Forces you might say, and they go on a reconnaissance and rescue mission and they were able to rescue Lot, the possessions these kings took as well as the other people that were taken captive. The king of Sodom wanted to reward Abram, but he refuses. And the king of Salem, Melchizedek comes out and blesses Abram and Abram gives to him a tenth of his possessions, a tenth of all that he has. That is where we will pick up our study this evening, on the heels of this great victory. So with that said, let's begin reading in Genesis chapter 15, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

GENESIS 15**VERSE 1**

1. Why did God tell Abram not to be afraid? Because he was afraid! Yes, he obtained this great victory but he was also aware that these four powerful eastern kings, their army far outweighed the men he had and he could expect retribution for his actions. Now, on what basis should Abram not be afraid? God tells him. First of all God will be his shield of protection from the enemy! It is as the Psalmist said in Psalm 33:16-20, **“No king is saved by the multitude of an army; A mighty man is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain hope for safety; Neither shall it deliver any by its great strength. Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, On those who hope in His mercy, To deliver their soul from death, And to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield.”** You see. Protection does not come from our might, our resources, but it comes from the Lord and the Lord wants Abram to understand that fact, just as He wants us to understand it!

Not only will the Lord protect him, but the Lord will also bless Him. Abram refused the reward that the world had for him, the king of Sodom, who is a type of Satan, and he gave to the Lord a tenth of his possessions, as Melchizedek is a type of Jesus. Thus, the Lord is his reward or the Lord will bless him exceedingly abundantly above all that he could ask or think! It is as Paul said in Philippians 4:19, **“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”** The Lord wants us to understand that also!

2. What are you going through right now? Maybe you feel the enemy is surrounding you, maybe you feel like you have nothing. Can you hear God's promise to you – "Do not be afraid. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward" and then walk by faith believing in His promise to you? The Lord wants you to because He is your shield and He is your reward!

VERSES 2-3

1. You might call these verses, "Lord, strengthen my faith." It is not that Abram doubted God's promise of being His shield and reward, but who would he pass this down to when he had no children. Thus, when he does die, in his mind, his servant, Eliezer would inherit it all. And he is maybe 75 to 85 years old at this point, while Sarai his wife is 65 to 75 years old! They are not spring chickens you know! What's the problem here? He doubted God's other promise to him, that his descendants would be as the sand of the sea, as the stars of heaven, that he would bring forth a great nation! But it wasn't happening as he thought it should. First of all, did God promise this to him? You bet He did and thus, it is not the right time yet for God to act. In fact, that promise won't be fulfilled for another 15 to 25 years!

2. How about you? Has God promised you something and since it has not happened yet, according to your timetable, are you beginning to doubt God or are you going to try and help God out, like He would need your help! The lesson God is showing us is that we need to learn to wait upon Him and what He has promised He is more than able to bring to pass. For me, some 10 to 12 years before God brought me up here to Wisconsin to be the pastor of this church, He promised me that one day this would come to pass. I didn't know where in Wisconsin, but I knew what He said to me and I waited, and waited and waited and you know what? What God promised me He did bring to pass, not according to my timetable, but according to His! Thus, we need to learn how to wait upon the Lord!

VERSES 4-5

1. Why does God have to keep reminding us of things? Because we either forget what He has said to us or we doubt what He has promised to us, and thus, like Abram, He has to remind us. Eliezer will not be his heir but a son from his own body will be and Abram's descendants will be as the stars in the sky! Again, keep in mind that the fulfillment of this promise is still some 15 to 25 years away! It is as Paul reminds us in Hebrews 6:11-12, **“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”**

VERSE 6

1. Was Abram saved by the Law or by grace? Obviously his good works did not save him, for the Law was still over 400 years down the road and circumcision was still not instituted yet! Thus, Abram was saved by faith and not by works, just as we are. That is exactly what Paul said in Romans 4:1-3, **“What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’”**

You see, it was faith and faith alone that caused God to account Abram as righteous, for the Bible tells us that our righteousness, as well as Abram’s is like filthy rags! What we see here in Genesis is the Gospel message in the Old Testament. Abram looked to the coming of the Messiah by faith and we look back to the Messiah who has come by faith, the one who has come and taken away the sins of the world, Jesus Christ. And that free gift of God is only received by faith and not by works! Luther commented on this by writing:

When the article of justification has fallen, everything else has fallen. . . . This is the chief article from which all other doctrines have flowed. . . . It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour.

- Luther, cited in Boice

VERSES 7-8

1. Abram's faith was not perfect and even after all God had promised him, he has some doubts and asks God to prove what He is saying, that it is true and it will come to pass. "How could he do that?" Folks, we do that all the time! One minute we praise the Lord for what He is doing and the next minute, when the situation changes a bit, we doubt what God has said! Like Abram, we are learning to trust in the Lord more and more, to believe in His promises to us. And in that there may be times where we struggle. God knows and the best thing we can do is to get into His Word and let Him speak to our hearts by His Spirit and as we do, we will learn how to trust in His promises!

VERSES 9-11

1. This may seem strange to us but this is equivalent to our modern day contracts that are signed. They would cut these animals in two and then each party that was involved would walk through the middle of them, sealing the deal. And back then this covenant was serious, not like today. And as Abram obeyed the Lord he waited for God to appear and walk with him between these animals. And as he waited the vultures came and in the Scriptures birds are often symbolic of evil. Thus, as he waited for the Lord Satan and his demonic forces tried to discourage him with doubt and unbelief. As Christians he does the same thing, thus, don't listen to his lies but trust in the Lord, the promises that He has made to you!

VERSES 12-16

1. As Abram waits for the Lord, he falls asleep. Did the Lord put him to sleep or did he just fall asleep? We don't know, I kind of lean towards Abram falling asleep, as we often do as we engage the enemy, we get tired of waiting for the Lord to do something and we drift off. Now, why did horror and great darkness come upon him? Maybe he felt the Lord was not coming, His promises to Abram would not come to pass and even in this sleep state, he is thinking about this, a nightmare you might say. And as this fear comes upon Abram, the Lord speaks to him. The Lord is there and even in the darkest times and especially in those times, may we not forget that!

2. The Lord does not start out with very comforting words. His descendents would be slaves in Egypt for 400 years, they were going to face this affliction! "Okay Lord, then I don't want any children!" That is what we might say, "I don't want to go down that path if it is going to be painful, if it is going to be hard!" That is how we often look at things and we forget that out of the pain, there is good that will come, God will use it in our lives somehow, someday!

Thus, the Lord tells Abram that He will bring them back to this land of Canaan; the land of promise after the iniquity of the Amorites has been completed. God is gracious, He is merciful, and one day He would deal with the sin of these people and under the leadership of Joshua, as they entered the Promise Land, the Amorites will be defeated. Now that may not seem fair, but please understand that God knows their wickedness and He knows their end. They are like a dog with rabies who is going to die anyway and the dog needs to be put down before he infects anyone else! But don't forget that God waited and gave them time to repent, and then judgment came upon the Amorites!

Not only will they come out of Egypt but also they will come out with great possessions, more than what they entered the land with! In Exodus 12:35-36 that is what we see take place as we are told, **“Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.”** Keep in mind that they were slaves in Egypt and they were being let go and yet, they plundered the Egyptians just as God said, not by might, the Egyptians gave it to them!

3. One more point here before we move on and it is an apparent discrepancy in the Scriptures, a discrepancy in the time they were down in Egypt. Here in Genesis and in Acts 7:6 we see the time frame as 400 years. But in Exodus 12:40-41 and Galatians 3:17 it says they were down there for 430 years. Thus, is this a mistake? Some say the 400 is rounded off, but I don't believe that nor do I believe that there is a discrepancy in the Scriptures! You see, the total time in Egypt was 430 years but they were oppressed for 400 of those years! In Exodus 1:8-14 we see this played out as we are told, **“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, ‘Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.’ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage — in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor.”** Thus, there is no discrepancy, in fact, the Scriptures are very accurate, they are very detailed with the time frame of how long they were down in Egypt and how long of a period of time they were oppressed down there!

VERSES 17-21

1. What is this smoking oven and burning torch all about? I believe this is speaking of the Shekinah glory or the presence of God as represented by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. We see that spoken of in Exodus 13:21-22. Thus, who walked through the midst of these animals? It was the LORD, YAHWEH! Where was Abram? He was still sleeping or at best groggy at this time. That tells me that this covenant that God gave to Abram and his descendents is a unilateral covenant or a one party covenant that is not based upon the faithfulness of Abram or his descendents but upon the faithfulness of God. Thus, I don't care what this group or that group says regarding the Jews forfeiting their land. I don't care what the Pope says or the Lutheran Church or whoever, God gave it to them not because they deserved it, but God made a covenant with them and He will keep it and He has and He will do so even in the Millennial Kingdom!

2. David Baron explains it like this, "According to the ancient Eastern manner of making a covenant, both the contracting parties passed through the divided pieces of the slain animals, thus symbolically attesting that they pledged their very lives to the fulfillment of the engagement they made (see Jer. 34:18, 19). Now in Genesis 15, God alone, whose presence was symbolized by the smoking furnace and lamp of fire, passed through the midst of the pieces of the slain animals, while Abram was simply a spectator of this wonderful exhibition of God's free grace." This signified that it was an unconditional covenant, dependent for fulfillment on God alone!

3. Folks, there is another covenant made by God alone for us. It is a unilateral covenant or a one party covenant that is based upon His faithfulness and not ours and that is our salvation! You see, our salvation is not based upon our good works, our efforts, but upon the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary! Just as Abram and his descendents didn't deserve this land, neither do we deserve salvation, but God freely gives it to us in Christ! It is as Peter tells us in I Peter 1:3-5, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”**

4. Now the Jews have occupied this land of Canaan, the borders that God gave to them maybe one brief time in their history. That was under King Solomon, (I Kings 8:65). But one day God will give them all this land as He has promised them, in the Millennial Kingdom! One more thing, the river of Egypt is not the Nile River but a stream south of Gaza that is known today as Wadi el Arish, at least that is what many believe!

GENESIS 16**VERSES 1-2**

1. How often do men listen to their wives and yet, here Abram does! Interesting. You see, what may seem strange to us was a common practice in that culture. If a woman was barren she could give her maid to her husband to bring forth a child and that child would be the firstborn. When did Hagar get hired on to be Sarai's maidservant? Remember, it was during their time down in the world, or down in Egypt and as we will see, it was not a good thing!

2. Why did they do this? Because God promised that their descendents would be as the stars in the sky, they were to be a great nation and thus, they needed to help God out! That is never a good idea! Keep in mind that Abram is 85 and Sarai is 75 and she was well passed the age of child bearing, that is what Paul tells us in Romans 4:19. Now, what was impossible with man is very possible with God even though Sarai's womb was dead. But, in their minds, since Sarai couldn't conceive, Hagar could and thus, this is what God must mean. No it wasn't!

VERSES 3-4a

1. It was 10 years of waiting and nothing was happening so plan B, Hagar would be the one who would conceive a child with Abram! It is as Barnhouse wrote:

Those who are truly zealous for God frequently reach for fruit without first dying. Unfortunately much Christian work is done in this way, and while there is conception, the child that is born can never be the heir. Christian work that is done merely through the zeal of human effort without counting the body as dead, and Sarai as good as dead, may produce great revival campaigns with but a few genuinely saved, large church memberships with many tares among the wheat.

- Barnhouse

Folks, it is always better to wait upon the Lord than to try and help Him out. We just get in the way of what He wants to do many times. And I think that the creator of heaven and earth can do it without our help, don't you? And when He wants to use us as vessels from which He can work through, may we be willing to walk as He leads and not as we want!

VERSES 4b-5

1. Hagar is now flaunting her pregnancy before Sarai. And thus, contentions began to grow and Sarai blames Abram for this mess. Now wait a minute, who told Abram to do this? I mean, wasn't he only doing what he was told? Nice try men, the reality is, it was not her fault, but Abram's because he was to be the spiritual leader in the family and instead of doing that, he felt it was easier to let Sarai handle it, no use fighting with her over this issue. That was and it still is wrong folks!

VERSE 6

1. Men, do you feel it is better to give in to your wife instead of doing what is right? You act like Abram did here, "Do whatever you want, I don't care" attitude? That is wrong. You are a family and you are the spiritual leader in the family, thus, you need to fulfill the role that God has given you in the family. Paul put it like this in Ephesians 5:25-28, **"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself."** You see, love them, watch over them, protect them, keep them clean as you share the Word of God with them! That was something that Abram was not doing.

2. Sarai gets the word from Abram to do what ever she wants and she deals harshly with Hagar, she makes her life miserable for her and Hagar flees for her life!

VERSES 7-9

1. Hagar is heading back to Egypt and on her way the pre-incarnate Christ appears to her! Now, in the situation that Hagar found herself in with Sarai, what do you think councilors might tell her? Probably, keep on going, don't come back, run away from this situation after what she did to you and-so-on. But that is not what the Lord tells her to do. She is to **RETURN** and **SUBMIT**! That would be a very difficult thing to do especially in the situation she was in but she obeyed the Lord and did just that! What are you running away from? Is the Lord telling you to return and submit? You need to listen and obey! But the reality is, it is easier to run away from a situation than face it! But there is no growth in doing that, but there is in returning and submitting!

VERSES 10-12

1. God makes a promise to Hagar that this child, Ishmael, which means "God hears," and through his descendants they will become a great nation and that has come to pass. Not only that but they will be wild. Who are these people? They are the Arabic people! And look at the conflict we see today because Abram tried to help God out, the turmoil between the Arabs and the Jews!

2. Paul, in Galatians chapter 4 picks up on the child of this bondwoman, Ishmael and the child of promise, Isaac. And starting in verse 21 of Galatians chapter 4 he says, **“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: ‘Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband.’ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.’ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”** Galatians 4:21-31.

He is contrasting the Law or works of the flesh, which only leads to bondage to grace, the gift that God has given to us, where there is freedom. The two don't work together; you are not saved by the Law and grace but by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone! Thus, cast out the bondwoman and her son!

VERSES 13-16

1. So Hagar did return and she submitted to Abram and Sarai. And when her son is born she calls him Ishmael, just as the Lord instructed her to do. Thus, every time Abram saw Ishmael he was reminded, “God hears.” That was something that Abram needed to be reminded of. Instead of acting on his own, he needs to bring it to God in prayer because God does hear! What a great lesson for us to learn and apply to our lives!

2. Think about the situation Hagar was in and how she would explain what happened to her and what she was doing to her master, Abram. “As I fled for my life because of how I was being treated by Sarai, the miserable conditions I faced day in and day out, I couldn’t stay any longer! But as I fled the Lord met me and told me it would be okay, He would see me through it all. He is the one who told me to return and submit and I am obeying Him!”

Wouldn’t it have been easier for her to stay away? You bet it would. But she obeyed the Lord’s call and returned and submitted! Barnhouse sums it up like this as he tells us:

If we seek to change our circumstances, we will jump from the frying pan into the fire. We must be triumphant exactly where we are. It is not a change of climate we need, but a change of heart. The flesh wants to run away, but God wants to demonstrate His power exactly where we have known our greatest chagrin [sorrow].

- Barnhouse

Thus, don't run away but run to the Lord and then listen to His instructions. Then what? Then obey His words to you. Yes, it may be difficult, it may be hard, but it is what is best! Hagar was teaching Abram some important lessons of trusting in the Lord! May we not only believe but apply these truths to our lives! You see, He is our El Roi or ***You are the God who sees!*** Thus, look to Him and listen to Him and then obey Him and see the blessing that God has for you as you walk by faith!