

Genesis – Lesson 14

The Covenant Made With Abram

Read Genesis 15:1-6

1. (a) From vv. 2-3, what did Abram *fear*? How did he believe this would be *resolved*?

Abram feared that he would have no *heir*; that because he had no children, all of his possessions would have nowhere to go upon his death. The only possible heir (as he saw it) was Eliezer of Damascus, a member of his household staff. Interestingly, Abram did not consider Lot to be his heir (even though he was related by blood); he assumed that such a position needed to come from *inside* his own household.

- (b) What *four* things did God promise Abram in vv. 1-6?

God promised Abram 1) that he would be Abram's shield (or protection from harm), 2) that Abram would be greatly rewarded, 3) that that his offspring would number as great as the stars in the heavens, and 4) that God counted him with righteousness for having believed him.

- (c) According to these promises, what was Abram's *reward*? *Why* was he being rewarded?

At first glance, it would appear that Abram's reward was offspring, someone who would spring from him who would act as his heir. However, God's promise of reward comes *before* Abram complains about the lack of an heir. Thus, God's promise must be something *other* than an heir. So, as the story unfolds, it is the *righteousness* that God credits to him that would be the logical conclusion to the promise: Abram was being rewarded by God for *believing* him that God would give him numerous offspring. He was being rewarded for taking God at his word.

2. (a) Compare v. 6 to Romans 4:1-9. What is the *righteousness* spoken of in these verses?

Paul clarifies the righteousness spoken of in Genesis 15:6; he calls it *justification*, that Abraham was justified before God because he believed God's word. He was *not* justified before God by what he *did*; he was justified by what he *believed*. Justification is the judicial declaration of God that the individual who believes him, who takes God at his word, is now *fully righteous in his sight*. Such a justified person now stands before God *in full restored relationship to him*, with the original relationship destroyed by sin now considered in good standing.

- (b) What are the five "*solas*" of the Reformation? Which one applies to Abram *here*? How?

The five "*solas*" of the Reformation are: 1) *sola Scriptura*, 2) *sola gratia*, 3) *sola fide*, 4) *solus Christus*, and 5) *solus deo Gloria*. In English, salvation is found in Scripture alone, granted to us by God's grace alone through faith alone in the completed work of Christ alone to the glory of God alone. In this case, the *primary* article is *sola fide*: that Abraham was justified by faith alone, and not by anything that he had done which brought the favor of God down upon him.

Read Genesis 15:7-16.

3. (a) Was Abram *doubting* God when he asked for confirmation (v. 8)? Why or why not? What *lesson* might there be for us in Abram's request?

Abram's question of *knowing* was to confirm the promise of God. Although many would assume that Abram was "doubting" God by asking for such knowledge, in fact, Abram was simply saying to God "show me what it is that you are going to do." Abram was simply asking God to *complete* his promise and show Abram the result. The reality is that God has, in many ways, offered to us *proofs* of what he is accomplishing, and we are *commanded* by Scripture to look to them and see the good things that God is doing. God is fully aware that we are weak, and he provides evidence for us that confirms what he is doing. It is not "doubt" to seek evidence, but to see the evidence and (then) question God is what would be considered wrong.

(b) From the prophecies of vv. 13-14, suggest *how* they were fulfilled in the national life of Israel.

In vv. 13-14, God tells Abram that the nation that would spring from him would be “*sojourners in a land that is not theirs,*” they would be “*servants*” (or slaves) there, that they would be afflicted in that place for “*400 years,*” and that they would be delivered from that place after the nation afflicting them was judged. Obviously, this is a reference to the people of Israel languishing in Egypt as slaves for 400 years and be delivered through the Exodus. Since the readership of this book were the wandering Israelites after the Exodus, this would be a stark reminder to them that their freedom had been ordained by God, and that they should worship him for such.

(c) What does it mean that “*the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete*” in v. 16?

God spoke these words to Abram about 600 years before the Exodus and the Conquest of Canaan by the Israelites. The Amorites (a native people living in that region) had no knowledge of the Living God, and their practices were wicked and evil in the sight of God. However, it was not God’s intention to judge them *yet* for their wickedness, but allow them (by his grace) to continue until the days after the Exodus where the Israelites would come to destroy them. By then, the full extent of their evil and rebellious nature against God would be visible, and their destruction would be plain and obvious. So, God *leaves* the Amorites to continue in their ways until *his* day of judgment would come.

4. What two things did Abram learn about *himself* in vv. 15-16? Which was most *important* to him?

God tells Abram two things about his future: 1) that he would die “*in peace*” (meaning that he would not die in some battle or by the hands of evil men, and 2) he would live to a “*good old age*” and be buried here (in the land God had promised his offspring). Although we are not told which of these Abram thought was most important, the fact that the Israelites would *eventually* return to this place of promise was probably the most comforting to Abram.

5. (a) What is the “*dreadful and great darkness*” that fell upon Abram in v. 12?

In Scripture, the character of God is often portrayed as light or radiance; his glory and majesty are often pictured as the light of revelation. But, at times, the holiness and utter perfection of God are pictured as darkness and dread. Because God is so perfect and holy, anything that is sinful or rebellious *cringes* before the nature of God, and this dread that falls upon Abram is symbolic of the absolute holiness of the Living God.

(b) What does the “*firepot*” and “*blazing torch*” in v. 17 represent? What is Abram *seeing*? How does this vision give Abram great *comfort*? How does it give *us* comfort?

In Scripture, the *presence* of God is often portrayed by fire; he is called (for example) a “*consuming fire.*” The nature of his presence is so great that his presence destroys anything not protected by him directly. In this case, the firepot and blazing torch represent God *passing through* the animals that have been cut in two. God passes through the animals as if to say “if I fail to keep my covenant, may it be done to me as it was to these animals.” To Abram, this is a sure sign that God has promised to keep this covenant, and Abram would awake from this vision assured in all that God had said to him. To us it is the same assurance: as Abram saw God pass through the dead animals, so we seek Christ pass through the gates of death (on the cross), and from it we are greatly assured that he has done *everything* necessary to rescue us from sin and judgment and death.

(c) Who was the *only king* to rule over the entire territory promised in vv. 18-21 (see 1 Kings 4:21)? Why was he the only king ever to do so?

Solomon, the son of David, was the *only* Israelite king to rule over the entire territory promised to Abram. The kings before him (i.e. Saul and David) worked to build the kingdom to this size, and Solomon's son, Rehoboam allowed the kingdom to be split almost immediately after Solomon's death. Additionally, the failure of Solomon to remain faithful to God at the *height* of his power doomed the nation, and it began the long downhill slide into captivity and destruction.