

Genesis 15:1-21

"God's Protection, God's Provision, God's Promise"

Even the most dedicated of Christians, can experience times of deep darkness in their lives. Meaning you may be left to wonder *what's* going on, or *where* God may be, or *why* He seems so far away... You're "in the dark".

Abram was no exception to that reality. Yet in passing *through* that time God was faithful *to* him & shared the wonders of His plan *w/Him*. As ironic as it may seem it was during this "dark hour" in Abram's life that God ultimately gave to him *illumination, revelation & information* otherwise unknowable. Isaiah said this, "*Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness And has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord And rely upon his God.*"¹

As we fall back into the flow of God's word today we find ourselves fresh on the heels of a tremendous victory in Abram's life. His nephew Lot had chosen to take part *in* the world & as the result he got taken into captivity suffering ramifications along *w/the* world. Over & over again the bible declares that we cannot involve ourselves *with* the world *w/out* being defiled *by* the world & suffering the consequences *of* the world. Paul was not writing to unbelievers when he said, "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*"² If you want to sow to the flesh, you can do that, but know that the harvest of the flesh will be to reap corruption. That's why we recommend that you sow to the Spirit; because those who sow to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life... In your OT the scripture says it like this, "*They sow the wind, And reap the whirlwind.*" Hosea 8:4 Or to understand all that another way, if you align yourself *w/the* world, delight yourself *in* the world, than you inherit the consequences *of* the world.

Lot got taken captive, but Abram didn't sit by idly & think, "That's what he gets, he shouldn't have been in Sodom in the 1st place." But rather he actively *pursued* him, we might say he made intercession on behalf *of* him, he rescued him & brought him back.

But on the heels of this *victory* a great temptation would visit him & seek to compromise him *directly*. The king of Sodom (the son of evil "Bera", king of perversion/burning) came out to meet him & offered him all the spoils, all the loot, all the toys & the trinkets that he'd gained from the war; he just wanted the souls (that's the nature of your enemy).

¹ The New King James Version. (1982). (Is 50:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² The New King James Version. (1982). (Ga 6:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But Abram said, “I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven & earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, & that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’”.

“Hey, I’m not even taking a sandal strap from you lest it compromise my walk w/God.” You see before the king of Sodom got to Abram, the King of Salem intercepted him, spent time ministering to him, refreshed him & reminded him of God’s goodness toward him. Melchizedek, “King of Righteousness” “King of Peace” (Salem); & Abram gave him a tithe of all. You see having spent time w/the King of Peace he was able to resist the king of perversion, having worshipped God, giving to the King of Righteousness; he didn’t succumb to the son of evil...

Vs 1

So, “after these things”, that is after his pursuit of Lot, the defeat of the armies of the 4 kings, the meeting w/Melchizedek & the refusal of the offer of the king of Sodom, “the word of the Lord came to Abram.”

This is the 1st time in your bible that you will find the phrase, “the word of the Lord”. It will be used over & over again from this point forward but this its 1st mention. Now ultimately we know that Jesus is the One who is identified as the “Word” of God, the Living Word. “In the beginning was the word, the word was w/God & the word was God. He was in the beginning w/God & all things were made through Him & w/out Him nothing was made that was made.” & Of course “The word became flesh & dwelt among us” (that’s all found in the opening remarks of the gospel of John). In Rev 19, John (in describing the return of J.C.) says, “*He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.*”³ Last week we spoke of the fact that Jesus said to the Scribes & Pharisees that Abraham rejoiced to see His day & he saw it. We wonder if it may’ve been a reference to the mystery of Melchizedek, it’s plausible. Here we read that the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, could Jesus have been speaking of *this*? It’s plausible.

However, regardless what *may* be, what we *do* see is that the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. As you study the scriptures you find God getting His word to His people in a # of different ways. Be it through an audible voice, the ministry of angels, the still small voice impressed upon the heart, a prophet or priest, a dream... here God used a vision. & He says to Abram, “Do not be afraid”, which tells us what? Abram was afraid.

³ The New King James Version. (1982). (Re 19:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

You don't seek to assure someone of the fact that there's no need for fear if they're not afraid. - Why would Abram be afraid? Oh, I don't know, he'd just attacked a confederation of 4 kings & taken from them all that they had & last I knew kings didn't take kindly to that kind of thing... He's probably sleepin w/one eye open just praying that they don't recollect themselves & come on a rampage seeking to settle the score & wipe him out!

It could be any # of things, we know that emotionally, psychologically it's not uncommon for people to fall apart after a radically dangerous/difficult happening of some sort in their lives. We have this capacity to repress it in the moment, but eventually that stuff works itself out. It's called P.T.S.D. (post traumatic stress disorder). Abram is just surfacing on the other side of a major scuffle; maybe he's waking up w/night sweats, dreaming about that guy that almost killed him, or reliving it in the middle of the night. We know that Elijah broke down after his encounter w/the 400 prophets of Baal; it's just a reality... for whatever reason Abram was afraid, so as to where Ch 14 dealt a lot w/the actions of Abram, Ch 15 deals w/the emotions of Abram.

What we're going to discover in this Ch is that it's characteristic of God to comfort the downcast. He is the God of all comfort, He draws near to the brokenhearted, saves such as have a contrite spirit & comforts the down cast. People of faith are also people w/feelings & though we're not to be ruled by our feelings, neither should we discredit them or ignore them, it can create a lack of balance real fast. Jesus expressed His emotion, David expressed his emotion (we read of their full spectrum in the psalms). But again we can't stop there. If there's a conflict between our emotions & the counsel of God's word, it's God's word that we heed, not how we feel about something/someone.

It was in the midst of his emotional state that the word of the Lord came to him, brought balance to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." The faith that will conquer fear is faith in God's Word, (Btw this is the 1st mention of a shield & a reward in your bible as well). God comforts Abram here. He tells him, "Listen, I am your protection & I am your provision."

Protection & provision are 2 of our greatest worries, safety/security. God says, "Don't be afraid", (you might write it down & look it up later Isa 41:10-13, 43:1-3). It's God's desire to comfort us, to assure us that He is greater than the sum total of all that we fear. Don't worry about your battles God's got your back (& your front & your sides). He is your shield...

Abe just gave up tons of potential wealth. God says, “Never regret it, I am your exceedingly great reward.” It’s the Matt 6:33, the Phil 4:19 of the OT. God will never be indebted to us, you will never give something up *for* the Lord, or give something *to* the Lord but that you won’t *gain* much more. (I’m not talkin about a get rich quick scam, or a way to manipulate the system [God searches our heart]), but you will gain way more eternally than what you ever give up temporarily in this world. As we’ve said before we will never get to heaven & say, “Well if I knew this was it I would’ve never given so much...” But we just might say, “If I knew this was it I would’ve given so much more...”

Vs 2-3

I love the transparency of the word of God, don’t you? Abram is keepin it real here; he’s not all super spiritual, shining up his halo & all ☺... He’s venting some pent up frustration here before the Lord (again read the psalms, David was free w/how he felt before the Lord). Now I don’t recommend being disrespectful to God, however God knows our frame, that we’re formed of dust/dirt, we’re frail & weak & God is compassionate & merciful.

It’s not that Abram isn’t thankful for all that God has done for him, how God has promised to protect & provide for him. But we’re seeing something deeper surface here. Abram wants a son, the child God promised him. It’s as if he’s saying, “What good is it to make an old man rich if I don’t even have a child to leave it to? Eliezer is a great man, but he’s not my son...” I want to encourage you today that if you’ve got frustrations, or aggravations, even exasperations, don’t hold them in because you’re afraid to offend the Lord. God knows already what’s going on in your heart/life. Bring them to Him... “Oh what joy we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry *everything* to God in prayer...” God doesn’t rebuke Abram here, he gives him the assurance that he needs. Peter said it like this, “...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”⁴

It’s not that Abram is *denying* God’s promise so much as it is that he’s *desiring* Him to bring it to pass. It’s an honest doubt, he’s asking the Lord to help him in his emotional distress. When you go through the gospels you find Jesus readily making short work of the unbelieving/insincere critic, He didn’t spend time seeking to convince them of something they didn’t want to believe anyway. But to the honest doubter, the sincere struggler, He would strengthen them, encourage them, comfort them... It’s found in Mark Ch 9:14-29.

⁴ The New King James Version. (1982). (1 Pe 5:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The father of a demon possessed son seeking the Lord to deliver him. Jesus said, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." The Father cried out w/tears & said, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" & Jesus honored his honesty, his transparency & did the work... God is faithful, but His work will be done His way, in His time. We're not called upon to understand it, but to believe it.

Vs 4-5

This is the 3rd time that God has informed/reminded/encouraged Abram of His promise to him. You & me, we get tired of the need to continually assure people of something. God's not that way, He knows our frame, our frailty, He cares for the cast down, comforts the down trodden. A bruised reed He won't break & a smoking flax He won't quench. God told Abram in Ch 12:2, again in Ch 13:15-16 & now here again that the work won't take place vicariously, but through him directly all the families of the earth will be blessed. That he will become a great nation & that Messiah will come through his lineage.

Now God keeps telling him this, so evidently Abram thinks it's supposed to happen soon, even still it will be at least 15 more years. God's will, will be done, but in His way & in His time. More than not God's promises require two ingredients to see their fulfillment #1 Faith, #2 Patience. Remember these words? *"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."*⁵

One has said that when the outlook is bleak, try the uplook! Abe had been looking around to try & solve his problem when he should've been looking up. Now whether he looked at the dust (13:16), or up at the stars, he would recall God's promise & be reminded of God's word.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto were camping in the desert; they set up their tent, and fell asleep. Some hours later, The Lone Ranger woke his faithful friend. "Tonto, look up at the sky and tell me what you see." Tonto replies, "Me see millions of stars." "What does that tell you?" asked The Lone Ranger. Tonto ponders for a minute. "Astronomically speaking, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Time-wise, it appears to be approximately a quarter past three. Theologically, it's evident the Lord is all-powerful and we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, it seems we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. What it tell you Kemosabe?" The Lone Ranger is silent for a moment, then speaks. "Someone has stolen our tent."

⁵ The New King James Version. (1982). (Heb 6:11-12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

For Abram, the stars would remind him of God's promise! That one day the "Bright & Morning Star" would arise as his descendant.

Vs 6

"Wait, what's that? Abram just 'believed' in the Lord, & God imputed/accredited *righteousness* to his account on that basis *alone*?" Yep. "He didn't *do* anything?" Nope, "Didn't *promise* anything?" Nope "Didn't need to 'measure up'?" Nope. Abram *believed* God & God accounted it to him for righteousness. You guys this is the John 3:16 of the OT, this was hundreds of years before the law, it's well before circumcision ever came into being, Abram didn't *do* anything in order for God to account him as righteous w/the exception of this one thing... he *believed* God's promise to him.

Listen to me, salvation *has always been & will always be* based upon one thing, God's grace through *faith*. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever *believes* in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." ⁶ "This is the work of God, that you *believe* in Him whom He sent."⁷

It's the way Abram was saved, it's the way you're saved today, by accepting what God has said & believing it. God has done something for you, He's made a promise to you. That Christ died for you, His blood was shed for your sins & He rose from the dead on the 3rd day & you'll just *believe* God for that, you'll never perish but have everlasting life. God will *accredit* your belief/faith as righteousness to your account.

Listen, there are essentially 2 types of righteousness, the righteousness accomplished *by* us, or the righteousness accounted/accredited *to* us by God. Now the righteousness you need to be saved is perfect righteousness. *The problem is we're flawed from the get go, perfect righteousness is out of our reach. Therefore what we need is not what we can accomplish (filthy rags before the Lord), but what we can have accredited to us through faith in Christ.*

God does not account your works for righteousness, your prayers for righteousness, you study of His word for righteousness, your coming to church for righteousness, your missions trips or outreaches for righteousness, your diligence or sincerity for righteousness. *I'm so glad God doesn't count those things for our righteousness, because often times I don't pray when I should, I fail miserably in my personal devotions, I don't attach myself to every possible outreach.*

⁶ The New King James Version. (1982). [Jn 3:16] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ The New King James Version. (1982). [Jn 6:29] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It's not about putting forth your best effort for God, but it's about believing in the promise of God. It's such a critical concept that the NT emphasizes this Vs over & over & over again. Write it down, look it up Romans Ch 4, Gal 3:5-9, of course James brings the balance of what true faith looks like in the believers life (James 2:18-24).

I can't stress it enough, it's not about us making promises *to* God, it's about believing the promises *of* God. The bible says, "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*"⁸ The question is, do you believe it?

You see, we read here that Abram believed in the Lord, but specifically (contextually) he already believed in the Lord. What he *believed* was the *promise* of the Lord. It's not talking about believing in God in the sense that we might generally allude to when someone says, "I believe in God." That's neat, so do the demons (and shutter, James 2:19). The question is do I believe the *promise* of God? That's neat that you believe a God exists, but that won't save you. Jesus said, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?*"⁹ So believing *in* God is one thing, *believing God* is another thing altogether. Believing God means that you believe that His ability is greater than any impossibility. Abram's odds of a child were an impossibility, but greater still was God's ability. Abram believed God & He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Vs 7-8

Check it out, Abram was a lot like you are & I am. God just gave him His word, made him a promise; Abram believed God, then he's like, "But how will I *really* know?" 😊 He's seeking a confirmation of sorts.

Vs 9-11

Here's what's happening, this is the modern equivalent to signing a contract. In that day (still referenced in Jeremiah's day [34:18-20]) this is the way 2 parties would "cut covenant" enter into an agreement. God is signing "His name" on the dotted line here for Abram. They would divide these animals & in essence walk through the middle of them repeating the oath of the covenant, the idea being it's "deadly" serious, life & death type things if they failed to keep their end of the deal. *It's a covenant so serious that it's sealed w/blood. So Abram is expecting God to show up, but He doesn't, not immediately & as he's waiting these birds a prey are swooping down & Abram is trying to fight them off...*

⁸ The New King James Version. (1982). (2 Co 5:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹ The New King James Version. (1982). (Jn 11:25-26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 12-16

Don't miss it, it was when Abram was in a dark desperation that God brought about illumination, revelation & information that Abram would've otherwise never known. & God gives to him a dreadful aspect to an amazing promise. **That his offspring will indeed inherit the land, but it's going to be hundreds of years from now; meanwhile they'll be strangers in a foreign land (any guesses?) Egypt, & they'll be afflicted some 400 yrs, but God will judge that nation & bring them out w/great possessions... What an amazing & detailed word of prophecy!**

Question: why wait? Why not give them the land immediately? Because currently it was inhabited by the Amorites & though they're a wicked & sinful people God will give them opportunity to repent. **People who think that God was just out exterminating people like pest control in the OT are radically mistaken. He gave this nation over 400 yrs to repent & get right w/Him! But there comes a time when a people refuse to repent, so judgment must fall.**

Vs 17-21

Wait, did you catch that? Abram did *all* this work, was ready to "meet God in the middle" but God waited until Abram was essentially paralyzed, couldn't move, wouldn't speak, stunned & in shock... Then He shows up, passes through the sacrifices alone, reaffirms His word & disappears.

Listen, this was God's unconditional covenant w/Abram, Abram didn't *do* anything, didn't *say* anything, no conditions nor strings attached. God just gave him His promise out of grace, all Abe could do, was believe it.

It's as though God waited on Abe to grow weary of working, too tired to try anymore on his own, "I'm done shooing away the birds" Abram gave up & then God did the whole thing. It's just like that w/you & w/me, when we're trying to do the work, seeking to see it through on our own or meet God in the middle God won't show up. He waits till we're weary, done working, then He shows up & sees it through, it's not of our works, it's of His work/grace.

It's a covenant that cannot fail because it's based entirely upon God's ability & in no way depends upon me. Jesus did it all; God has signed the contract in the blood of Christ, it's finished. It's left to you... only to believe.

As for the smoking oven & the burning torch?

Lots of speculation, that's all it can be. Smoke & fire reminds us of God's presence at Mt Sinai, it reminds us of the pillar of cloud that led the children of Israel through the wilderness by day & the pillar of fire by night... some see the furnace as judgment & the lamp as the light of the world. There's plausibility to all of that I suppose.

Ultimately we need to see that God confirmed his word & it was left to Abram to believe. Even so God said that if we believe on the Lord J.C. we will be saved, He confirmed His word at the resurrection. He's given you a promise, it's left to you to believe...

Prayer Points:

God we're grateful for your word, how You encourage us again & again. Your word is rich w/life & vibrancy, it changes our lives; make us more like Jesus. We're so thankful that You haven't left any part of salvation up to us! You've done it all, & Father we believe Your promise. Help us in our time of doubt, or fear, or feeling like we're in the dark. Jesus You are the light of the world, & we give You praise.

If you're here today & something in you has perhaps clicked, or resonated like never before, you understand now that it's not about believing "in" God per-say (though that certainly applies) but it's in *believing God*. Believing His promise to you, that it's through faith in Christ that your sins are forgiven & you're made right in His sight & you're ready to turn from your sin & trust in J.C. than I encourage you to not put it off another minute, do it now.