

GENESIS 13:1-15:21

ABRAM BLESSED BY GOD

Last week we were introduced to a man named Abram. He's a God-fearing man living in a pagan society. He has a comfortable life in a place known as Haran which is in the northern part of Mesopotamia. It's right on the border of present day Syria and Turkey. Abram's father has just died at the ripe old age of 205. God comes to Abram and gives him a message. This is foundational.

READ Genesis 12:1-4

Abram is not given any details, just a promise. He responds by obeying God. He packs up his family and heads down to the land of Canaan where God had directed him. When they arrive, they find that the land is occupied by an evil people group called the Canaanites. Recall from our previous lesson that the Canaanites are descendants of Ham. They had been cursed by Noah in a divinely-inspired oracle. The curse stated that the Canaanites will eventually become the servants of Noah's other two sons, Shem and Japheth. So now here is Abram, a distant descendant of Shem arriving in the land of Canaan. God tells Abram: "To your offspring I will give this land." Abram builds an altar and worships God.

Abram's family is nomadic. They dwell in tents. They don't stay in one place for very long. They move around. The reason for this is that they are herdsmen. They move around constantly allowing their flocks to graze over a large area. They end up down in the southern part of the land of Canaan in an area known as the Negeb. It is an ideal place for Abram's flocks – wide open rangeland.

But no sooner does Abram arrive at his new home, he is faced with a crisis. We are told that there is a famine in the land! Abram and family head down to Egypt where there is food. At the end of Genesis 12 there is a story that reveals to us the human side of Abram. He messes things up royally. But despite this, God blesses Abram. His family winds up being

expelled from Egypt and they head back home with more sheep, oxen, donkeys and servants than they left with.

In the chapters that we're going to focus on this morning we'll see this pattern continue. God keeps right on blessing Abram – with great wealth, power and prestige and most importantly, God blesses Abram spiritually.

READ Genesis 13:1-4

Abram returns from Egypt a very wealthy man. When he arrives back home he worships God on an altar he had built previously. Sacrificing offerings to God is Abram's regular practice. Abram worships. It says that he "called upon the name of the LORD." Abram recognizes something about God, which is that He wants to hear from us!

READ Genesis 13:5-7

Lot, Abram's nephew had followed Abram to the land of Canaan. Over time Lot also becomes a successful herdsman and accumulates his own rather large herd of livestock. But strife develops as a result of Abram's and Lot's success. The two groups begin crowding each other. Not only must they compete against each other for available grazing land, but we are told in v 7 that they are also competing against the locals as well. Large flocks and a limited amount of land – this creates a conflict.

READ Genesis 13:8

As the spiritual leader Abram takes the initiative. "Hey, we're relatives. We need to put an end to the animosity that's developing between us." And Abram offers a solution...

READ Genesis 13:9

Abram graciously offers Lot first choice of land. Whichever direction Lot goes, Abram will go the other way. This is not a permanent rift in their relationship. They can still visit each other, but this is just good business. It's something that needs to be done.

READ Genesis 13:10-11

Lot sees this lush green patch of land down in the Jordan River valley and he heads that direction, toward the east. That note in parentheses is a reminder of how desirable the land was before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and turned it into a wasteland. We'll read about that later in Genesis Chapter 19. Lot thinks he is making a good choice.

READ Genesis 13:12-13

What may have seemed to be a good choice from a purely material standpoint turns out to be disastrous spiritually for Lot and his family. We will notice that in later chapters.

READ Genesis 13:14-17

God comes to Abram and provides him with a little more information about his offspring and the land they will possess. Remember that God had promised Abram earlier: "I will make of you a great nation." What do you need to have a nation? You need three things: you need (1) people, (2) land and (3) laws. God lets Abram know that his offspring will be "as the dust of the earth." There will be so many of them that they cannot be counted. As for land, God says that He's going to give Abram all this land as far as he can see in any direction. This is prime real estate! We know that the laws will be given to Moses hundreds of years later at Mount Sinai after God's covenant people are released from their Egyptian bondage. But Abram isn't told about that.

Abram is a blessed man! And what is his response to God?

READ Genesis 13:18

Abram worships the LORD.

Well, as we get into Genesis Chapter 14, we learn that a war breaks out between rival kings. Let's pick up the action...

READ Genesis 14:8-10

So, in the course of battle, apparently in unfamiliar territory some of the kings and their men fall into these pits and the rest of them fled. That leaves their cities and people undefended.

READ Genesis 14:11-12

The rival kings swoop in and plunder the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Among the people taken is Lot who is now dwelling in Sodom. Well Abram soon receives the news about what has happened...

READ Genesis 14:13

This is the first time the term "Hebrew" is used in the Bible. He has settled in this particular area and made friends with his neighbors. He receives the bad news about Lot from someone who had escaped his captors.

READ Genesis 14:14-16

Abram quickly assembles a rather large militia and leads them in pursuit of the rogue kings who had kidnapped Lot. He pursues them north of Damascus, 150 miles away. He and his men defeat the bad guys and bring back everyone and everything they had taken away from Sodom. Mission accomplished. Abram is a big hero who saves the day! Again, we see that Abram is blessed by God, this time with a military victory.

READ Genesis 14:17-20

This obscure king of Salem, Melchizedek (his name means "righteous king") appears on the scene. But he is not just a king. He is described as a priest of God Most High. He blesses Abram. Abram recognizes that he is a priest of God and gives him a tenth of everything. He tithes. This is the first time a tithe is mentioned in the Bible. This is an act of worship on Abram's part as he acknowledges Melchizedek's words that it was indeed God who had given him victory.

The writer of Hebrews picks up on this rather obscure king priest Melchizedek. He references this passage here in Genesis Chapter 14. He

says, "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met [Abram] returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to him [Abram] apportioned a tenth part of everything. He [Melchizedek] is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness and then he is also the king of Salem, that is king of peace" (Hebrews 7:1-2). So then, the writer of Hebrews uses Melchizedek as a type of Christ. He makes his case about who Jesus is. Jesus, like Melchizedek is our Lord and King, our King of righteousness and our King of peace. Jesus, like Melchizedek is also our priest, our great High Priest interceding for us before the Father.

READ Genesis 14:21

"And the king of Sodom said to Abram..." Now hold on. We know that the people of Sodom are wicked. They are not godly people and neither is their king. Abram wants no part of Sodom or anything it has to offer. He is not at all like Lot who had been lured by the material things of Sodom.

READ Genesis 14:22-24

Abram has already received his reward in the blessing from God given to him by Melchizedek. Sodom had nothing Abram wanted. And that takes us to Chapter 15.

READ Genesis 15:1

Once again God appears to and speaks to Abram. God knows Abram's concern which is why He says, "Fear not". And what is Abram's fear, his concern? Simply this – he is now 85 years old, still childless, and has an elderly wife, 75 years old, who is barren. So God comes to Abram and comforts him and reminds him that He, God, is his Protector and his Provider. "Fear not, Abram. I am God and I keep My promises."

READ Genesis 15:2-3

Abram in his own reasoning thinks his heir will be his servant Eliezer because at this point Abram does not have children of his own. This is

human thinking. It's worldly thinking, short sighted thinking. So God responds to Abram...

READ Genesis 15:4

This passage is pretty clear. "Abram, your heir will come from your own body – he will be "your very own son."

READ Genesis 15:5

God reminds Abram that He is the Creator of the universe. If He could make the countless stars of the heavens, then He can certainly perform a miracle in Abram's life. He is a BIG GOD!!

Put yourself in Abram's position. I want to share a personal confession. There have been times when I doubted God. I faced what I thought at the time were major setbacks in my life. My reaction expressed my doubt about what God and what He said in His word. These turned out to be only minor setbacks and God ultimately brought me through it.

But this is NOT Abram's reaction...

READ Genesis 15:6.

Abram believed God. He didn't know how or when any of this would happen. But he still believed. He didn't have all the answers. At this point all Abram knows is who, what, where and why. But how it will happen and when it will happen, Abram has no clue. He knows that somehow, some way, God will bring it to pass. He believes God.

God then "accounts it to," He credits it to Abram's account, reckons it to him as righteousness. In other words, God declares Abram as righteous. How was Abram saved? By his faith, by believing what God said. How are we saved? The same way! When this verse is quoted in the New Testament by Paul and by James, the Greek word for righteousness (dikaiosune) is closely linked to the Greek word for justify (dikaio). The two words are virtually interchangeable. We can conclude then, that Abram

is justified by his faith in God. That's why I chose to use the term "saved" to describe Abram.

READ Genesis 15:7-8

Abram is living in the land, but as yet he doesn't possess it. Other people groups are living there. They own it. So Abram asks God about that aspect of His promise to him. Abram does not doubt God by asking. He just wants some clarification as to the how and when. So at this point, God affirms His covenant with Abram.

READ Genesis 15:9-10

The ceremony of killing and dividing animals in half was a common practice in the ancient world. The two parties would enter into an agreement and then ratify their contract by walking between the two halves. One commentary I read said the reason behind this is that the parties are acknowledging that if they fail to keep their promise the same thing that happened to these animals will happen to them. Another commentary said that the reason the birds were not divided into halves is that they were too small, which makes sense. So Abram has done what God asked and now he waits for God to show up to ratify the contract.

READ Genesis 15:11

While waiting for God to show up these birds swoop down and Abram shoos them away. If Abram did not believe God was going to show up, then he would not have bothered with the birds of prey. He would have just let them have their feast. But Abram believes God will show up in due time so he keeps everything intact.

John Walvoord in his commentary adds another layer to these birds. He sees the birds swooping down as an "evil omen." It represents Egypt's future oppression of the Israelites. He says, "Egypt, like the birds of prey, opposed the covenant, but ultimately the covenant will be fulfilled." That's an interesting insight.

READ Genesis 15:12

Abram falls asleep and God gives him a vision.

READ Genesis 15:13-16

In preparing this great nation that will come from Abram God must build up their population and get the people in the proper mindset to go take possession of the Promised Land. God gives Abram a timeframe for this – 400 years. During this time, God will give the pagan idolatrous Canaanite peoples ample opportunity to turn from their wickedness. If they don't turn (and spoiler alert, we know they won't) then God will use the Israelites as His instruments of judgment. He will purge the land of the evil Canaanites. God tells Abram that his offspring will be afflicted in a foreign land and then afterward they will come out with great possessions.

God doesn't give Abram any details, but we know what will happen from reading ahead in Genesis and Exodus. Seventy people – Abram's grandchildren and great grandchildren will one day go down to Egypt during a great famine (Joseph's day) and dwell down there. Years later a new Pharaoh will come to power and enslave them. Under Moses's leadership 430 years from this passage in Genesis Chapter 15, a million plus Israelites will come out of Egyptian bondage and when they do Exodus 12:36 says that they "plundered Egypt.

So, God gives Abram a snapshot of future events. He doesn't give Abram all the details. What Abram learns is that he, Abram, will not possess the land in his lifetime. But his descendants will.

During their long period of enslavement in Egypt God's covenant people will develop a strong desire to go and possess the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. They will become tough-minded and resilient. God will use the Israelite nation as His arm of judgment against the wicked Canaanites, referred to here in this passage as the Amorites, the same people group.

READ Genesis 15:17-21

God shows up! Abram's vision closes with a demonstration of God's presence passing through the pieces of meat in the form of a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch. God shows up! This same imagery of God as fire gets repeated in the future when God gives the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

One final thought before we close. In this covenant between God and Abram that we just read about, what does Abram have to do in order to receive all these blessings from God? NOTHING. This is what we call an "unconditional covenant." All Abram has to do is believe God and we were told earlier that he does. "[Abram] believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness." It is going to happen!

So then, God promises to bless Abram with countless descendants and He promises all the land of Canaan to them. For now Abram at 85 years of age has a grand total of ZERO descendants. In addition for now Abram possesses NONE of the land. At this point it all seems so improbable! But God has just reiterated to Abram this amazing promise of land and people.

How is God going to bring all of this to pass? We know that God WILL because God keeps His promises. Well, come back next week and find out how He does it.