

BELIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE Sunday School- December 11, 2011

Unifying Topic: A PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

Lesson Text

I. The Promise Of The Seed (Genesis 15:1-6)

II. The Purpose Of The Sacrifice (Genesis 15:12-18)

The Main Thought: And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. (Genesis 15:6, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Sometimes people are asked to believe the unbelievable, even the impossible. How far can some peoples' ability to believe be stretched? Even through Abram and his wife Sarai were long beyond the age of childbearing, because of his faith in God, Abram believed God when told that he would have descendants more numerous than the stars.

Lesson Aim: To challenge the students to exercise their faith in God and to expect that he will fulfill His promises.

Life aim: To help the students have faith in God sufficient to suspend their normal understanding of possibility in order to accept God's extravagant promises.

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- 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.
- 15:2 And Abram said, LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?
- 15:3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.
- 15:4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.
- 15:5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.
- 15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.
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- 15:12 And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.
- 15:13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;
- 15:14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.
- 15:15 And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.
- 15:16 But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.
- 15:17 And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.
- 15:18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:

HISTORY:

¹Abram went to Shechem (**Genesis 12.6**); then to south Canaan (**Genesis 12.9**); from Canaan he went to Egypt because of famine, where he in unbelief lied to Pharaoh about Sarai (**Genesis 12.10-20**). After that he traveled back to the Bethel area (**Genesis 13.3**). Abram was a wealthy man by this time (**Genesis 13.2**; Hebrews 11.9). Abram gave Lot his choice of land. Lot of course thought he was taking the best--the Sodom area (**Genesis 13.5-13**). God gave to Abram and his descendants everything else, so Abram moved to Hebron, the oaks of Mamre (**Genesis 13.14-18**).

Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, had conquered the five cities of the plain and so required heavy taxes. The cities revolted after 12 years of this. Chedorlaomer and four other kings punished the cities. He carried away slaves including Lot. Abram heard of this; he formed a small army (318 men) and along with Mamre, Aner, and Eshcol pursued and defeated the Chedorlaomer army. He returned with the stolen goods and people. When he returned he gave a tenth of the goods to Melchizedek, the king-priest of Salem. Abram also gave the king of Sodom back his goods (**Genesis 14**; Hebrews 7.1-4,6).

Sometime after the Chedorlaomer war, Abram asked God that Eliezer, his servant, be made the heir of the seed promised.

LESSON:

Genesis 15:1-6 The Promise Of The Seed

15:1 After these things... The previous chapter focused on Abram's actions, but this chapter deals with his emotions.

¹ <http://www.spokanebiblechurch.com/study/Bible%20Heroes/abraham.html>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

"After these things..." What things? - After the battle and all other things that had occurred. ...**the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.** This presents one of the four ways which God spoke to individuals in Old Testament times (Num.12:6-8).

1. He spoke in visions (Amos 7:1).
2. He spoke in dreams (Gen.41:1; Dan.2:1; 3).
3. He revealed Himself by speaking directly to the Prophets mouth to mouth (Dan.12:8).
4. And He spoke through His Word (the time of the Gospels was still under Old Testament authority—under the Law).

God called him by name. He knew Abram's heart, his fears, and disappointments. The tenderness of this act really brought Abram prostrate before God and encouraged him beyond all measure. When God called Abram's name, Abram knew above all else that he truly belonged to God. In this vision; in this mental picture, God gave a threefold message:

1. "*Abram do not fear.*" It seems that along the way fear came into the picture. Why? He had just come out of a war and perhaps he feared the revenge of the kings he had just defeated or he feared being childless.
2. "*Abram I am your shield.*" God wanted to reassure him that He is his shield, a protector and defender. God shielded Abram...
 - a. from being hopelessly discouraged and giving up.
 - b. from denying the faith and the promises of God.
 - c. from being defeated by the enemies of life.
 - d. from losing his soul to the spiritual enemies of God.
 - e. from losing heart in the face of weakness, temptation, and trial.
3. "*Abram I am your exceeding great reward.*" God would continue to fight for him as He had just demonstrated in chapter 14. And He would continue to reward Abram, especially since Abram had returned all the goods; valuables and gold, livestock and possessions, to all the people he had rescued. All the wealth was rightfully his by the law of conquest, but he had returned all and kept nothing for himself. God had truly made a Covenant with Abram, and Abram needed not fear because "*I Am*" had spoken. Abram was to be rewarded by God Himself, His very nature, beyond and above anything Abram could ever guess.

Just like Abram's experience, emotions can fall apart; darkness can sweep over our souls; trials can sap our strength; temptation can cause us to question and doubt God's promises. In fact, times do arise when we need a fresh experience with God, a brokenness experience, a deep sense of His presence, a special reassurance from His Word. It is in such moments of need that God always comes to us to meet our need, and the depth of the experience with God, always matches our need. The experience of His presence and the power of His Word and assurance, are always just what we need. This was the case with Abram, and it is always the case with the genuine follower of God.

15:2 And Abram said, LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? Now we see, something else that Abrams feared: having no child. He was too old; too many years had passed since the promise had been given. ²The last time God had spoken to Abram about the birth of a son, he had promised him he would make his descendants like the dust of the earth (Gen.13:16); but now the promise is that they shall be like the stars of the heaven in multitude (Gen.13:14-16). His nephew Lot whom he had reared and loved like a son had chosen to follow after the world instead of God. Therefore, he was unfit to be the heir, so the question to the Lord was, "*what will you give me?*" Abram comes up with the idea of the steward, Eliezer of Damascus, his most trusted servant in his household to inherit his wealth; a Mesopotamian custom—if Abram died without a son of his own, then his eldest servant would become his heir.

15:3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. Abram is wondering what happened to the promise. He's saying Look now; I still don't have a seed. He was disappointed and getting impatient! We can look at this in two ways: The male carries the seed for the baby, and as of yet, Abram has not seed for the baby to be born; or that Abram's seed or heir has not been born. However, Abram is now considering his servant Eliezer of Damascus in the house; he could be his heir. How much longer would he wait?

15:4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. There is a regular dialog between he and God. After God hears him, God said no, Eliezer will not be his heir. God then told Abram that he and Sarai will have a son who will come from her own body; her own flesh and blood; from their own bowels— this is where their heir will come from. The promised seed was sure to come.

² <http://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/genesis/faith-conquering-fear>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

15:5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. Remember, God was giving Abram a vision of all this. God took Abram outside, which means that Abram was inside his tent. Now He tells Abram to look up and if he is able to count the stars, so will his seed (descendants) be. What a glorious encouragement! Everytime Abram looked up at the stars he would think of the great promise of God and be encouraged and strengthened in his faith. ³No one knows how many stars there are. That's precisely God's point. Abraham will have so many descendants that he will never be able to count them all.

15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. To "*believe*" means to rest upon, to lean upon, to be sure of, to have complete and full confidence in. There are essentially two types of righteousness: righteousness we think we accomplish by our own efforts, and righteousness accounted to us by the work of Christ when we believe. God took Abram's faith and counted or credited it to him for righteousness. No person is righteous before God. Our righteousness is always seen **in** Christ Jesus, for we are **in** Christ! The key word is "**in**." Our faith is in the Person of...; our belief is in the Person of... When a person deposits his money **in** a bank, the bank credits the money to his account. When Abram deposited his faith **in** God; laid his life into the hands of God; God credited his faith as righteousness because Abram deposited his faith **in** God. What did Abram believe? He believed God's promise to give the promised seed.

Genesis 15:12-18 The Purpose Of The Sacrifice

15:12 And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. Again, remember Abram was receiving a vision from God. The revelation comes to Abram in a trance of deep sleep. Lying there, deep in sleep, a thick darkness moved in upon him and some sense of horror and dread began to strike his heart. What was the message? It was a prophecy foretelling the triumphant future of the promised seed (v13-16).

- a. The promised seed shall enter a foreign land to be oppressed and enslaved for a period of 400years (V13).
- b. The promised seed shall be delivered from the oppressing nation (Egypt), and when they are delivered they will have great possessions (V14).
- c. The believer (Abram) will join his fathers in peace (v15).
- d. The promised seed shall return to the Promised Land after 400years (V16).

It represented the sufferings which would come to God's people Israel and as well to Saints presently. Abram's descendants would possess the land of Canaan, but not until after a considerable delay and many difficulties.

15:13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; God tells Abram that Israel must remain in a land (Egypt) for four hundred years (their entire stay). This is a rounded figure, the precise number being 430 (Exo.12:40-41). ⁴Four hundred years are to elapse before the seed of Abram shall actually proceed to take possession of the land. This interval can only commence when the seed is born; that is, at the birth of Isaac, when Abram was a hundred years of age and therefore thirty years after the call. During this interval they are to be, "*first, strangers in a land not theirs*" for one hundred and ninety years; and then for the remaining two hundred and ten years in Egypt: at first, servants, with considerable privilege and position; and at last, afflicted serfs, under a hard and cruel bondage. This is a certainty!

15:14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. At the end of this period Pharaoh and his nation were visited with a succession of tremendous judgments, and Israel went out free from bondage "with great wealth." This passage teaches us that we will go through difficult seasons, which sometimes last for generations. Nevertheless, God knows the end from the beginning and causes trials to work for the benefit of those who trust him.

15:15 And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. "*Going to his fathers*" meant joining them in heaven. Abram will die a happy old age (he was 175 years old when he died in Gen 25:7-8). Abram would have peace—eternal life and peace.

15:16 But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. The iniquity of the Amorite tribes living in the land of Canaan was not yet full; God gave them more time to repent. The Amorites were one of the nations living in Canaan. God knew the people would grow more wicked and in

³ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1996-04-28-How-to-Overcome-Fear/>

⁴ <http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/374/eVerseID/374/RTD/Barnes>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

their iniquity they would be punished. This prophecy was literally fulfilled. Moses, for example, who led the Israelites back to Canaan after their 400 years in Egypt, was in the fourth generation from Jacob—Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses.

15:17 And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. God gave Abram a deep experience of His holy presence. But note how God appeared to Abram: God's presence was symbolized in a smoking firepot with a blazing torch. God often symbolized His presence by using fire. The Bible says that God is a consuming fire. There had to be shed blood to seal the covenant. To confirm His promise, God gave Abram a sign—the smoking firepot and flaming torch passing between the parts of the sacrificed animals. Ancient covenants were sometimes confirmed by the halving of sacrificial victims and the passing between them of the two parties to the covenant (Jere.34:18). However, there was only one to pass through the carcasses and that was God. This indicated that Yahweh alone was undertaking the fulfillment of all the conditions attached to the covenant. The sign to Abram was a visible assurance to him that the covenant God had made was real. Therefore, if the covenant of the promised seed and the Promised Land was to ever be established and fulfilled, it had to be established by God and by God alone; by grace and by grace alone. A person is saved—receives the promised seed (Christ) and the Promised Land (heaven)—by grace and grace alone.

15:18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: This is an expansion of the covenant given earlier by God: here the actual boundaries of the Promised Land are given. The Promised Land will stretch from somewhere close to the great Nile River to the great Euphrates River. Note, at that time, there were apparently ten significant tribes of Canaanite people occupying the land. The Amorites were the largest, and the name Amorite was sometimes used to refer to all the Canaanite people.

SUMMARY:

Abram ⁵was struggling with the delay in God's promises being fulfilled. God began to encourage him to not fear because He would be his shield and exceeding great reward. God answered with a promise of a son, and He promised to provide abundantly. Abram's concern about dying without an heir led him to think that his servant Eliezer would be his heir. The Lord readily answers to clarify it by declaring "*this man shall not be your heir.*" God does not even consider him as an option but says his son shall come forth out of his own bowels. At this point, still looking at it in the vision, God takes Abram to the outside of the tent to look up at the stars; if he's able to count them, so shall his seed be. When Abram responds in belief to God's promise, God credited this belief to Abram's account as righteousness. In other words, Abram wasn't righteous in and of himself; however, because he had faith in the Word of the Lord, the Lord's righteousness was credited to him.

Abram falls into a "*deep sleep*" and God speaks that Abram's descendants will be "strangers in a land not their own." They will be "enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years". However, their oppressors (the Egyptians) will be punished in the end and God's people will come forth with great wealth that would bring them to the Promised Land. Abram now knows that he will be able to go with his fathers and die in peace at a good old age. In this vision, Abram also sees a smoking firepot proclaiming the furnace of affliction that Israel will have to pass through; and a flaming torch move between the split carcasses of animals sacrificed. This represented the manifestation of God's divine presence passing through the sacrifice showing that He was and would be the light and salvation of His people. In Exodus He was their pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. The purpose was to settle the matter of His covenant He had made with Abram: The promised seed was reaffirmed and the Promised Land was reaffirmed with given boundaries.

APPLICATION:

Did you see how many times God told and reaffirmed to Abram the promises? He will do the same for you even when you have questions. God is always true to His Word because God is the God of impossibilities showing it to many generations!

⁵ <http://mark12ministries.wordpress.com/2009/11/15/genesis-151-6-%E2%80%99Cgods-promises-are-abundant/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>