

GENESIS: Where Grace Begins

When God "Cuts" a Covenant – Genesis 15

"After these things ..."

15 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision ...

Genesis 15:1a

The events of Genesis 14 have apparently left Abram feeling more _____ than ever.

Though God had miraculously given Abram and his 300 men victory over a 4-king coalition and Lot had been amazingly rescued, Abram now had new and potentially vengeful enemies. They had already demonstrated their willingness to go to war simply over the non-payment of taxes. Now, Abram and his clan have demonstrated themselves to be a formidable (and _____) foe.

Though Abram was a man of _____, his faith was imperfect. This time, his faith is being challenged by _____.

God's gracious response to Abram's faltering faith is unprecedented in the Pentateuch. He gave Abram a _____ of Himself. This experience began at night and lasted through the following day and another night. (see. V. 12, 17)

No event would ever be more important in Abram's life.

"Fear not, Abram, I am your shield ..."

² "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

Genesis 15:1b

Two promises:

- 1) I will _____ you (so don't be _____).
- 2) I will _____ you (so don't give up _____).

Abram's struggling faith:

² But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."

Genesis 15:2-3

Is it ok to be frustrated at what you can't see – at promises that seem unfulfilled?

Is ok to vent those frustrations to God?

Is it ok to be _____ with God about our doubts, fears, and struggles?

Some Incredible lessons in faith:

⁴ And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." ⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

⁷ And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."

Genesis 15:4-7

_____ is not _____. God's timing – though often different from our own – in nonetheless _____.

Faith is ultimately believing _____, not believing _____.
believed ... 'aman' ... amen

How was Abram 'saved'? (Romans 4:9; Romans 4:22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23)

What parallels do we see in Abram's story and our own salvation?

How **God reassured** Abram:

You don't need to _____ an heir. I will provide one (and beyond what you can realize).

Our faith is formed and fortified in the _____ of God in our history and in the history of others. Forgetting what God has done is a fast track to doubt and unbelief.

But Abram wants more – he seeks _____:

⁸ But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"

Genesis 15:8

Instead of _____ Abram for his lack of faith, God instead does the remarkable. He enters into a solemn _____ with Abram.

⁹ He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. ¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.

¹⁴ But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

¹⁷ When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, ¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

Genesis 15:9-21

God's Oath to Abram:

Abram was directed to use five animals, all of which would become standard sacrifices when the Mosaic covenant was instituted. Though slaughtered, the animals were not sacrificed. There was no altar, no fire, no burning. Their symbolic purpose was to represent God's covenant people much as in the same way these animals would represent them before God in the future sacrificial system. So Abram killed the animals and arranged the halves of the heifer, goat, and ram to line a gruesome covenant path. Apparently the dove and young pigeon were not halved because they were so small but were placed on opposite sides of the path facing each other.¹

The cutting or halving of the sacrifices demonstrates the _____ and seriousness of the vow ...

Abram cut each of the sacrifices into two, and with the parts made two heaps. The Hebrew technical term to 'cut a covenant' reflects this part of the ritual, with its inevitable shedding of blood. The solemn commitment was made by passing between the parts of the sacrifice, which they cut in two and passed between its parts'. In other words, death awaited the person who broke a covenant.

The 'cutting' of the covenant was the point at which the covenant was inaugurated, and two other verbs, used of making a covenant in chapter 17, bring this meaning to the fore. 'I will make my covenant between me and you' (verse 2) has, instead of 'cut', the Hebrew very 'give', or 'put'. Thus God lays down the terms of the covenant as well as taking the initiative, and later he says, 'I will establish my covenant the element of security and changelessness. Human covenants were often broken, and still are, but this covenant was established by the unchanging God, and was consequently ordered and secure.

Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis*, pp. 53-54

God _____ bears full responsibility for the keeping of this covenant. Abram is _____ and does not participate ...

God _____ that this word will be kept ...

The furnace of fire symbolized the presence of the living God with whom Abram was being brought into fellowship. It was an awesome symbol, which Moses was to encounter at Sinai on a grander scale, and one which the people were to associate with God's holiness (Ex. 19:18-23). He was not a God who could be trifled with, and yet he would go with them in a pillar of cloud and of fire (Ex. 40:38), guiding and protecting them.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, 231.

For Abram all this was implicit as, all alone, he felt the heat of the flame that passed so near to him. He would be aware that, if this had been a treaty made by a human king, both parties to it would have passed between the pieces of the sacrifice. As it was Abram was merely the passive observer, while the Lord, symbolized by the fire, walked between sacrificial offerings, so taking upon himself the curse implicit in the ritual: 'Thus be it done to me' if the terms of the covenant are broken.

Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis*, p. 55

Why that mattered then and why this matters now ...

Midweek Bible Study returns on **August 4**.