

God's Covenant with Abraham

Walking through HIStory...

OT Week 3

August 25, 2013

DAY 1:

1. One pattern in the Old Testament is this: people sin, face the consequences of their bad choices, and God redeems. No matter how deep and dreadful the consequences of people's choices, people's insistence on running their own lives only hardened. The entire world population was in trouble. What could be done to redeem this awful human dilemma?

2. Painful consequences were not turning people around! What would it take to shake and awake people out of their personal rebellious ways? Think of all the things people try today to change their ways: trying harder, being religious, New Year's resolutions, accountability, being "sincere" (whatever *that* means), etc. Nothing we did could change our human nature--just too arrogant and out for self.

3. There was **only one thing** that could work. A plan was hatched. It was so radical that only God could think of it, and only He could make it happen. We study the infant stages of His plan this week!

Genesis 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

4. In one way these are big moves, but on the other hand there are no headlines--simple words uttered to one man living in obscurity.

a. What things in these verses seem "big" to you?

b. What things seem "small"?

5. Reread the verses again, but underline every "your" and circle every "I."

6. What was Abraham's role in this covenant?

7. What was God's role in this covenant?

8. What strikes you about God's heart?

DAY 2: The Covenant Pictured

1. About eight years passed between Genesis 12:1 and 15:1. The promise involved offspring that would grow to an innumerable amount. One problem: after eight years Abraham still had zero offspring. God used this moment of doubt and confusion to confirm His covenant with Abraham.

Genesis 15:2 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

2. Can you relate to Abraham? Have you ever had a promise from God of what you thought He was going to do, and nothing seemed to be happening? (15:2-3) What was it?

3. How did God answer Abraham?

a. What question did God answer? (15:3-4)

b. What question(s) did God NOT answer? (15:5) What reasons would God have to NOT answer some of our questions?

4. What was Abraham's response? (15:6)

5. God could have spelled out His plan to Abraham in elaborate detail. He didn't. All Abraham had to go on were some big ideas: land, offspring, a blessing to all peoples/nations. What reasons can you think of for why God did NOT give any details about His plan of salvation for fallen man?

6. God's plan of salvation depends on God, not Abraham. It is not something that any sinful man can "mess up." He has "idiot-proofed" the plan of salvation!!! The big plan is idiot-proofed, and so is the covenant with Abraham. Hmmm. What does this say to you about God? About you?

DAY 3: The Covenant Confirmed

1. Just after reiterating the covenant, God HIMSELF, ratifies it!!! Let's see how...

*Genesis 15:8 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"⁹ So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.¹² As the sun was setting, **Abram fell into a deep sleep**, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.¹³ Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.¹⁵ You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."¹⁷ When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates--¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites,²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites,²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."*

2. Before there were notary publics and attorneys, men ratified or "signed" binding agreements (covenants) with a visual aid. The image was to kill some animals, split the carcasses in half, lay them out in a row, and the two men each walked the path as a commitment to their keeping of the agreement. The significance of the dead animals was this: "If I don't keep my end of the bargain, you can do to me what we've done to these animals!"

3. Who are the ones that walk the path, between the carcasses? List them as noted in 15:17...

4. God "appears" but only in symbolic form. He appears as two entities:

a. Smoking pot: Smoke was used by God to denote His presence, as the pillar of smoke, at Sinai, at the temple, etc.

b. Blazing torch: Fire was also used to denote God's presence, as at the burning bush, the pillar of fire; God is a consuming fire, etc.

5. Does Abraham walk through, between the dead carcasses?

6. How did God **make sure** that Abraham could not walk through the path? (15:12). What does that say to you?

7. God walks through TWICE! "Abraham, instead of you walking through, I'm going to walk through in your place!" "Abraham, if you or your descendants are not blameless, upholding your part of the covenant, YOU CAN DO THIS TO ME!"

8. This would foreshadows the cross, where countless people have violated the covenant, so God punishes HIMSELF, not us!!!! What's your biggest takeaway from today?

DAY 4: Creating a People for Himself

1. When I was a young Christian, I thought that I was saved primarily to avoid hell and enjoy heaven. Though those things are certainly true, and I will be eternally grateful for them, the central point is much bigger than that. God wants me! He called me into relationship with Him, to be one of His people! Let's look back at these roots... in God's interaction with Abraham.

Genesis 17:7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

2. What promises does God make to Abraham?

3. Read back over these verses. What strikes you about God's longing for relationship with His people?

4. Do you sense a yearning in God? For what?

5. Do you sense He will go to any length to make that happen? What words or phrases indicate that to you?

6. What God is centrally promising is to do everything within His power to make relationship happen with Him. This is a formidable task because, left to ourselves, not a single solitary person would pursue God simply for who He is. We are just too self-centered and rebellious.

Have you ever been in God's position, of yearning to bridge a gap to make a broken relationship "happen" but found it a formidable task? What was that like?

7. What does God offer more: His blessings or His presence?

8. Which of those two alternatives are you "naturally" drawn to?

9. How much does God's presence *really* mean to you?

DAY 5: The Gospel to Abraham; The Faith of Abraham

1. Let's look at Abraham's responses to God's covenant with him.

Genesis 15:1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." ² But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." ⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

2. First response: Underline Abraham's doubts in 15:2-3.

3. Second response: What was Abraham's verbal response to the covenant, **following** God's visual of the **stars**? (Hint: This is a trick question)

4. The Spirit of God records no words uttered by Abraham. It is likely he was speechless. Why?

5. Though Abraham was speechless, something VERY significant happened! What was it? (15:6)

6. Notice the verb in 15:6: "credited." It is a banking term. When you make a deposit into your checking account, your account receives a credit. SOMEONE ELSE can also make a deposit into your account. It is still credited to you! Abraham went to a spiritual "bank."

a. What was the "deposit?" (15:6a) _____

b. What was "credited to him?" (15c) _____

c. Abraham was *declared* "righteous." He was now in "right standing" with God. There were no charges against him. This is how salvation works, both in the Old Testament and the New...

*Romans 4:18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope **believed** and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ Without weakening in his **faith**, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was **strengthened in his faith** and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." ²³ The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who **believe** in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

7. What strikes you from this Romans passage, several thousand years after Abraham lived?