

## Introduction

Last week we covered Genesis 14: Taxes and Tithes. In Genesis 14, Lot is taken captive by the four kings of the north, after they had defeated the five kings from the south. The war had been over taxes. The five kings from the south had rebelled against paying the taxes levied against them by Chedorlaomer. He put together an alliance and went down south and defeated the five kings, and took Lot, his wives, and their possessions. After hearing about it, Abram put together his own coalition, and went and defeated the four kings in a surprise attack at night. Then, Abram has an encounter with Melchizedek, the King and Priest of Salem, which is Jerusalem, and he gave a tithe of all the spoils to Melchizedek. He acknowledged that it was God who had given him the victory. Abram also had a meeting with the king of Sodom, who I believe was the new king of Sodom. Abram refuses to take anything from the spoils, so that the king could not say that he made Abram wealthy. Abram was trusting God to provide for him, and to make him wealthy. He was not trusting in man, but God.

Our chapter today contains a verse that some theologians consider the most important verse in the Bible. In Genesis 15:6, *“Then he (Abram) believed in the Lord, and He (God) reckoned it to him as righteousness.”* Abram was not saved by works; he was saved by faith. This verse is considered the most important verse because our relationship with God is based on faith, not works. It ties in with Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5. I believe it is an extremely important verse, but I do not personally think it is the most important verse in the Bible. I think the most important verse in the Bible would have to be about God, not our faith in God. I would be more prone to vote for Genesis 1:1, John 3:16, or Romans 5:8.

After Abram had defeated the four kings to the north and returned from the battle, the Lord appears to him in a vision. All the events that take place in this chapter takes place in that vision; they are not literal events, but things that God spoke to Abram about in his vision. The covenant that God establishes with Abram takes place in the vision. In Hebrews 1:1, we see that God spoke to the fathers in many portions and in many ways. Last week Abram got a visit from Melchizedek, which I believe is the Lord Jesus Christ. God spoke to him through Melchizedek. This week God speaks to Abram through a vision.

(Heb 1:1) “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,”

In this vision God make a covenant with Abram. In that covenant, God tells Abram what He is going to do for Abram. These vows that God makes are backed up and supported by the covenant that God makes. There are three vows in this covenant. In verses 1-11, God speaks to Abram about his descendants. In verses 12-16, God speaks to Abram about the future of his descendants and his own future. Finally, in verses 17-21, God speaks to him about the promised land.

## God's Covenant With Abraham

1. The Descendants (Gen 15:1-11)
2. The Future (Gen 15:12-16)
3. The Land (Gen 15:17-21)

1. **The Descendants** (Gen 15:1-11)

(Gen 15:1-11) "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." {2} Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" {3} And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." {4} Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." {5} And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." {6} Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. {7} And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." {8} He said, "O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it?" {9} So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." {10} Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. {11} The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away."

It is interesting that God starts the vision with a word to put calm Abram's fears. Abram has just defeated the alliance of the four kings, and two of these kings are the most powerful kings in the world. Abram is probably and rightfully concerned that they will regroup and come back down and take him out. Our text does not say that, but in light of what has just taken place, I think it is a pretty good guess as to what was going through Abram's mind. God tells him, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you." God was going to take care of Abram. The God who has helped him defeat his enemies is also going to help protect or shield him from anyone who will attack him.

Next, God tells Abram that his reward shall be very great. Abram has just turned down the spoils of war that he was entitled to take. He turned down those riches in Genesis 14 because he did not want the king of Sodom or anyone else making a claim that they made him rich. Abram was trusting God to bless him and make him a great nation. So, God responds to Abram's faith and told him that his reward would be very great.

I love Abram's values that come out here. After God tells him that his reward will be very great, he says, "*O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?* {3} *And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir."* Abram considered children as a blessing. Abram understood that children are a blessing from God. Notice what Solomon says in Psalm 127:3-5. "Children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward...how blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. God told Abram his reward would be great. Solomon said that children are a reward and a blessing. Abram understood that children were a great reward.

(Ps 127:3-5) "Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. {4} Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. {5} How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate."

I cannot tell you how many people have made comments about how many children Karen and I have. We get asked if we are Catholic or Mormon. When we say no, they say that we must be really dumb protestants. Others ask if we know what causes it. Others have offered us TV's. The general attitude of people is that children are not something desirable, and they are a lot of trouble. I tell people that I am so grateful to have ten children. I tell them what a blessing all of our children are, and that we are extremely grateful for Chad and Joanna. They have been such a blessing to Karen and I. I tell them that the Scriptures teach us that children are gifts from the Lord, and that they are rewards. I am in agreement with Abram. He recognized that children are a blessing.

Notice what God tells us in Psalm 128. "How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord. Then, God tells us how the person who fears the Lord will be blessed. He will eat the fruit of his labors. He will be happy, and it will be well for him. Third, his wife shall be like a fruitful vine within his house and his children will be like olive plants around the table. God concludes by saying, "for thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord." Children, you are a blessing to the Lord. You are not an accident. You are not a problem. You are a blessing from the Lord. You are a gift to your parents and to everyone else. You are a reward. Abram asked God about his reward since he did not have any children.

(Ps 128:1-4) "How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways. {2} When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, You will be happy and it will be well with you. {3} Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine Within your house, Your children like olive plants Around your table. {4} Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD."

Abram told the Lord that Eliezer of Damascus was going to be heir of his estate. Many scholars believe that Eliezer is a slave of Abram, whose mother and father were also slaves of Abram, and he had been born in Abram's house. Since he had been born in Abram's house, the custom at that time was to give the inheritance to one born in the house if there were no direct offspring. Since Abram did not have any children of his own, his estate would go to Eliezer.

Then, in this vision, God said to Abram, "This man will not be your heir, but one will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." Then, the Lord took Abram outside and told Abram to count the stars. In many cities today, that would not be hard to do. The lights of the cities are so bright that very few stars can be seen. I was flying back to Albuquerque a few years ago and the man next to me was coming to New Mexico to look at the stars. He was showing me something on Google Earth that showed the darkest spots in America, which were the best place to see the stars, and there is a place in western New Mexico that is excellent for looking at the stars. At the time of Abram there was no electricity and you could see the stars clearly from any location on the earth. Abram could obviously see so many stars that they could not be counted. God was going to give Abram lots of descendants.

This was not the first time God had spoken this to Abram. In Genesis 13:16 God told Abram that He would make his descendants as the dust of the earth. Similarly, He said, "if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered." God had used the dust of the earth and also the stars of the sky to convey this promise to Abram. Often I feel like Abram; I have to be told a couple of different ways so that I grasp and understand what is being said. God is a great communicator and as good communicators do, He used different illustrations to get the same point across. He made sure that Abram got the message.

(Gen 13:16) "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered."

We put a lot of weight on the next verse, that Abram believed in the Lord and God reckoned it to him as righteousness. We know that it is by faith that we are saved and that not of ourselves. It is not by works that we are saved, lest any man should boast. Man does have to believe and trust in God. At the same time, God had gone to great lengths to communicate the message to Abram. He has repeatedly gone to Abram and told him that He was going to have lots of descendants. God repeatedly calls and woos all of us. He wants us to believe and put our trust in Him.

(Eph 2:8-9) "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

When Abram believed in the Lord, God reckoned it to him as righteousness. Abram was not made righteous by his works; he was reckoned as righteous by his faith. Notice that the next thing that God did in this vision was to cut a covenant with Abram. He told him to bring a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. All of these animals and birds were cut in two and laid opposite of each other. The blood from the two sides of the animals drained toward the middle and made a pool. Then, both parties would walk through the blood and make a vow, saying, "May what was done to these animals be done to me if I do not keep this covenant." The one who failed to keep the covenant paid for it with his life.

In Jeremiah 34:18-20 we find an example of this. God had made a covenant with Israel and in that covenant they were going to set their slaves free in the seventh year, the year of remission. The Israelites had not been setting the slaves free, and so God confronts them in Jeremiah 18. Listen to what God tells them.

(Jer 34:18-20) "I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts {19} the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers and the priests and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf {20} I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth."

When someone violated the covenant that they made before God, their life was required of them. They would become like the animals that had been killed by cutting them in half. People today do not understand the meaning of the covenant, and the seriousness of a covenant that they make with God. When god spoke this to Abram in the vision, Abram fully understood what God was saying. He fully understood the ramifications of the covenant.

When the two parties that are making a covenant walk between the animals that have been cut in half, the greater party went through first. In the case of a marriage covenant, the man walked through first. Then, the bride would walk through the animals and make the same vow. I want to skip down to verse seventeen for a minute so that I can continue this thought about walking through the animals. In this vision, when the sun had set, it became very dark, and there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch, and both of these passed between the pieces. The smoking

oven represented God. Smoke was indicative of the presence of God. *“When God came to Mt. Sinai it was covered in smoke (Ex.19:18). Each time God came to the tabernacle or the temple it filled with smoke (Isaiah 6:4). God led his people through the wilderness by a cloud of smoke. Isaiah says the Lord comes in dense clouds of smoke (Isaiah 30:27). The prophet Joel (Joel 2:30) and the apostle Peter (Acts 2:19) speak of God coming with billows of smoke. The temple is filled with smoke ‘from the glory of God and his power’ (Rev.15:8).”*<sup>1</sup> God, being the greater party, went through the pieces first.

(Gen 15:17) *“It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.”*

But notice what else Abram saw in the vision. The smoking oven was followed by a flaming torch, which also passed between the pieces. The flaming torch, a lamp of fire, also represented God. When God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush (Ex 3:2), fire represented God. When God led Moses and Israel through the desert, He led them with a pillar of fire at night (Ex 13:21). When Elijah was carried away to God, he was carried in a chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire (2 Kings 2:11). In Exodus 24:17, the glory of God looked like a consuming fire. In Isaiah 30:27, God's tongue is described as a fire. In Jeremiah 23:29, the word of God is like a fire. At Pentecost, there came down tongues of fire as the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples (Acts 2:1-3). In Hebrews 12:29, God says that He is a consuming fire. So, the flaming torch, or fire, also passed between the pieces.

This was unexpected by Abram. It would be expected for God to go through the blood first, because He is the greater party, and the One initiating the covenant. But for God to go through a second time, as the lesser party, was very unexpected. God was saying that He was going to suffer the consequences for the lesser party failing to keep their end of the covenant. God knew that Abram would sin. God knew that Abram's descendants would sin. God knew what was in the hearts of men, and knew that we would all sin. God was saying that He was going to pay the penalty for our sins. God knew that He was going to come down in the form of man, and pay for our sins on the cross. God was willing to fulfill all the requirements of the covenant. God is an awesome God, a merciful God, a benevolent God, and His covenant with Abram and with us is an incredible covenant. His blood was shed for us to satisfy the covenant.

It is not by our own righteousness that any of us stand before God. Jesus came to us and lived a perfect and righteous life, and He died for our sins so that the payment for our sins that separated us from God would be paid. He made a covenant with us, the New Covenant, that by believing Him and confessing Him as Lord, we receive His righteousness. Paul wrote about this in 2 Corinthians 5:21, saying, *“He who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* Like Abram, we have to put our trust in God so that we are reckoned as righteousness.

(2 Cor 5:21) *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

Next, birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. In the parable of the sower and the seeds in Luke 8:4-15, some seed fell on the road and the birds of the air

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<sup>1</sup> The Abrahamic Covenant, Vander\_Laan

came and devoured the seed (Luke 8:5). In Jesus' explanation of the parable, He said that the birds represented the devil. The devil came to take away the seed (word) so that people would not believe and be saved. In the account today, the birds probably represent the devil and the forces of darkness, who do not want this covenant to take place. Abram drives away the birds of prey, signifying that he would overcome his enemies and drive them away. In the same way, we are to overcome the evil one and drive away the forces of darkness.

(Gen 15:11) "The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away."

(Luke 8:12) "Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved."

## 2. The Future (Gen 15:12-16)

(Gen 15:12-16) "Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. {13} God said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. {14} But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. {15} As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. {16} Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.'"

The first part of the vision was about Abram's descendants being like the stars. In the second part of the vision, God gives Abram a prophetic glimpse of the future. Specifically, he talks about the four hundred years that Abram's descendants would spend in Egypt, where they would be enslaved and oppressed. Then, God tells him that He will judge Egypt, and they will come out with many possessions. All of this takes place from Genesis 37 through Exodus 14. We serve a God who knows the past, the present, and the future. When we go through difficult times, it does not catch God by surprise. He already knew what you and I were going to go through those times.

God also tells Abram about his personal future. He tells him that he will go to his fathers in peace and will be buried at a good old age. God is not just concerned with Abram's descendants, the nation of Israel, He is concerned about Abram himself. In the same way, God is concerned about the church, His bride. But, He is also concerned about each one of you personally. He knows how many hairs are on each of your heads. He knows how many days He has appointed for each of us to live.

## 3. The Land (Gen 15:17-21)

(Gen 15:17-21) "It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. {18} On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: {19} the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite {20} and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim {21} and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."

In the final part of the vision, God speaks to Abram about the land that He is going to give to his descendants. He said the territory goes from the river of Egypt, which is the Nile, and it extends from there all the way to the river Euphrates, which is in present day Iraq. God also mentions a number of different peoples that are occupying the land that He is giving to Israel. He mentions the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites. These would become the enemies that Israel would have to drive out from the promised land in order to take possession of it.

As an application, God has led us to this area of Albuquerque. But, we do not possess this area. We will have to pray and establish the kingdom of God here. There are battles to be fought as we begin taking possession of the territory that God has called us to possess.

### **Conclusion**

As we come to a close this morning, what has God been speaking to you about? He kept speaking to Abram about His descendants. He used different pictures and analogies to communicate with Abram. He kept encouraging Abram and reaffirming him. What has God been speaking to you about over the past season? It is very likely that He has spoken to you more than once about the things He has in store for you. It is likely that He has used different pictures and analogies with you. Let me encourage you to journal or write down the things that God has been speaking to you about.

I mentioned that many feel that Genesis 15:6 is the most important verse in the Bible. Abram believed the Lord, and God reckoned it to him as righteousness. This morning, do you believe in the Lord? Have you placed your trust in Jesus Christ? We will never reach God by our good works. We will never be perfect and without sin. God knew that and He had the smoking oven and the flaming torch both pass through the covenant aisle. God promised that He would sacrifice His own blood in order to satisfy the covenant He made with us. There is nothing for you or I to do, other than believe God and receive Christ's payment for our sins. In Romans 10:9-10, He says that if we believe in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, we will be saved. With our hearts we believe and become righteous, and with our mouths we confess Jesus as Lord, and are saved. Do you believe this morning, and have you confessed Jesus as your Lord. This morning, this may be the most important verse in your life. When you believe and place your trust in Christ, you will be reckoned as righteous. Your life will be forever changed. Your future and your inheritance will be secured forever.

Let's pray.

**Introduction** (Gen 14, 15:6, Eph 2:8-9, Tit 3:5, Gen 1:1, John 3:16, Rom 5:8, Heb 11:1)

1. **The Descendants** (Gen 15:1-11, Ps 127:3-5, 128:1-4, Gen 13:16, Jer 34:18-20, Ex 19:18, Is 6:4, Is 30:27, Joel 2:30, Acts 2:19, Rev 15:8, 2 Ki 2:11, Ex 24:17, Is 30:27, Jer 23:29, Acts 2:1-3, Heb 12:29, 2 Cor 5:21, Luke 8:4-15)
  
2. **The Future** (Gen 15:12-16, Gen 37-Ex 14)
  
3. **The Land** (Gen 15:17-21)

**Applications:**

What God has been speaking to me about: