

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 15:7-21

Topic

God causes a deep sleep to come upon Abraham as He promises him to give him the Promised Land as an inheritance

Title

"He Sees You When You're Sleeping"

Introduction

The fantasy has come true - a long-lost relative you have never heard of has died, and you just received an email from a lawyer indicating that you are the only heir.

Well, not quite. Somebody with your last name died without any heirs, and the promise is that if you can prove that you actually have the same last name the lawyer will send you his millions. All you have to do is pay some legal fees up front, and fax over your identification and bank account number!

It's a scam. Don't fall for it.

Truth is, most Americans have little to look forward to in terms of inheritance. According to recent statistics, only about 8% of Americans get an inheritance of any kind - and those who do inherit will likely get less than \$25,000. Less than 2% of Americans receive more than \$100,000 in inheritance. The average inheritance is spent in less than two years.

The scams and sketchiness of inheritances can render it difficult for us to wrap our heads around the promises we encounter in the Bible that we

each have “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (First Peter 1:4).

Maybe you don't doubt what is waiting for you but you have doubts while you're waiting as you experience various trials and tragedies.

If any of this resonates with you, then Abraham is your guy. He flat out asked God to give him a guarantee of his promised inheritance. Assured of it, he waited for it with a style of living by faith that has become the standard for every subsequent believer.

It prompts me to ask these two questions around which I will organize my thoughts: #1 How Do You Really Know You Have A Spiritual Inheritance Reserved In Heaven?, and #2 How Do You Roll Knowing You Have A Spiritual Inheritance Reserved In Heaven?

#1 How Do You Really Know
You Have A Spiritual Inheritance Reserved In Heaven?
(v7-8)

God promised Abraham an inheritance.

Genesis 15:7 Then He said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

Abraham's response was a little surprising - at least on the surface.

Genesis 15:8 And he said, "Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

Was the guy noted for his faith doubting the Word of God?

I don't think Abraham was doubting God's Word. If anything, he was taking God at His Word.

God promised Abraham He would “give [him] this land to inherit it.” Now when someone gives you something, it is yours to own and use and enjoy.

But if they promise to give it to you as an inheritance, then you need to wait for it.

Abraham's question was asked in light of his believing God that he would never, in this life, possess the land but that it would indeed be an inheritance and possessed by Abraham's descendants... *Of which he had none at the time!*

And you know what? **That is exactly how Abraham lived.** He is elsewhere described as a pilgrim, as a sojourner, looking forward to a city not on earth but in Heaven, a city whose builder and maker is God.

I'd say Abraham had faith, not doubts, when he asked God, "how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

I'm going to suggest that the real point of his question was something like this: "God, since I will never really possess in this life what You have promised me as my inheritance, how can I *experience* the effects of what you have promised me every day from now until I arrive in Heaven?"

In fact, the word translated "know" means *to know relationally or experientially*.

I see this more as a request than a question. Abraham requested something by which he might **experience** his inheritance on a daily basis.

We don't talk enough about experiencing God. We're more *rational* than *relational* and, after all, experiences can get weird.

Nevertheless, we **are** in a relationship with God, and He Himself often describes it in experiential terms. One of God's favorite illustrations of our relationship with Him is that of a feast. Pastor and author Tim Keller comments, "a feast is a place where our appetites and our senses - of sight, smell, sound, and taste - are filled up."

In one place we are even told to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). Picking up on that taste-test, Jonathan Edwards once wrote,

There is a difference between believing that God is holy and gracious, and having a new sense on the heart of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. The difference between believing that God is gracious and tasting that God is gracious is as different as having a rational belief that honey is sweet and having the actual sense of its sweetness.

God is going to give Abraham an experience, a ‘taste.’ Is there a corollary in our lives as Christians by which we “taste and see that the Lord is good?”

Yes. First, remember that you and I have been promised a future inheritance. What is it, exactly?

The place to start talking about our inheritance is with Jesus Christ. It is written of Jesus that “He has [been] appointed **heir of all things...**” which includes the entire universe (Hebrews 1:8). We’re told “**all things**” will be put into subjection to Him (Hebrews 2:8).

Jesus, then, will inherit **all** of the created universe and everything in it. Then isn’t it mind-blowing to read in Romans 8:17 that believers are “joint-heirs” with Jesus? Everything He inherits, we inherit as well.

You and I will inherit everything that is the Lord’s - and that is everything!

In the mean time, while we are waiting, God has graciously given us a way to experience our promised inheritance. A way to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” In Ephesians 1:14 we are told that God the Holy Spirit, Who indwells every believer, “is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession...”

This word “guarantee” means *down payment*. God lives within us as a guaranteed down payment of everything we have been promised as an inheritance.

How do you really know, i.e., *experience right now*, that you have a spiritual inheritance reserved in Heaven? You have the Holy Spirit in you. You have God dwelling within you. Every day and every moment of every day.

If that isn't a foretaste of Heaven, I don't know what is!

#2 How Do You Roll Knowing
You Have A Spiritual Inheritance Reserved In Heaven?

(v9-21)

We said that Abraham realized he would never own the land. He was being given it as an inheritance. How should he live in the present in light of the facts about his future?

Genesis 15:9 So [the Lord] said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."

Genesis 15:10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee commented on this, saying,

When men made a contract in that day, this is the way they made it. They would prepare a sacrifice in this manner. The party of the first part joined hands with the party of the second part, they stated their contract, and then they walked through the sacrifice. In that day this corresponded to going down to the courthouse and signing before a notary public in our day.

As we will see, however, God and Abraham do not walk together through this sacrifice. Abraham does not walk through it. There was nothing required of Abraham, nothing he could bring to the table.

Why the ceremony? It was to establish to Abraham that God was going to give him the land as his inheritance and to illustrate God was giving it with absolutely no conditions for Abraham to meet or any contribution on his part.

God doesn't get around to walking through the sacrifice until verse seventeen. In the intervening time God shows Abraham how he should roll as he waits, as he sojourns, as he looks for the heavenly city.

Genesis 15:11 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

You have to picture this scene. Abraham had prepared the prescribed sacrifice, set out the pieces, but was just sitting around all by himself. If you were looking on you'd wonder who was he waiting for? Was it God - the God he'd left Ur to follow?

If so, God seemed a no-show, or at least very late.

Does God ever seem a no-show? Does He ever seem late? Sometimes even very late?

The answer - the honest answer - is "Yes," from our human perspective He does.

F.B. Meyer wrote,

It is not easy to watch with God, or to wait for Him. The orbit of His providence is so vast. The stages of His progress are so wide apart. He holds on His way through the ages; we tire in a few short hours. And when His dealings with us are perplexing and mysterious, the heart that had boasted its unwavering loyalty begins to grow faint with misgivings, and to question...

To add to his waiting, "vultures" smelled or saw the carcasses and started to pick away at them. Abraham had to drive them off. He had to be there, to remain there, in order to be able to drive them off.

You must remain at the place of sacrifice if you want to be able to drive off doubts and fears and all such things as assault your faith. That place of sacrifice is, for us, the Cross of Jesus Christ. Thus you and I must daily live in the shadow of the Cross, being willing to lay down our own will in order to be able to honestly say, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven."

Genesis 15:12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.

Abraham's taste of Heaven wasn't all sweet. He experienced "horror and great darkness" to represent to him that life would often hold tragedy and suffering.

We need to believe the Lord that in the world we will have trouble, but that He has overcome the world.

Part of Abraham experiencing darkness and horror was in identification with things that would befall his descendants. The history of the Jews most definitely includes "horror and great darkness."

The next few verses are a prophetic history lesson.

Genesis 15:13 Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.

Genesis 15:14 And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

Genesis 15:15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.

Genesis 15:16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

Abraham was enabled to 'see' Israel's future 400 year captivity in Egypt. He 'saw' the Israelites come out of Egypt with great spoil and enter the land Abraham was being given as an inheritance.

We are able to 'see' many things on the horizon thanks to the prophecies yet to be fulfilled that we read in the Bible. We 'see,' for example, a future seven-year Great Tribulation coming upon the planet to prepare it for the Second Coming of Jesus.

As far as Abraham, he would remain a pilgrim in the land and then die and be buried in it. Many believers in Jesus Christ have died remaining strangers and pilgrims. I'm hoping for the Rapture but I, too, may die still looking for the city whose builder and maker is God.

Abraham's descendants "in the fourth generation" would return and claim the land as theirs by divine grant. They would conquer the "Amorites" they encountered there, as well as the other inhabitants of Canaan.

Why the wait? There are many reasons but one important one was that "the iniquity of the Amorites [was] not yet complete." In other words, God was giving the Amorites opportunity to repent of their iniquities. Four hundred years His longsuffering waited for them.

We live in a time in which God's longsuffering waits. As we report each week, that time is nearing its end. *Meanwhile folks are getting saved!*

God would send Israel, under Joshua's leadership, to both claim their land and destroy the sinful inhabitants of it.

This tells us that between here and Heaven we can expect conflict and combat. In our case the battle is spiritual and so should be the weapons we employ. But make no mistake about it: We are at war.

Genesis 15:17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.

Abraham had to wait all day - shooting vultures and enduring terrors. Then a "smoking oven" and a "burning torch" go through the pieces.

There are no end of interpretations of what these symbolize. Let's try to keep it simple.

Remember what this was. It was a ceremony in which two parties would walk through the sacrifice. The two parties here were Abraham and God - but Abraham was not a participant. **That means these symbols represented God walking through the sacrifice alone.**

- The "smoking oven" is really a small furnace that would be used to refine metals.
- The "torch" served as a light in those days.

Since we have the benefit of the complete Bible, I can't help but suggest that both these symbols represent Jesus Christ Who walked through the sacrifice alone, as it were, when He died on the Cross for the sins of the world.

Why represent Jesus as a "smoking furnace?" Can't say for sure, but if I think in terms of how I am to be living while I await my inheritance, I'm told I will find myself in the furnace of suffering. *Ah, but Someone will be in it with me!* Just as Jesus was there in the fiery furnace with Daniel's three friends, He will be with me.

The "torch" symbolizes Jesus as the Light of the world, and as the light to my path through this world to the next.

Genesis 15:18 On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates -

Genesis 15:19 the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites,

Genesis 15:20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,

Genesis 15:21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

Here's the land grant to Abraham's descendants. It was God's to give and He gave it, unconditionally, to Israel.

Technically, God's covenant with Abraham was made in chapter twelve and it is ratified by God here in chapter fifteen. The promise of land, of descendants, and of blessing all nations of the earth, are the three points of the Abrahamic Covenant. We understand this to be literal and physical - a real granting of the land to the physical descendants of Abraham, the Jews, through whom the Savior, Jesus Christ, came to bless all nations.

We also understand that the ultimate fulfillment is yet future, when Jesus will physically return to earth to rescue Israel and establish His kingdom on the earth.

Mean time we can live as those fully expecting to receive our inheritance.

Even so, Come, Lord Jesus!