

GENESIS 15

Introduction

Abraham had just been involved in a struggle. Four kings and their armies had defeated five kings and their armies. Abraham's brother, Lot, had been taken captive. Hearing the news, Abraham armed his 318 trained servants and pursued the four armies. He fought them and prevailed, returning victorious.

In Chapter Fifteen Abraham is involved in another struggle. It is a different kind of struggle. It is not against soldiers or spiritual foes; it is internal. He has come to a place of fear in his walk with the Lord. He is struggling in his heart between faith and fear. You know that he is afraid because God tells him *not* to fear! When God reassures him you see, in Abraham's response, *why* he is afraid:

Genesis 15:2-3 But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

Abraham is afraid because he has faith in God's promises but he does not see God's promises being fulfilled, nor does he see how they *ever can* be fulfilled! He understood by faith that the promises God had made him depended upon an heir being born to him. He understood by human reason that Sarah was barren and that both he and Sarah were old. Abraham had been walking by faith but now several years had passed since God had first made these promises to him. Abraham was manifesting fear instead of maintaining his faith because he was troubled by God's delay in fulfilling His promises.

God's response to Abraham is interesting. He repeats, clarifies, and expands the original promises. But God also lets Abraham know that he will *not* receive the complete fulfillment of the promises in this lifetime!

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

f Abraham was to walk by faith, not succumbing to fear, even though the fulfillment of God's promises were to be delayed.

f You are to walk by faith, not succumbing to fear, even though the fulfillment of God's promises are often delayed!

Think for a moment about some of God's promises to you... You will be either raptured or resurrected, then rewarded. You will rule and reign with Jesus Christ. In addition God has probably given you many personal promises from His word regarding

people and events in your own life. These promises and many more are laid hold of by faith.

Now think about the circumstances you face today and tomorrow... If you're honest you'll admit that, even in light of your faith in God's future promises, you sometimes fear for the present. Like Abraham, you manifest fear instead of maintaining your faith because you don't see God's promises being fulfilled, nor do you see how some of them *ever can* be fulfilled because of your circumstances!

Those with great faith are not those who see the immediate fulfillment of God's promises. In Hebrews 11 the heroes and heroines of faith, including Abraham, are listed. The writer twice makes this comment about them:

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Hebrews 11:39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise...

These men and women of faith, like Abraham, often had moments of succumbing to fear. In the end they persevered, overcoming their fear, and are remembered only for their faith.

The fulfillment of many of God's promises to you are delayed. How do you maintain your faith without succumbing to fear when God's promises are delayed? You learn three things from Abraham's struggle with fear:

- #1 Remember Your Salvation And You Will
Maintain Your Faith Rather Than Manifest Fear
When The Fulfillment Of God's Promises Is Delayed
- #2 Remain Steadfast And You Will
Maintain Your Faith Rather Than Manifest Fear
When The Fulfillment Of God's Promises Is Delayed
- #3 Rest In Your Sufferings And You Will
Maintain Your Faith Rather Than Manifest Fear
When The Fulfillment Of God's Promises Is Delayed

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#1 Remember Your Salvation And You Will
Maintain Your Faith Rather Than Manifest Fear
When The Fulfillment Of God's Promises Is Delayed
(v1-6)

Many Bible commentators have said, without exaggeration, that Genesis 15:6 is the most important verse in the Old Testament. In it you learn the answer to life's most important question, How can rebellious men and women become right with God? The answer is that men and women can be declared righteous before God *not* by any works of their own, but solely by the work of Jesus Christ received by faith. True, Genesis 15:6 doesn't specifically name Jesus. Nevertheless, we are not adding anything to the Scriptures by proclaiming to you that it is His work on Calvary that must be believed and received by faith. In the New Testament book of Galatians, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that Abraham looked forward to the coming of Jesus. He says in Galatians 3:16, "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to your Seed, who is Christ." Paul is saying that Abraham *knew* that God's promises to him involved a particular descendant - the Christ, the Messiah - Who would bring salvation and thus be the ultimate source of spiritual blessing to the whole world. Abraham did not yet know Jesus' name, but he was looking forward in faith to His coming, and it was on the basis of faith in Jesus as his personal Lord and Savior that God declared him righteous.

Abraham had believed God's promise of Jesus prior to Chapter Fifteen, just as Adam and Abel and Noah and the other saved patriarchs had. All these had been saved by grace through faith, declared righteous before God. In verse six God is calling upon Abraham to remember his salvation as a first and important step in overcoming his fear.

Genesis 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

Most commentators suggest that Abraham was suffering from a kind of battle fatigue. Having just routed four kings and their armies, and having just turned away from the spoils of battle, they say he was afraid that the enemy would regroup and attack him. While this may be true, what is really on his heart is revealed by his questions to God in verses two and three - he is afraid that God's promises to him will go unfulfilled.

It is with that in mind that God says to him, "I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." It is a description of his salvation:

^ God was his "shield" in the sense of protecting him from the outpouring of divine wrath against sin. Later in the chapter you learn that God's wrath against sin is like a cup filling up, one day to overflow against the Amorites and other wicked inhabitants of Canaan. Abraham, having been declared righteous, would never be the object of God's wrath poured out on sinners. It is from *this* that Abraham was shielded.

You, too, are shielded from the coming wrath of God! Jesus took the wrath of God on Himself at Calvary for those who receive Him by faith:

v Colossians 3:6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience...

v Romans 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

v 1 Thessalonians 1:10 Jesus...delivers us from the wrath to come.

v 1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...

%o God was his "exceedingly great reward" in the abundance of the spiritual blessings Abraham would inherit. Though he would die a stranger, owning only funeral plots, he was blessed beyond measure in heavenly places. So, too, is God *your* exceedingly great reward!

Genesis 15:2 But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

Genesis 15:3 Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

We noted that, in Galatians, Paul indicates that Abraham knew that God had promised him a special Seed. You see here, too, that he understands this. He is concerned that God's promises are not being and cannot be fulfilled because he has no offspring and has little hope of producing any. It is this that has brought him to a place of fear.

What has God promised *you* that is yet unfulfilled? Has it brought you to a place of fear? Talk to the Lord about His promises to you!

Genesis 15:4 And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir."

Genesis 15:5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

Faith teachers have made a mockery of verse 5. They say that Abraham had to "visualize" each star as a descendant in order to "give birth" to the promise. The emphasis of the verse is on God's power, not on

Abraham's faith. It is as if God were saying, "Abraham, can you number the stars?" We can't even do that today! Remember our favorite verse from Genesis One? "He made the stars also..." If God is infinitely powerful enough to make the stars as a kind of afterthought, then He is able to bring His promises to fulfillment regardless of the seeming impossibility of the circumstances! A barren womb is no real obstacle for the God Who created the universe! Whatever "barren womb" you face is no more a challenge for God!

Genesis 15:6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

As we said earlier, this is not the moment that Abraham was saved. He was *already* saved when he left Ur of the Chaldees. As we twice saw, he already believed in the promise of a Savior to come. Abraham had been struggling with fear and the first important step towards regaining his walk of faith was to remember the wonder of his salvation.

God had saved him, not because of any merit in Abraham, but on account of His grace received by faith. Having trusted God for salvation, Abraham ought to be able to trust him to keep all of His other promises!

In Philippians 1:6 you read, "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in *you* will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ." Having trusted God for *your* salvation, you ought to be able to trust Him to keep all of His promises to *you!*

#2 Remain Steadfast And You Will
 Maintain Your Faith Rather Than Manifest Fear
 When The Fulfillment Of God's Promises Is Delayed
 (v7-11)

In the following verses, God entered into an important covenant with Abraham. In Jeremiah 34:18-20 you read of a ceremony common to ancient cultures in which two parties who were entering into an agreement passed between the bodies of slain animals in order to ratify and solemnize their oaths. In this case only God passes through. That tells you that the covenant made with Abraham and his descendants is unconditional. God would keep this covenant with Abraham and his offspring regardless of their obedience or disobedience. Their performance could not alter these particular promises. The Abrahamic Covenant begins in Genesis 12:1-3 and is confirmed and enlarged in Genesis 12:6-7, 13:14-17, here in 15:1-21, and in

Genesis 17:1-14 and 22:15-18. In this covenant God makes promises to Abraham, to his offspring, the nation of Israel, and to the Gentile nations of the world:

^ Abraham himself is promised that he would be the father of a great nation...including kings and nations other than the Messiah Himself. God promises His personal blessing on Abraham. His name shall be great and he himself shall be a blessing...

% To Abraham's offspring is promised that the nation itself should be great and innumerable. The nation is promised possession of the land...the covenant is called "everlasting" and the possession of the land is defined as an "everlasting possession..."

^ All the Gentile nations of the world are promised a blessing through Abraham and his descendants...

God is still keeping His covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Regardless of their disobedience and disbelief, God has brought the Jews back to Palestine. At the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, all Israel will be saved. Jerusalem and Israel will become the central nation during the 1,000 year Kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth. All the nations of the world will indeed be blessed during that glorious Millennial Reign of Jesus on earth!

While it is true that God's covenant was and is unconditional, Abraham was not passive. Even though struggling with fear he remained steadfast in his faith. His steadfastness showed itself in three ways: In persistence, in obedience, and in watchfulness.

^ Abraham was persistent:

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."

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

This is not complaining or unbelief. This is persistence in prayer, called "importunity" in the King James Bible. It is commended by Jesus in the New Testament in Luke 11 where He tells the parable of the friend who comes seeking bread at midnight and persists until his request is granted. His application of the parable is "ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to

you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Luke 11:9-10).

Remain persistent in prayer about the things God has promised you...

%o Abraham was obedient.

Genesis 15:9 So He 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.

God instructed him to prepare for the ceremony and Abraham obeyed.

Often obedience falters when the fulfillment of God's promises is delayed. Since God seems to have failed, we find it easier to fail - blaming Him for it.

Walk in obedience to the word of God regardless of your assessment of His promises...

^ Abraham was watchful.

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

Abraham gathered the animals, cut them appropriately, and arranged them carefully. His work wasn't over, though; God would be a while in coming and the work Abraham had done had to be diligently watched and guarded from predators.

Watchfulness is particularly difficult when you're struggling with unfulfilled promises. It seems as though there is no need to watch since nothing is going to happen. Had Abraham applied this thinking, by the time God came the animals would have been picked clean by vultures!

Remain watchful...

You can remain steadfast and faithful even when your faith is failing! God will come in His appointed time. Faithfulness is what He will require. Like the heroes and heroines of faith in Hebrews Eleven, your fears will not be remembered, but your faith will!

#3 Rest In Your Sufferings And You Will
Maintain Your Faith Rather Than Manifest Fear
When The Fulfillment Of God's Promises Is Delayed

(v12-21)

Abraham is told that he will not see the fulfillment of certain of these promises in his own lifetime on earth. Genesis 15:15 "Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age." The promises are so glorious, however, that it shouldn't any longer matter whether or not he lives to see them! He *will* see them fulfilled in earth's future and in eternity future. For the moment he sees that he is part of a great plan of redemption that spans all of human history. To demand the fulfillment of the whole plan in his own short span of years would be to never really understand the wonder of God's love for all of mankind!

Perhaps that's why the writer of Hebrews says,

Hebrews 11:39-40 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

What Abraham *is* told is that the fulfillment of God's promises will not be without suffering.

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.

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's sleep terror is perhaps a way of his being made to share in the future sufferings of his descendants. Suffering would come before the promises would be fulfilled. The descendants of Abraham would be held captive and enslaved by Egypt for around four hundred years before they would possess the promised land. Abraham himself would suffer physical death long before that. But after their suffering would come their opportunity to possess the land. Under Joshua's leadership, they would return to Canaan and dispossess the wicked inhabitants there.

In verse 16 you learn that God is longsuffering towards sinners. He waited hundreds of years for the Amorites and others to repent. In the end, only Rahab and her household and the Gibeonites threw themselves on God's mercy and were saved.

Some of *your* suffering is the result of *God's* longsuffering! In His unwillingness that any should perish God allows sin to continue In light of

the eternal destiny of sinners, however, our light affliction is but for a moment and is easily endured so that others can have the opportunity to know Christ as their Savior.

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.

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."

As we've already said, this is God's literal, unconditional, irrevocable, eternal decree for the physical descendants of Abraham, the nation of Israel. They will inhabit the land just as God has promised. Modern Israel is the key to understanding and unlocking Bible prophecy.

The "smoking oven" and the "burning torch" speak of resting in the midst of your sufferings. The oven is the furnace of affliction and trouble that God's people often find themselves in. Here it speaks of the captivity of Israel in Egypt. It could be a lion's den, as it was for Daniel, or a literal fiery furnace, as it was for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In the furnace, though, is a burning torch - a light more radiant than the fire of affliction. This is the promise of God's presence with you in your sufferings. It is a promise that you can rest in your sufferings because Jesus is there with you. I mentioned Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace. Even though the fire was turned up seven times its normal intensity, when King Nebuchadnezzar looked in, he saw a fourth Person Who looked like the Son of God! The glory of His presence in the furnace was more radiant than any fire. The three men in the furnace were casually, restfully, wonderfully walking along with Him!

Every oven comes with a torch for the believer. You can rest in your sufferings for Jesus' sake. No fire can consume His glorious presence. Your sufferings may be long, but they are limited. They are unique opportunities to walk restfully with Jesus, and for others to see Him gloriously revealed.

Conclusion

Reconciling God's promises with His providence can be difficult. You have faith in His promises; but in His providence He withholds the fulfillment of many promises. In those times you can *give in to fear* or you can *go on in faith*.

Go on in faith knowing that God's promises to you are a part of His plan of redeeming lost men and women for eternity. What you don't see fulfilled in your short lifetime will be fulfilled according to God's plan, both on earth and in eternity.