

In The Beginning: Session 24: Abraham Believed God

בְּרֵאשִׁית

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Recap of Genesis

- Genesis is the first book in the Bible
- Author: Moses, about 1400 B.C.
- The story of the beginning of the human race and God’s dealings with us
- Continues to the time of Joseph ~ 1700 B.C.
- Five main stories
 - Creation
 - The Fall of Man
 - The Flood of Noah
 - The beginning of the nations
 - The Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons)

Flow of Genesis

- Chapters 1-2: God made everything that exists
- Chapter 3: the Temptation and Fall; Promise of a Redeemer
- Chapters 5-9: Mankind deteriorates dramatically. God sends a great flood in judgment in order to destroy the world and start over with just eight people. Only Noah and his family survive.
- Chapters 10-11: Man unites in opposition to God, who divides their languages.
- Chapter 12: God continues His plan to bring the Deliverer or Messiah into the world by calling Abram, later called Abraham.

- One of the most important things we've seen and will continue to see in Genesis is God making covenants with Abram and his descendants.
- God promises Abram that He will be His God, and bless Him. He also promises him descendants, and the Land of Canaan.
- Chapters 13-14: Abraham rescues his nephew, Lot, from a coalition of powerful kings. This meant that Abraham potentially had new enemies.

An Encounter With the LORD (Gen. 15:1)

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."

- God is always saying to us, "Do not be afraid," especially in this face of our enemies.
- God tells us why we should be confident instead of being fearful. His covenant promises make us secure, and we know His guarantees are sure!
- God will be our shield against our enemies, whether known, or unknown!
- God will also be our reward. Abram wanted to be able to say that it was only God that had made him rich. And so God says that **He** will be Abram's reward.
- This is a great encouragement for anyone who gives up something for the Lord's sake, or who is willing to take a loss now for righteousness' sake.

What Will You Give Me? (Gen. 15:2-3)

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

- If God is faithful to His promises, then in a bold but respectful way, Abram will stand upon those promises and remind God of them.
- Abram cannot imagine how these promises can come to pass if he doesn't have any children. In that culture you could leave everything to your steward.
- What was a steward's position?

He Believed In The Lord (Gen. 15:4-6)

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

- God says Abram will actually have children of his body. It will not be an adopted child or someone who is considered his child through some legal technicality. Not only this, but God says they will be extremely numerous!
- God's other response is one of the most profound statements in all the Scripture; Moses says Abram believed God, and it was *counted to him* for righteousness.

Righteousness 101

In the Bible, there are two ways in which people can be made righteous with God:

- One way is *religion*: trying to gain God's approval by doing good works.
- People who believe in "works righteousness: don't really understand the sinfulness of man. They don't understand that we need a savior who can bridge the gap between us and a holy God.

- Paul tells us in Romans 3 that because of Jesus, there is another way to be righteous, and it doesn't have anything to do with keeping commandments.
- This righteousness is a *gift*. All we must do to receive this gift is trust God for it. Abram could never earn God's love or favor, but God set his love on Abram.

One day a man asked Jesus, *What works shall I do in order to do the works of God?* In other words, what are the good deeds that are acceptable to God? Jesus answered him, *This is the work of God, that you believe in the One He sent.* In other words, the work that causes us to enter the Kingdom is the work (if you want to call it that) of putting our confidence in Jesus Christ.

Confirming His Word (Gen. 15:7-20)

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

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." 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. 11 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

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

14 “And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

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. 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— 19 the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

- God is going to confirm His covenant of friendship with Abraham. Notice that He invites friendship by using His personal name of YHWH (Yahweh).
- Let’s not interpret this as a lack of faith on his part. Abraham is asking for what we might call “covenant proof.”
- In response, God would make (“cut”) a covenant with Abraham in the same way that the people of that region would make a covenant with each other.

Between The Pieces

In a state of trance or a sleep, Abram could perceive that God Himself was moving between the pieces of these animals.

- This is one what we call a *theophany*. God appeared often in the Old Testament in a veiled or covered way, hiding His glory or His Presence.

- When you made a covenant with someone, this seems to have been a typical ceremony. It meant that you were sharing life with the other person, because you had a share in the same blood.
- It was also a dramatic picture that said if you broke your covenant, then you wished that what happened to those animals should happen to you as well.
- See how God condescended to Man's customs, by giving him this witness!
- Perhaps the most important detail is this: **God alone walked through those pieces.** What does this signify?
- God made the words of that covenant come to pass. And this covenant is still good today.

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