

December 12, 2021

“The Lord Gives His Promise  
Lesson 2 of Unit

Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18

### **Intro**

Last week's lesson dealt with Abram being called by God, and Abram being faithful to obey that call. In the chapters between then and today's lesson, chapters 13 and 14, many significant things have happened. Abram and Lot have split up, taking residence in two separate areas. Abram has rescued Lot from capture by the kings in the area of Sodom, near where Lot was living.

Abram is now a powerful man, because he forcefully rescued Lot from kings. He could be seen as a threat, and in rescuing Lot he may have made his position weaker. This is his situation as God speaks to him in today's study passage.

### **Read Genesis 15:1-6**

1. vs. 1: God's first words to Abram are “Do not be afraid”

The implication is that Abram is afraid of something

Based on the events of ch.13-14, he's likely afraid of his status with his neighbors

God tells him, “I am your shield, your very great reward.”

These words remind Abram that his security isn't based on his military might

It's also not based on his neighbors

God says He will be Abram's reward

It appears Abram is already sure of this, based on his ch. 14 actions

He gave 10% of the spoils of war to Melchizedek, king of Salem

He gave the rest of the spoils of war back to the king of Sodom

God appears to be confirming Abram's actions in what He says

2. vs. 2-3: Abram's concern is for more than physical safety and his possessions

God had promised in 12:2 to make Abram “a great nation”

Abram looks around and says, “I'm childless! My servant will inherit my estate!”

If we could put words into Abram's mouth, he appears to be saying, “You promised to make me a nation, but I don't even have a son to start that nation!”

3. vs. 4: God's response to Abram's concerns!

“This man (the servant) will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.”

Abram will father an heir, despite being about 75 years old at this time

God doesn't say who the mother will be

In ancient societies, it was common to have children through the wife's servants if the wife was unable to have children

Abram and Sarai try this before Sarai is named as the future mother in ch. 17

4. vs. 5: God uses a visual aid to explain what will happen  
 “Count the stars—if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be.”  
 We can see a lot of stars, but so could Abram  
 No electric lights get in the way of seeing the stars at night for Abram  
 However many stars are visible, they are a great multitude
5. vs. 6: Abram is again shown to be a man who believes God and follows him  
 He left Ur and Haran in ch. 12 at God’s word—an act of faith  
 Here, he believes God about the huge number of his descendants, “like the stars”  
 “Abram believed the Lord”  
 And God’s response to Abram’s belief?  
 “And He credited it (Abram’s belief) to him as righteousness.”  
 God sees both Abram’s heart and his actions coming from that heart  
 God credits faith in action as righteousness.

### **Read Genesis 15:12-18**

7. vs. 12: Between vs. 6 and vs. 12, Abram asks how he can be sure this promise will be kept (vs. 8)  
 This is followed by God taking Abram through an animal sacrifice (vs. 9-11)  
 This leads to vs. 12, where Abram falls into a deep sleep  
 Sounds like the sleep Adam was put into by God in Genesis 2  
 That sleep resulted in the creation of Eve  
 This sleep is different, and worse  
 Abram’s sleep is described as “thick and dreadful”  
 This may be because of what God is about to reveal to Abram (vs. 13)
8. vs. 13: Bad news: Abram’s descendants will be slaves in a foreign country for 400 years!  
 God promised Abram his line would be given the land of Canaan  
 He didn’t say how soon that would come to pass  
 This tells Abram (and us) that he must operate on God’s timetable  
 God’s plans are far-reaching, and this calls for patience by His people
9. vs.14: God follows this up with his justice and concern for His people  
 He will punish the nation that enslaves His people  
 We find out it’s the Egyptians at the end of Genesis / beginning of Exodus  
 This reminds us that not every experience we have will be pleasant  
 God, however, remains sovereign, in control of His plans for us  
 He will keep His promises in His time
10. vs. 15: God softens the blow for Abram a little  
 He will not be a part of the enslaved people  
 He will die in peace “at a good old age”  
 He will be 175 when he dies, nearly 100 years from this point!

11. vs. 16: Two important things are revealed in this verse

First, Abram is told which group will come back to Canaan

“In the fourth generation...”

Second, he is told why God will wait so long to give the people the Promised Land

“the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure”

(Amorites and Canaanites are interchangeable terms here)

God doesn't use bulldozer tactics

He is giving the Amorites a chance to change their ways

Their behavior isn't to a justifiable point of action at this time

God knows they will get there, but they aren't there yet

He doesn't “cut to the chase” before action is justified

This 400 years of waiting must be part of God's plan for Abram and descendants

A faith-building process

A long struggle essential to their becoming a nation

A people who wander without a home, who will desire their promised home

12. vs. 17: This action serves as God's confirmation to Abram

He asked for a sign in 15:8; God now gives him a sign in 15:17

In ancient covenants, the two parties would perform this ceremony

Passing through the pieces of the offered animals was a sign of commitment

Both were saying, “If I fail to keep my commitment, may I become like one of these animals here.”

The smoking firepot and the blazing torch are both symbols from God, however.

Abram is a witness to God's commitment to fulfill his covenant with Abram

God and Abram are not equal partners in this covenant

It is not Abram's job to engineer the fulfillment of God's promise

He, like us, is to respond faithfully to what God has asked him to do

He, like us, is to wait on God's timing and methods for fulfilling the promise

13. vs. 18: God restates his covenant promise to Abram here

“To your descendants I give this land...”

He confirms the area by giving geographical points that Abram knows

The Euphrates is the river to the north

The “river of Egypt” is to the south

Not the Nile, but a smaller river which is the traditional border of Egypt

Application: God chose to make a nation of Israel in preparation of Jesus' earthly arrival. Though He cares about each person individually, each one is also made by God to serve His purposes. The nation formed of Abram's descendants were not protected and treasured for their own sake alone, but so they could be a blessing for and to all nations.

This means that at times there is stress and pain to suffer. The Israelites had to suffer in Egypt. Later on, the prophets had to suffer at the hands of the wicked. And later still, Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross. All part of His ultimate plan.

Followers of Jesus are, or at least should be, aware of this pattern. Jesus calls us to follow Him by taking up our cross (Luke 9:23). This suggests suffering in various ways, but for the cause of Christ and for the blessing of others.

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Prayer: Father God, please help us as we learn to be patient in submitting ourselves to your timing. We run ahead of you on our own schedule so often; forgive us for doing that. Help us to walk by faith in You and Your ways. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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