

Genesis, Chapters 12-15

Quick Review:

Abram was called to leave his homeland and family and go to Canaan, but instead his father led Abram and the family to Haran and they stayed there until Terah died.

Abram left behind a large and ancient city and civilization with multi-story air-conditioned houses and running water and huge temples and buildings to wander as a nomad, albeit a wealthy nomad.

Our account of Abram covers loosely connected stories scattered over about 100 years of time. Sometimes years separate the different stories, but what we are to watch for is the development of Abram's faith.

The Abram that we first meet is characterized by a lack of faith and a tendency towards being somewhat of a liar and con artist, much like his grandson Jacob (Israel) will be and many of the other members of his family (Nahor, Rebeckah, most of the sons of Jacob, whom we meet)

In our story of chapter 12, Abram and family no sooner arrive in Canaan than there is a terrible famine and Abram, presumably without consulting God or waiting on His counsel, takes everyone to Egypt, where he convinces his wife to lie along with him that she's really his sister because he's afraid that they'll kill him to have her.

This is but one example of Abram's lack of faith: He's been promised that he'll be a great nation, but he's afraid of starving to death in Canaan or of being killed in Egypt, so he displays not the faith he will become so famous for, but the very lack of it.

Genesis 13:1-2

His deception is revealed and he leaves Egypt in shame and disgrace, although he gets to keep all the riches that Pharaoh gave him for Sarai.

The Results of Abram's trip to Egypt:

- 1) he got more wealth;
- 2) brought shame and disgrace instead of a witness to being a friend of God;
- 3) probable tension between him and Sarai;
- 4) probably picked up a slave girl named Hagar;
- 5) Lot saw the worldly, not Godly example, of his uncle
- 6) Lot saw the fertile land of Egypt.
- 7) the servants of Abram and Lot didn't have a very good example to follow.

Chapter 13, verses 3-4

Abram returns to where he formerly stayed, although the text sounds like the altar he build has been torn down.

"And Abram called on the name of the Lord there" – Wonder what he said? Did he repent of his lying? His lack of faith? His poor witness? His gratitude at getting out of the mess with his wealth intact and increased? What does it mean for us to call on the name of the Lord?

Genesis 13:5-7

the strife isn't between Abram and Lot, but between their herdsmen, but what it boiled down to was that there wasn't enough room, water or grass for all of them.

"And the Canaanite and the Perizzite lived then in the land"

Why is this detail given?

- 1) to remind us that the resources that the camps are fighting over aren't even theirs, since they're still just nomads?
- 2) to remind us that they're surrounded by potentially hostile neighbors who might see strife between them as a sign of weakness and an excuse to attack?
- 3) to remind us that Abram only has faith that the land will be his despite it's being occupied by others?

4) to remind us, that just as in Egypt, they're surrounded by a pagan world who's watching to see how people of God live and if their conduct matches their words and sacrifices?

Genesis 13:8-12

Abram didn't have to be generous in his offer. He was the head of the clan, he could have told Lot what to do, but he didn't.

"Lot lifted up his eyes"

Lot doesn't live by faith, he lives by sight – (II Corinthians 5:7)

He takes the best and leaves his uncle in the dust, literally.

"And Lot journeyed east" – toward Sodom.

Remember that when a person travels east the symbolism we're supposed to see is a journey away from God.

"he pitched his tent toward Sodom"

Soon we'll see that he leaves his tent for a house in Sodom and actually becomes a judge or an elder because he's sitting in the gate when the angels find him.

Genesis 13:13 – "wicked and sinners" before God, "exceedingly so"

Time for a side trip!

What was the great sin of Sodom and Gomorrah?

People usually say that they were all gay and wanted to molest the angels, but that's not exactly correct.

I think we might see that their wanton and energetic lusts are more the result, or symptom of their sin, than the actual sin for which they were judged.

Ezekiel 16:49-50

Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom; pride. Fullness of bread and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters. Nor did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.

And they were haughty and did abominable things before Me, so I turned away as I saw fit.

Jeremiah 23:14

I have also seen in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing; they commit adultery and walk in falsehood. They also strengthen to the hands of evildoers, so that none returns from his evil; they are all of them like Sodom to Me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.

Isaiah 1:10; 16-17

Hear the word of the LORD, rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, people of Gomorrah...

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil;

learn to do good; seek judgment, reprove the oppressor. Judge the orphan, plead for the widow.

II Peter 2:6; 9-10

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, He condemned them with an overthrow, setting an example to men intending to live ungodly.... The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust for a day of judgment, to be punished, and especially those who walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise dominion. They are darers, self-pleasing; not trembling at glories, speaking evil.

but lest you get the impression that this homosexual sin wasn't one of the things they were judged for:

Jude 1:7

... as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them, in like manner to these, committing fornication, and going away after other flesh, laid down an example before-times, undergoing vengeance of everlasting fire.

Ro 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness,

19 because the thing which may be known of God is clearly revealed within them, for God revealed it to them.

20 For the unseen things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being realized by

the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, for them to be without excuse.
 21 Because, knowing God, they did not glorify Him as God, neither were thankful. But they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools

23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed animals, and creeping things.

24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves.

25 For they changed the truth of God into a lie, and they worshiped and served the created thing more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26 For this cause, God gave them up to dishonorable affections. For even their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature.

27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another; males with males working out shameful things, and receiving in themselves the recompense which was fitting for their error.

28 And even as they did not think fit to have God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do the things not right,

29 being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; being full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, evil habits, becoming whisperers,

30 backbiters, haters of God, insolent, proud, braggarts, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

31 without discernment, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous order of God, that those practicing such things are worthy of death, not only do them, but have pleasure in those practicing them.

Genesis 13:14-18

Is Abram thinking, "Did I just give Lot the best?" or "Well, now what am I going to do?" after Lot takes the best land and leaves him with the scraps?

Just like He does in so many other places with so many other people having fears or doubts, God appears to Abram again and gives him reassurance.

Genesis 13:16

The Descendants of Abraham
 compared to:

"dust of the earth" - can't be counted

15:5 - "the stars" - can't be counted

22:17 - "like the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore."

Remember what our video said last week about the knowledge revealed in the Bible and this was one of the examples:

everybody who hadn't read this part of the Bible used to think that the stars could be counted and most people thought that there were only a few thousand of them.

It wasn't until the telescopes were invented that scientific knowledge caught up with the Bible that had said over three thousand years ago that the stars were like the dust of the earth or the sand of the seashore - more than a few thousand.

"Abram, lift up your eyes now..."

Abram is told to lift up his eyes just as Lot lifted up his, but Abram is to walk not by the lust of the eyes (wanting what he's seen), but he is to walk by faith by believing in the promise that all the land that Lot took and much more will be given to his descendants.

"...rise up and walk through the land..."

Abram isn't just told to have faith, he's told to take action because of his faith must as James will remind his readers that faith without works is dead.

So Abram's faith makes him travel.

What does our faith make us do? How does our faith change our actions or behaviors?

How does our faith make our lives different?

Now Abram is in Hebron, at the Oaks of Mamre.
and here is the one that he's reputed to have stayed under.

Oak of Mamre

A few observations from Abram's adventures so far:

from Warren Wiersbe:

Abram is a man who was called out of his world to be a wanderer and to walk before God and be holy and to believe.

in other words, Abram was called to be a man of tent, altar and faith.

The only time in our account of his life that he gets into trouble is whenever he neglects one or more of the above.

How much trouble have we caused ourselves by neglecting or forgetting the same thing:

- 1. that we're to be in the world but not of it;
- 2. that we're to be worshippers of God and God only;
- and
- 3. that we're to walk by faith, not by sight.

There are also some things that can be said to be true about Abram, and he too got into trouble whenever he moved away from the life indicated by these statements:

- 1. Abram lived for others, not for self.
- 2. Abram lived by faith, not by sight.
- 3. Abram let God choose for him.
- 4. Abram gave thanks to God.

Some other quotations from the commentary on Genesis from the "Preaching the Word" series by Rev. Kent Hughes:

Abram is described as a man of faith:

- 1. True faith believes the bare word of God.
- 2. True faith steps out on God's word.
- 3. True faith follows wherever God's word directs.
- 4. True faith builds altars and worships wherever it goes.
- 5. True faith proclaims the name of the Lord.

"What you believe about God is everything"

How Big is your God? If you have a big God, then

- 1. You have a God who, through His Son, redeemed you to be His people.
- 2. You have a God who will give you the land.
- 3. You have a God who will lead you through much suffering into the kingdom
- 4. You have a God who will do miracles in your life.
- 5. You have a God to direct your life.
- 6. You have a God who will answer prayers.
- 7. You have a God to whom you must give all your love.

Genesis 14:1-11

Moses must have had some surviving original source due to all the specific details that are recorded about this battle and its background that took place about 600-700 years before Moses' wrote and compiled Genesis

Genesis 14:1-11

The details about these "kings" and their cities or lands fall into that category of being like those asphalt or pitch pits: more details than we need to get bogged down in.

Genesis 14:5

Do notice one detail, however. In verse 5 is our first mention of giants since the flood. Moses knew about these folks because he'd fought them and pretty much wiped them out. They come up again in Joshua, and evidently the last of them took refuge with the Philistines and were killed by David

and his men.
Genesis 14:12

Trouble in paradise. Lot chose this land because it looked good, but in reality it will bring him nothing but trouble, and this is just the first of it.

Genesis 14:13-16

Abram to the rescue. 318 trained fighting men may not seem like many to us, but other writings from his time state that 300 men was considered an ideal size for a fighting force. Besides, he had the men of his allies Aner, Eschool, and Mamre

Genesis 14:17-24 – two different types of kings

Upon his return he's met by the king of Sodom and the king of Salem, representing the kings of the earth and the king of God. (for more about the symbolism of Melchizedek, see the book of Hebrews)

Melchizedek, who is also described as the priest of the most high God, brought bread and wine and a blessing to Abram and in return Abram gave him of tithe of all the loot that he'd gotten back from the four invading kings.

The king of Sodom offered to let Abram keep everything he'd retrieved and only asked for the people of his city to be returned. Abram's response to him was a cold should that he wouldn't take a shoelace, lest the king claim that he'd made Abram rich.

Our commentators suggest that the different response shows that Abram recognized his dependence upon God but also remembered that he was a wanderer and separate from the world, especially any part of the world as evil as Sodom.

Genesis Chapter 15

Abram's reflection and quiet time.

Often the most challenging time to keep your faith and not to get down is after a great accomplishment.

Abram is no exception. Look at Genesis 15:1-2. They give an insight into 4 thoughts or feelings Abram had after he returned home from his victory of chapter 14. It's late at night, but instead of being asleep, Abram is lying awake and thinking and worrying

1. He was afraid and discouraged;
2. Specifically, he was afraid of the repercussions that he might have from attacking the four kings;
3. He was thinking about the wealth he'd given up by refusing to accept any of the booty;
4. He was discouraged because he didn't have a son yet; and
5. He was thinking about how old and close to the end of his life he was getting and wondering about his purpose or reason in life since everything he'd accumulated would go to his steward.

Genesis 15:1

God tells Abram to not be afraid because He is his shield, in other words, God will protect Abram from the revenge of those kings or from anyone else who'd attack him and because He is his exceeding great reward

Genesis 15:2-3

Abram's response is basically, "What good will it do for you to give me an exceeding great reward since there's no kid to leave it to and everything I've got will go to Eliezer of Damascus when I kick the bucket? You promised me a son, but he ain't here yet and I don't think he's coming"

Genesis 15:4-5

God's response isn't one of rebuke or anger, but one of reassurance and promise.

Genesis 15:6 – an important verse

(and another of those parentheticals)

"And he believed in the Lord; and the Lord counted it to him for righteousness."

Depending on your version it may say "counted it to" "reckoned", "imputed", "put it to his ac-

count”, etc.

They’re all accounting terms that basically mean that in Abram’s ledge, God wrote his belief or faith down as a credit to his account.

Abram could use a credit because lately he’d had a lot of debits. The New Testament (Romans, Galatians, and James) will pick up on this accounting ledger metaphor and expand on it as those writers try to explain salvation, faith, grace, imputation and other difficult heavenly or Godly concepts on a human level that we can understand.

If we’ll ponder it carefully, we can perhaps see how this concept can help our Calvinist and Lutheran friends deal with their dilemma of how salvation can be a free gift that is still dependent upon our acceptance of it. They tend to believe that if we have to accept the gift then it’s dependent upon our actions and not truly a free gift that we can’t possibly earn. They therefore have concluded that we’re too dead spiritually to accept the gift of salvation unless the Spirit quickens us (their definition of “born again”) and not only enables but also makes our acceptance irresistible, because if we could resist God, then God wouldn’t be all powerful. (Also why they don’t believe we have free will but are predestined to our fate)

On the other hand and more in line with our demoninational thinking, our dear Puritan preacher friend, William Gurnall, writing in “The Christian in Complete Armour,” published in 1655, explains the verse this way:

Our faith is the means of our salvation because faith is the one of the graces or gifts that reflects the least on us and the most on the grace and love of God and the blood of Christ. We profess our faith in and only in the saving sacrifice of Christ on the cross, but our faith saves us only because its how the sacrifice and blood of Christ and His righteousness is imputed (credited) to our account. We can’t do anything to save ourselves or to have any righteousness of our own written on our ledger or balance sheet. All we can do is put our faith in the ability of Christ’s righteousness to balance our ledger for us.

To put it in Titantic terms:

Our life on earth is like the Titantic, it’s sinking and we’re bound for the cold ocean of hell.

Grace is when God sends us a lifeboat named Jesus.

Faith is when we accept a seat on the lifeboat.

Imputation or reckoning it to our account is when we are saved not because of our faith, but because of the quality of the lifeboat. We could do nothing to save ourselves.

And just believing in or knowing about the lifeboat isn’t enough to save us and we’ll wind up just as dead if we get in the lifeboat but then try to help matters along by hanging over the side to try to help the lifeboat move faster.

A saving faith is one that realizes its own helplessness and hopelessness outside of the total trust in the lifeboat. A saving faith is one that accepts the authority and control (Lordship) of the captain of the lifeboat. A saving faith is one that causes humility because we’ve done nothing to earn or to be worthy of a seat on the lifeboat and we’ve no more right to be on the boat than the lowest ship rat and we’ve no less deserving of freezing than any corpse that floats by the boat.

A saving faith gives total loyalty, love, respect, obedience, praise, worship, honor and glory to the lifeboat;

A saving faith shows its gratitude and its reality by the way it treats the other people already on the lifeboat and by the concern it has for the people not yet onboard and the way it reaches out to try to get them on the lifeboat.

A person who is on the lifeboat is different from the people on the sinking ship or in the water. If they’re not then, they’re deceived and they are not on the lifeboat, no matter how hard they try to assure themselves and convince others that they are.

The rules for being on the lifeboat are different for the rules of being on the sinking ship or cold ocean and the conduct expected and demanded of a person on the lifeboat is different from that of

those on the ship or in the water.

And once again, if your conduct and the rules you live by are not consistent with those of a person on the lifeboat, then you're not on the lifeboat, no matter how much you insist that you are.

Well, that's enough ocean metaphor, let's get back to the hot and dry Middle East.

Genesis 15:7-21

This is either a continuation of God and Abram's meeting or an account of a separate meeting that's put here because it was as good a place to put it as any.

Genesis 15:9-17 – The Blood Covenant

The blood covenant was taking the halves of the aforementioned animals and putting one half on one bank and the other half on the other. As the blood ran down into the gulley or valley between the banks, the parties to the covenant would walk in the blood to ratify the treaty, in effect saying that what happened to those animals would happen to the person who broke the treaty. Since Abram didn't walk through the blood, but the smoking firepot and flaming torch, representing God (remember the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night), passed through, showing God's willingness to die instead of breaking His covenant. This verse has troubled some of our commentators because they can't figure out how God who is described as a spirit, could shed His own blood.

If you've ever been to one of our Passover meals or watched the correct episode from the "That the World May Know" series, you already know the answer to that.

A few thousand years later, God will come to earth in the form of a man, will actually walk through a blood covenant again (on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, they "crossed the Kidron Valley" where the blood from the over 360,000 Passover lambs would drain from the temple), and then shed His blood and give His life as the ultimate fulfillment of all the covenants.

Genesis 15:11 – When the birds of prey came to the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

For whatever other symbolic meaning this might have, it shows a practical lesson the Abram has learned: the quality of patience and waiting. Unlike the Abram of chapter 12 who took it upon himself to go to Egypt, now we see him patiently waiting for another word or sign from the Lord.

Once again, there's a life lesson here for us, to wait on the Lord and be patient.

Ps 37:9 For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.

Ps 59:9 Because of his strength will I wait upon thee: for God is my defence.

Ps 62:5 My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.

Ps 123:2 Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.

Isa 8:17 And I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.

Isa 40:31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Ps 4:4 Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.

Ps 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

Genesis 15:12 – a deep sleep and a dread and a great darkness – the language is emphasized to show that Abram is having a vision from God, not just an ordinary dream.

Also, a deep sleep and/or great fear is the customary response in the Bible when someone encounters God or one of his angels.

In fact, there are three typical responses to being in the presence of God or an angel:

- 1) deep sleep
- 2) fall down
- 3) be afraid

Deep Sleep

Ge 2:21 ¶ And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

Genesis 15:12

Job 33:15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed;

Da 10:9 Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground.

Fall Down

Nu 22:31 Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.

Re 1:17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

Jg 13:20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground.

1Ch 21:16 And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

Mt 2:11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him:

Mr 3:11 And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God.

Lu 5:8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

Re 19:4 And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.

Joh 18:6 As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.

Be Afraid

Isa 6:5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

Jg 6:22 And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.

Mt 28:5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye

Lu 1:13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias

Lu 2:9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

Ac 10:3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid

Fall Down and Be Afraid

Mr 5:33 But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.

Mt 17:5-6 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

Genesis 15:13-16; 18-21

Promises:

- 1) descendants will be slaves and afflicted for 400 years
- 2) nation enslaving them will be judged
- 3) they will leave the nation rich
- 4) Abram will live a long time and die in peace
- 5) descendants will come back to possess the land, but not until the sins of the people there are full (ready to be judged in the conquest)
- 6) people whose land his descendants will be given are named and the boundaries given (probably another parenthetical)