

Genesis 15:1-2

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Date: 28 February 2019

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- [0 : 0 0] at verse 17, 18. After those things, the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.
- And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?
- And then later in the chapter, we actually find Abram asking another question of the Lord, and saying, verse 8, he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?
- So our thoughts really are going to be focused pretty much around those two questions that Abraham set before the Lord, and how the Lord answered them consecutively.
- Abraham lived a life that was much tested, which is not surprising, because we read throughout the Bible that wherever faith exists, it will be tested.
- [1 : 0 4] You can only have your faith shown to be true, genuine faith, by facing tests, by responding in a positive way to the tests that come to you in your providence.
- And the tests that come to faith, as you can see from Abraham's life as described in Genesis, are tests that come by and large through everyday events, by everyday experiences, whether it's in the family life or at work or in the community, wherever.
- That's where our faith is tested. And it's as we respond in a proper way, in trusting in the Lord, that our faith comes to be shown, but also to be strengthened as we come by God's grace, to meet with and overcome the tests.
- Now, it's important, as you look in any passages in the Bible that describe such things as the life of Abraham, it's important to keep your eye upon the development of his life and the events of his life from here, from chapter 12, right through these chapters in Genesis.
- Because it's there that you find that common thread, not only of him being tested and the way that he responded, sometimes indeed failed in facing up to the tests that he faced.
- [2 : 1 8] You find that the threat in chapter 12, for example, was a threat that came as a test to him, a threat really in regard to the promise that's given by God to him and Sarah, his wife.
- From verse 10 onwards, there was a famine in the land when he went on. Abraham went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was grievous. And he said, Behold, now I know that you're a fair woman, therefore it shall come to pass when the Egyptians will see that they'll say this is his wife, and they will kill me, but they will save you alive.
- In other words, that was the threat that Abraham, the test that Abraham faced, and in that case he actually failed it. But that threat in the wider picture is actually a threat to God's promise.
- Because what Abraham is doing is really putting God's promise, as it were, to the side there, or putting it really under threat. Of course, we know that ultimately, because God is God, his promise will always come to pass.
- But from Abraham's perspective, from a human point of view, Abraham, by trying to pass off his wife as his sister in order to protect himself, is really saying about this very wife of whom God had intended to bring a son to Abraham, that was Abraham dealing in the wrong way with that test.

[3 : 44] And you go forward to chapter 14, and you find war breaking out between certain kings that are mentioned there. And as they came to clash and to battle, certain kings took Abraham's nephew, Lot, away with them from the vicinity of Sodom.

And Abraham had to gather his forces. It's quite surprising in a way that Abraham had such forces, but he had, by that time, a large retinue of servants and helpers and his own private army, you might say.

So he actually went and challenged those kings and actually took back Lot, Abraham's brother's son, and his goods, and all the others benefited from that as well.

So he brought back in verse 16, all the goods and his brother Lot, again his brother Lot, and his goods and the women also. Now what does that do with? Why is that chapter there?

Why actually then from what you have in chapter 12, 13, and then later in chapter 15, as we'll see, to do with the covenant and with God's promises to him, where does chapter 14 sit in all of that?

[4 : 57] Well, chapter 14 is also a threat to God's promises because the land that Abraham is in is the land in which God's promise is set.

He's going to give them this land, this inheritance. And as these kings act to take away Lot and these people from the vicinity of Sodom and break them captive, well, Abraham is going out not just to take them back and the goods that have been plundered, he's taking back possession of the land.

He's taking back the inheritance that rightly belongs to him by the appointment of God. And so it fits into that whole pattern, that whole thread of God's covenant promises from the time he called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and is leading him through these various events and experiences and circumstances so that it becomes more and more clear as Abraham goes on that God's promise is going to stand, that God is going to be true to his promises, that God is not going to renege on his promises.

And when you come to chapter 15, the situation there is one that concerns Abraham and having an heir through whom the promises can be fulfilled.

And as you find that, that's the question that's on Abraham's mind, first of all, when he asks the Lord, what will you give me? Seeing I go childless and the steward of my house.

[6 : 23] Is this Eliezer of Damascus? In other words, Abraham is really asking the Lord, where is my heir going to come from? Because all I have at the moment is someone who's a servant in my household.

And if I'm going to have a proper heir, needs to come from my wife, from someone who is united to me in a proper way and come to be my own son in that way.

So that's the first question that we need to deal with. And the second one then follows on from that where the Lord answered him. And in verse 8, the Lord said, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?

Let's look at the first question, first of all. Now that begins, that really begins with a statement. You don't reach the question till first of all you deal with the statement from God.

Where he says in verse 1, Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward. Now it's quite possible to translate the Hebrew text there slightly differently and still gives very good meaning in the context.

[7 : 28] Something like, I am thy shield and thy reward shall be exceeding great. In other words, the Lord really has his mind upon what he's going to do for Abraham, what he's going to do through Abraham, what he's going to do in providing him with seed, with descendants, more numerous than the stars of the sky.

And he's going to give him this inheritance as well as these descendants. So it makes sense to translate it this way. I am thy shield and thy reward shall be exceedingly great.

In other words, God is his defense. I am thy shield. But at the same time, God's supply will be his inheritance.

God is going to be his defense. He is that there. And he's now promising he's also going to supply something which will become his inheritance. Your reward shall be great.

What I'm going to give you shall be exceedingly great. And isn't that pretty much the same as you have as a motto for our town of Stornoway?

[8 : 42] God's providence is our inheritance. God's providence is our inheritance. Not a lot of people want to think about that nowadays, especially those who want to undermine the gospel, who don't want to think about the Bible being central to human life, who don't want to have God brought into every aspect of human life and experience.

That's how it is. That's how her forefather saw the way of prosperity. Not through economic means primarily, not through material things primarily, but through God's providence, through dependence upon God, through God being our security, our defense, and through God's supply being our inheritance.

And that's how Abraham here is addressed by God. I am your shield. Your reward shall be exceeding great. And then Abraham asks this question, Well, Lord God, what will you give me, seeing I go childless?

And the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus. He's following out that promise of God. He's taken that promise of God in verse 1 at face value.

He's believed that promise. But he has this question. He has this query. How is the promise going to be worked out? And that's not wrong for Abraham to ask that. It's not wrong for any Christians today either to ask for further light on their relationship with God, on how they're going to enter more fully into the enjoyment of God's promises.

[10 : 13] That's part of the Christian life. You want to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. To do that, you do it in your relationship with God. You do it through prayer. You do it through waiting upon him.

You do it through reading his word, through being under the preaching of the word, through fellowship with God's people. And Abraham really is seeking light here on his circumstances.

He's seeking from the Lord further information about this inheritance and about God's promise. Eliezer was a steward in the house of Abraham.

Somebody you might say was, nowadays you would call that some sort of household manager. He had an important role. He was in charge of running the household. But Abraham asked the Lord, well, is this Eliezer of Damascus?

Is he, is that the one you're intending to be my heir? It was possible for heirs to be adopted if there were no children born in any relationship.

[11 : 17] That happened in the Old Testament. But Abraham asked that question. The steward of my house, this Eliezer of Damascus, what will you give me seeing I am presently childless?

Abraham had spent over 20 years since the Lord called him dealing with this question. Am I going to have an heir?

Will I have a son? How will God's promise come to be fulfilled? And now you come to God's answer in verse 4. Where Abraham has said, Behold, to me you have given no seed.

Lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him saying, This man, this one shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

And he brought him forth abroad and said, Look now towards the heaven and tell the stars, number the stars, if you are able to number them. And he said, So shall thy seed be.

[12 : 23] Isn't it interesting? In a chapter, it's interesting that both times that God answered Abraham, he took him into a situation of darkness, of night time, and answered Abraham's question by something that happened during that night time or in the darkness.

Here he is, in the darkness, where the light has gone, where the day has ended. The Lord takes him out, just as he would take you or I outside this evening, outside this building.

And he said to him, Look up towards the heaven. Look at the stars. See if you can number them. Because so shall thy seed be.

In other words, God is assuring Abraham, not only will he have a son, not only will he have an issue, not only will he have descendants, but they are going to be more numerous than he is able to count, more numerous even than the stars of the sky, because God is pointing him to the future.

God is pointing him to all that is going to happen, yet thousands of years hence, in Jesus Christ and through Christ, where God's people in Christ are going to come to have a glorious inheritance, where they're going to form a people without number, which no man can number.

[13 : 43] That's where we are today. It doesn't matter whether we answer the question or not. The question was put to the Lord. Lord, are there few that be saved?

And he answered it as only he could, by saying, Strive to enter in at the straight or the narrow gate. It's not, the question really isn't how many or how few will be saved.

One thing is sure, the number of the saved will not be few. There will be an abundance. There will be a multitude. There will be more than the stars in number.

Heaven's population will not be sparse. It will not be thin on the ground. It will be an abundant population of saved people, saved sinners under the regime and the glory of Christ.

So God's answer is saying to him, This is what is going to be true of you. He that shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be thine heir. And then verse 6, He believed in the Lord and he counted it to him for righteousness.

[15 : 00] Now these words come to be of huge significance as Revelation proceeds on through the Old Testament and on into the New Testament. And as you know, Paul quotes this directly in Romans chapter 4, which again points out the way in which Abraham believed God.

And in fact, through his believing of God and God's word and God's promise, his faith was actually strengthened. It actually means that in chapter 4 of Romans, it's not so much that God, that Abraham was strong in faith, which is how it's translated here in the AV, but literally it means he was strengthened in faith.

Because what he's saying, that he says, where it says, who against hope, this is Abraham, where he says that the faith, which is of Abraham, who's the father of us all, before whom he believed even God, who quickens the dead and calls those things which be not as though they were.

Abraham did not have a son. When God took him out at night and showed him the stars of the sky, he did not actually have a son. But Abraham believed God because God is the one who calls the things that be not as though they were.

He did exist in the plan of God, in the promise of God, and that's enough for Abraham. Who against hope believed in hope that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, so shall thy seed be.

[16 : 37] And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body, now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.

And that's where the word strengthened is probably a better translation again, where it says he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief. He received it, he believed the promise, and in consequence of that, he was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God.

That's an important point, because it's as we believe in God, and believe in God's word, and as we embrace God's promise, and accept God's promise as truth, through that, our faith comes to be strengthened.

You don't have your faith strengthened by hesitating to believe God's word, by somehow querying whether or not this is actually true. That's not what Abraham was doing.

He was looking for more light, for more information, he wasn't speaking from a position of doubt, but seeking further confirmation and assurance of God's promise and of God's relationship with himself.

[17 : 50] So he believed in the Lord, and it was counted to him for righteousness. That's the essence of justification. That's what Paul develops in his letter to the Romans and also to the Galatians.

A man is not justified, a woman is not justified by the works of the law, by our own efforts, by our own obedience, by our own works in seeking to fulfill the demands of God, but through faith in Christ.

That's the glory of the gospel, isn't it? God, you don't come to be saved by any works of your own. The works are already done, they've been accomplished.

Christ has done it all. And it's when you embrace that truth and embrace the Christ who is central to that truth, that's when you come to be justified by faith.

Remember that no one is justified by election. No one is justified because they might be in the elect of God.

[19 : 02] We don't know that. The elect of God come to be made clear by their believing in Christ, by them coming to embrace the promises of God and making them their own possession.

And it's by faith in Christ that we come to be justified. We are not justified, our sins are not forgiven until we've come to believe in Christ, to trust in Christ, to place all our confidence in Christ.

And that's what really you find developed this point that Abraham said about Abraham here, he believed in the Lord and God counted it to him for righteousness.

And that reminds us too of something very important, that is that the truth of God is personal, he believed in the Lord, and our faith is personal, we believe in the Lord, we place our trust in the Lord, that's what believing in him essentially means.

But secondly, it's also propositional because the word of God contains these great propositions, these great statements. This is not some theory, not something that changes from one generation to the next, not something invented by the church, not just composed of feelings, it's propositions, it's truth, it's statements, it's facts.

[20 : 29] That's what Abraham believed and it was counted to him for righteousness. So there's the question, the first one, what will you give me? And God took him out to answer it and showed him, this is how your seed shall be.

And Abraham believed in the Lord. And isn't it in that way that you come to prepare for the Lord's Supper this coming Lord's Day? you need no more than you already have in Christ.

You cannot add to Jesus, to what he has done, to what he is doing, by any efforts of your own. And you come to remember him in his completeness as your Savior, as you remember his death.

you remember that that is all that you require to trust in, to be accepted with God.

Second question then follows on from that. And he said, and God said to him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the cold days to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?

[21 : 47] In other words, God is reiterating or just restating things for him just to give him more grounds for assurance. And then comes the second question from Abraham in verse 8.

Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? Now you mustn't think that that again is from unbelief or from doubt. This is actually Abraham seeking again further light.

That's how the thing develops. He's bringing a thing before the Lord, asking the Lord, Lord, for more confirmation. That's perfectly proper for yourself as a Christian, as a believer, to ask the Lord day by day for greater confirmation than you have of your relationship with God.

For greater light on that relationship, greater level of understanding in that relationship. And that's where Abraham's question comes from. It doesn't come from lack of faith.

It comes from actual faith as Abraham is exercising it here. You'll find the same with the likes of Moses. In chapter 33 of Exodus, Moses remarkably is saying because when you think about Moses and who he was, what kind of knowledge did he have of God?

[22 : 59] What was his relationship with God like? What was his understanding of God? Well, you can say probably better than many of us, if not all of us, today. And yet there he is coming to the Lord and saying, Lord, I beseech thee, show me thy glory.

It wasn't that Moses didn't know any of the glory of God, but he wanted further insight, further understanding, further confirmation of what composed, what comprised the glory of God.

And remember, remarkably, God actually said that he would make, he would pass before him. You'll find this in the following chapter of 34 of Genesis. And God had said to him, this is as well as if to say, Abraham, you've asked me to show you my glory.

I will make my goodness pass before you. And that's what happened. God passed before him in a mysterious way.

And as he passed before him, he proclaimed the name of the Lord, the Lord, the Lord God, the Lord merciful, gracious.

[24 : 08] In other words, Moses is being told by God, this is a primary aspect or a major aspect of my glory, my mercy, my grace, my forgiveness.

That's what Moses came to understand more fully from that great occasion. But he had begun with a question, Lord, show me thy glory. Just as Abraham here is exercising his faith by saying, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?

And God's answer is remarkable too. He said, take me a heifer of three years old and a she-goat of three years old, a ram of three years old.

And he took unto him all these. Now, you see, that's remarkable because for one thing, this is God laying down these specifications for Abraham.

And when Abraham gathers all these animals and these birds together, what is he doing? He brings them to the Lord. Brings them to the Lord. That's emphasized there.

[25 : 15] God said, get this for me. And when Abraham had gathered them, he took these unto him, unto the Lord. And then he proceeded to divide them in the middle, laid each piece against the other, but the birds he divided not.

Now, what is all that about? Why does that feature in this passage? And how does it relate to the things we've seen already in the passage as we've tried briefly to follow it through? Still to do with a covenant.

Indeed, that's going to be mentioned here that God made a covenant with him. But what is this procedure? What is this strange procedure about? And what is this strange appearance of this burning furnace or this burning fiery oven that appeared and that then passed between these pieces?

Well, Abraham is preparing the elements for making a covenant. It was an established practice at that time, we believe, in the time of Abraham.

God wasn't taking something Abraham wasn't aware of because this is how very often a covenant was made between various people. Animals were divided in the middle, they were killed and then divided in the middle and then the person making the covenant walked between them.

[26 : 39] This is exactly what the Lord did here as well. Gives him this information. During the time that a deep sleep fell on Abraham and a horror of great darkness, he reiterated, it's then know of a surety that your seed will be a stranger in a land that's not theirs.

And he takes them through what eventually came to be the time of Israel and Egypt and their leaving Egypt after 400 years. And he assured Abraham himself that he would die and be buried in a good old age.

And then in verse 17, It came to pass that when the sun went down and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces and in the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying.

The burning smoking furnace and the lamp is a representation of God himself. This is really something that symbolizes God himself in making a covenant with Abraham.

Because the person that passed between the pieces of these animals, even in the ordinary sense, in other times when this was done between various people, what the person was saying in making a covenant with someone else was saying, If I break this covenant, let death come upon me.

[28 : 01] Because this is obviously death. These animals were put to death. They were divided. And walking through the midst of them was tantamount to saying, If I break my promise, if I break this covenant, let me come under this death, the death of a broken covenant.

And God remarkably is really saying to Abraham, You need never doubt whether I will break my covenant or not.

if I ever break my covenant with you, this is what I am taking to myself. Let me die the death of a covenant breaker.

And God is assuring Abraham from that, that he can be absolutely sure that the covenant of God will be kept by him, by God himself.

because really death is the curse of a broken covenant. That's what God threatened upon Israel if they broke his covenant.

[29 : 10] That they were faced with death, with being sent away from God, distanced from God, that is ultimately death. And so God was saying, May this be the case if I break my covenant.

And so the promise there in verse 18, the promise that the covenant that's mentioned there, the promise of God and the establishment of that covenant is confirmed by God himself doing this in representation of himself and confirming for Abraham, I will never break my promise.

But it doesn't end with that. because the death of a broken covenant was taken by God to himself and the person of his son in our nature, in Jesus Christ.

What does Paul say to the Galatians when he's dealing with this great topic of justification by faith? How are we justified?

He says, not by the works of the law. Why? Because Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, the curse of a broken law. How? By being made a curse for us.

[30 : 30] Christ passed between the pieces as it were in order to bring covenant blessings and life to his people. And essentially that's what you hope to remember on the Lord's day.

that the death that Jesus died is the death that was due to the covenant breaker. Though Jesus himself of course never broke the covenant not even in an iota, not even in the least sense.

But the Lord laid on him the iniquity of his people and because the sin of his people was laid upon him he was treated as one deserving of the death of a sinner.

He never sinned. No fault was found in him. The faultless Lamb of God because God was pleased to lay the sin of his people upon him he needed then to face the reality of that death of a broken law and a broken covenant all the way back to Adam.

In the day that you eat of it God said to Adam you will surely die and to undo that death to undo that curse the Son of God came into the world to die that death to accomplish that.

[32 : 01] It's a remarkable thing too isn't it that in Luke's Gospel where well Luke's Gospel is where you read that on the Mount of Transfiguration Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus in that glorious situation where he was transfigured where Jesus was transfigured and his whole body shone gloriously remember and they spoke about his decease it says in our translation in the AV but the word literally means his exodus they spoke about his exodus as they appeared with him in the glory as Luke puts it and what was the exodus of Jesus the exodus of Jesus was his death followed by his resurrection followed by his ascension to glory the whole thing you take it as one great movement if you like he came into the world he died the death of the cross he rose from the dead he ascended to glory he is seated at the right hand of God that was his exodus his going out of the world by death and resurrection and ascension and then

Luke specifies this death of Jesus as one that he was going to accomplish whoever had it said of him or her that the death they were going to die was one they were going to accomplish when death came upon human beings as we brought that on ourselves it wasn't something that we accomplished it was the penalty that God had threatened but when Jesus died he accomplished that death he successfully died death in all its entirety physical spiritual eternal death the death that is hell he accomplished that he died that death without being overcome by it and there's the mystery of what you remember in the

Lord's Supper that he gave himself to death to this death to the cursed death of the cross to the death of the covenant breaker to the death of what the sinner deserved to the penalty of sin to the demands of a broken law to the wrath of God we can't understand that but we can remember it and do because that's the basis as you well know of our salvation and that ultimately is the answer to Abraham's questions what will you give me that's when answered where God said he gave his only begotten son so that in him the promise to Abraham would be accomplished and fulfilled in its entirety and he would come to have a seed without number and in him the second question too how shall

I know how do we know where is our certainty that we shall inherit well it's in Christ if Christ's death can ever fail at any point we will not inherit we can doubt the inheritance but of course that can never be because Christ's death as Christ's resurrection as Christ's person continues to be perfect and always will John Murray in one of his writings I think it was in one of his books on theology late professor John Murray spoke about the atonement that Jesus rendered through his death and he spoke about that being the security of God's people in that atonement accomplished by that atonement but he said it is the perfection of that atonement that secures it

Christ's perfect atonement this do in remembrance of me may God bless these thoughts to us let's pray thank you