

THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS

"Most touching and sublime is the childlikeness of that simple believing without seeing, and its absolute confidence. Ever since, through thousands of years, it has stood out as the great example of faith to the church of God."

—Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History: The Old Testament*

"God & Abraham: The Covenant"

The Preceding Events: Genesis 12:10-14:24

- The Sojourn in Egypt
- The Separation of Abram & Lot
- The Rescue of Lot

Point of Emphasis: Abram had experienced _____, conflict with his own _____, as well as _____ in the years following God's initial promises to him.

God's Covenant with Abram: Genesis 15:1-21

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

- Abram had just come through a difficult season.

"Fear not..." →

"I am your shield..." →

Point of Emphasis: Though Abram did not yet possess the good things which God had promised, he possessed the _____ of knowing Yahweh.

- Abram's faith was not in question, what he lacked was assurance. (Gen. 15:2-3)

Abram's 1st Question: Would he have an Heir?

"And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: 'This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.' And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'"

⇒ The Lord used part of His creation that was familiar to Abram in order to help him to better understand the promise. This is a theme that will recur throughout Scripture.

Is. 55:1—"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Matt. 5:6—"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Luke 12:27-28—Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!

Abram's Response:

"And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness."

*"believe" – 'aman – Carries the idea of standing firm. Used of the doorposts that supported the Temple (2 Kings 18:16).
It can be translated, "...and he developed assurance in Jehovah."*

- ⇒ This was a confession of faith in the _____ of Yahweh. It also served as a witness to the _____ of Yahweh, the God of the promises.
- ⇒ This verse is quoted four times in the N.T.—Rom. 4:3, 22; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23 and plays an important role in how we understand the doctrine of justification by faith alone (*Sola Fide*).
- ⇒ There is an important distinction between 'righteous' deeds and a 'righteous' condition or standing before God.

And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."

- God reminded him of the original call that he received in Haran.

Abram's 2nd Question: Would he and his descendants possess the land? (Gen. 15:8)

He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.

- This is a description of an Ancient Near East covenant ratification ceremony.
 - ⇒ The dead animals invoke a curse and picture the consequences of failing to keep the covenant. Judah revived this practice just before the destruction of Jerusalem with the hopes of being delivered by God (Jer. 34:15-20).

"...a deep sleep fell on Abram." → This recalls Gen. 2:21

A Prophecy

"Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

- ⇒ Abram's descendants will live out corporately the experience that he had in _____.

The Ceremony

"When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land..."

- ⇒ The imagery pictures the powerful presence of God (Ex. 19:18-20)

Point of Emphasis: God's love for Abram was shown in His willingness to make His promises in such a way as to resonate with him _____.

Some Observations

1. The only true source of faith and assurance in this life is
2. God ministers to us in ways that engage
3. The ultimate fulfillment of God's promises to us