

Sent: Wednesday, November 14, 2018 2:49 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Genesis 15

"For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulders, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!" (Isaiah 9:6)

"Oh Lord God (Yahweh!), what will You give me, since I am childless...You have given no offspring to me...! (And he must have thought: "You've called me out of Ur of the Chaldeans...and promised to take me to the land that You would show me...and to make me a great nation...and somehow, through me, to bless all the families of the earth??? How can these things be? Time seems to be going by so quickly! I'm getting really old! Oh Lord God, Creator of the heavens and the earth, what's going on, and how may I know?)

This is where things stood, and the lingering questions Abraham had, as we get into Genesis 15! And, amazingly, he discovered that His God, the only true and living God, was "there" and more than willing to listen to, and to answer, these questions--and so much more! Which is why Bill Arnold, author of "Encountering the Book of Genesis," and other Bible scholars, calls this "one of the most important chapters in the Bible"--and that the rest of the Bible actually "turns on the two main ideas presented here!" How so?

It begins: "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great!' Wow!

After what things? The events of chapter 14! Remember? The so-called "first world war" (or so says Steve Holley)! Abram's astounding victory over Chederlaomer and the four Babylonian kings! The rescue of Lot! The sudden mysterious appearance of Melchizedek! Abram receiving the "blessings of God Most High"--and rejecting any part in the "spoils" of war belonging to the wicked king of Sodom! And then--God appearing to him again, this time in a vision--with these comforting words! (It was great that God would appear to relieve him of the fear of a sure reprisal from the Babylonian kings--but never would he have believed that there would be so much more coming out of this intimate, one-on-one, unfathomable dialogue with Yahweh--the God who was "there"!)

And so Abram took the opportunity to pose the "big" questions, first concerning an "heir"--offering what he thought was a reasonable solution, "under the circumstances"! Eliezer! His trusted steward would be heir, right?

God's response was very clear and firm: "This man will not be your heir! But one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir!" Wow! Point made! And then God does something so awesome! He takes him outside to "look toward the heavens and count the stars--and says (shockingly!) so shall your descendants be!" (Pick yourself up, Abram! He was only looking for one!)

And this, according to the great theologian, Dr. James Boice, is "perhaps the most important verse in the Bible!" Genesis 15:6 (remember it!) says: "Then Abram believed in the Lord, and

He (God) reckoned it to him as righteousness!" Why is this perhaps the most important verse in the Bible? Because it makes crystal clear, for the first time in the Bible (and in the Old Testament at that!) the great doctrine of "Justification by Faith"! It would become the "centerpiece" for the Apostle Paul for what "saving faith" is all about! Willmington's Guide to the Bible says it would become the "pattern for all future believers"!

Paul would write in Romans 4:16: "For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance by grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law (the Jews), but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham (and that would include us!). Here we see "faith" equated with "grace"--and we think of another verse Paul writes that puts it all together! Ephesians 2:8-9--"For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves! It is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast!"

There're many other verses we could cite! I like Galatians 3:6-9, because it makes clear that the "Gospel message" originated, and applied, in the Old Testament! "Even as Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham! The Scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations will be blessed by you!' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham (the man who once thought that he would have no son at all!)

"Shepherd's Notes" notes that the Hebrew word used for "believe" in this context is "a firmness or certainty about a person or situation that leads to action!" And we will see this true in Abraham's example as we continue to follow his life story! (And hopefully it's true in ours!)

But we're not done with Genesis 15! There's another great Christian truth to explore--and that concerns the idea of "covenant relationship" that begins with the so-called "Abrahamic Covenant" in verses 7-21--but progresses through the Old Testament as the promises of God, culminating in a "new covenant" which ensures eternal life for "believers" because of the redemptive work of Christ (the "seed" of a woman, noted in Genesis 3:15--"Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham," in Matthew 1:1!)

This second part of this great lesson begins in Genesis 15:7 where God again gives Abraham more great words of comfort through a great reminder of His great promise: "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it!" Wow! There He goes again, Abraham must have thought--God (Yahweh) promising the land! And he actually wants to talk about it apparently!

And so--probably after again picking himself up from the ground--Abraham, given the golden, once in a life-time, opportunity--raises a highly appropriate question any "wandering nomad" would ask after hearing such an amazing promise! "Oh Lord God! How am I going to know that I'm going to possess ("inherit"! it)?" (Again we see heart-warming, almost unexpected, intimacy between Abraham and the "approachable" God of Creation!)

Dr. Constable sees this scene "in so many words as Abram asking God to strengthen his faith! And, in response, God graciously obliged by "formalizing" the promise of land He previously

gave--and formalizing it into a "covenant"! The "Abrahamic Covenant"! And doing it through what looks (at least to us) like a bizarre kind of ceremony, apparently practiced in that day and culture--something which Abraham understood--to legally bind certain important agreements (with failure to comply by one the parties sentenced to death)! Basically God appeared through "a smoking fire pot" and "flaming torch" and passed between the severed body parts of sacrificed animals--and He did so alone (not accompanied by Abraham) confirming His promise to Abraham's possession of the land! By passing through it alone, He demonstrated that His promise was unconditional! And sure! And He circumscribed in detail the boundaries and configuration of the land for all time! He also confided how Abram would "go to his fathers in peace"--and outlined the upcoming history of his descendants, including the 400 years of Egyptian captivity they would endure--but also of their ultimate return to the land!

What's so awesome about Genesis 15 is not just the two great doctrinal truths revealed concerning the doctrine of "justification by faith" and the "covenant relationship" of God's people--which are awesome in themselves, and raise some vital questions for all of us! (Do you truly believe? Have you exercised your faith? Have you availed yourself of His grace? The "gift"? Do you possess the "covenant promise"?) But there's also something else that jumps out of this lesson! And that is the beautiful and intimate relationship exhibited between a man and the Most High Creator God!

And what's interesting too, at least for me, is the remarkable connection we saw this week between our lesson and Jesse's sermon on Sunday! The text on Sunday included James 4:8 where we're admonished: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you!" The point is that God (Yahweh) actually wants a close and intimate relationship with His people--just as He had with Abraham, who could be called "a friend of God"! And He wants us to come to Him "with clean hands, and a "pure heart" and "humbly"! Kind of like we saw with Abraham! And we saw a God who is interested in our deepest questions and concerns--and promises to be there for us!

Jeremiah 33:2-3 seems to say it best! "Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is His name! Call to Me and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know!" (Done that lately?)

Paul Logan, in closing last nite's large group session--covering one of the most important chapters in all of the Bible--challenged us to close our lesson time with praise and thanksgiving to God for all that He has done for us, and especially for "sending us His Son"! (And what could be more appropriate for our upcoming Thanksgiving season--with all our "heirs"! Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham"!

Go with God, the God of Abraham, this week--and be a blessing!

Lowell