

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study – Genesis 13-15

Read Genesis 13:1-18

In Genesis 12:10-20, Abram went into Egypt because of a famine. Fearing for his life and wishing to be treated well, he deceived Pharaoh into thinking Sarai was his sister rather than his wife. However, God inflicted Pharaoh and his household with serious diseases, with the result that Abram's deception was discovered, and he and Sarai were sent away. Leaving Egypt, they returned to the land of Canaan, to the place near Bethel where Abram had previously built an altar (13:3-4). There, Abram called on the name of the Lord, perhaps in repentance and renewal of commitments he had made to the Lord prior to his journey into Egypt (12:8). Having become very wealthy (13:2), he now began having problems with his nephew, Lot (13:5ff).

-As Lot's uncle, Abram had the right to decide which way he and Lot would each go. What do you think motivated him to relinquish that right and let Lot decide instead? What do you think motivated Lot's decision?

- Abram operated based on faith; realized God had promised the land to his offspring and, maybe from his experience in Egypt, trusted that God would provide for him
 - thus, he could not become impoverished or lose the land, but would ultimately take possession of it; therefore was free to serve needs of others (i.e. Lot) before his own; would wait on the Lord to provide
- Lot chose based on material well-being, without necessarily considering moral or spiritual consequences
 - ignored Sodom's evil → perhaps thought he could deal with it by living outside Sodom (though by Gen 14, he is living within Sodom)
 - in contrast to Abram, he seemed to be living by sight, rather than by faith (Lot 'lifted up his eyes' (v.10) and saw the potential for material well-being; Abram 'lifted up his eyes' (v.14) and saw God's promise)

-If you were faced with similar decisions as Abram and Lot, what do you think you would do, and why? [e.g. If your boss came to you with a very good promotion and told you that either you or your co-worker could have it, would you leave the choice to your co-worker? Or if you had an opportunity for an extremely attractive job that would pay far more than you were currently making, but meant that you could be exposed frequently to temptations or that you might not be able to attend Church on most Sundays, would you take the job?]

-How did God respond to Abram's dealings with Lot? How did Abram respond to God?

- God appeared to Abram and reiterated/expanded on His promise; reassured Abram of His promise, in response to Abram's faith
 - told Abram to walk the length & breadth of the land (like an owner checking out his property)
- Abram responded in obedience (moved his tents) and worship (built another altar)

Read Genesis 14:1-24

-Summarize the events of this chapter.

- a coalition of 5 kings, including king of Sodom, were paying tribute to a coalition of 4 kings led by Kedorlaomer
- coalition of 5 kings rebelled after being subject for 13 years, resulting in attack by Kedorlaomer et al.
 - 5 kings defeated; people & goods of Sodom & Gomorrah carried away, including Lot & his household (living in Sodom by this time)
- Abram told of this & went after the 4 kings with his 318 men and his allies
 - attacked and routed them; recovered all the goods & rescued Lot & his possessions
- on returning, met & blessed by Melchizedek, king of Salem; gives a tenth of everything to Melchizedek
- king of Sodom offers to let Abram keep everything but wants his people back
 - Abram refuses to take anything, so king of Sodom could never say he made Abram rich

-Who was Melchizedek, and why is he significant? (see also Psalm 110:1-4; Heb. 7:1-7)

- was both a king and a priest (Psalm 110:1-4)
 - king of Salem (i.e. Jerusalem; means "king of peace"); his name means 'king of righteousness' (Heb 7:2)
 - priest of God Most High ('El Elyon')
- was greater than Abram since he both received a tithe from Abram and blessed him (cf. Heb 7:4-7)
 - greater also than Aaron and the Levitical priests, who were descendants of Abram
- foreshadows Jesus Christ, who is also a king and a 'priest forever in the order of Melchizedek'
 - genealogy of Melchizedek deliberately left out (even though Genesis was full of genealogies)
 - mysterious figure "without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life" (Heb 7:3)
 - foreshadows the eternal nature of Christ and His priesthood
 - some think Melchizedek may actually be a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ Himself

-Why did Abram refuse the king of Sodom's offer? What does this tell us about Abram's character?

- Abram refused to take anything so that the king of Sodom could never say that he was the one who made Abram rich
 - i.e. so he could not take the glory from God; realized that it was God who provided for him
- Abram had faith in God's provision and trusted in His promise – did not need goods from a wicked king
 - seems to have learned his lesson from his episode in Egypt

Read Genesis 15:1-21

-Why might Abram have been afraid (v.1), and how does God comfort him?

- sometimes the case that God's servants exposed to attacks by the Enemy after a 'mountaintop experience' → fall into depression & fear; feelings of inadequacy & imminent danger (e.g. Elijah after Mt Carmel)
- fear of future retribution by Kedorlaomer & his allies; fear perhaps of jealousy & hostility of local kings → but God would be his shield
 - perhaps second thoughts about whether he did the right thing by refusing to take the plunder → but God would be his very great reward

-Why (and how) does Abram question God (v.2-3)? How does God respond to Abraham's anxiety (v.4-5)?

- he has no heir, so doesn't see how God would be able to give him a lasting inheritance/reward
- but questions God respectfully, genuinely; tone of the conversation - out of anguish rather than anger or skepticism
- calls God 'Sovereign LORD' – still sees God as King and in control, but does not understand how His promises will work out
- God responds by reassuring him and reiterating His promise to Abram of a son from his own body, and of offspring too numerous to count

-How does Abram respond to God's promise of an offspring? Why was his response so remarkable? (cf. Rom. 4:18-22)

- Abram believed God; i.e. responded in faith
- remarkable because Abram had not yet received anything God had promised to him many years earlier; was by this time probably into his 80s and Sarai in her 70s; old and childless to that point; yet he still believed
- possible chiasm with 15:6 at the centre, indicating it to be the main point
 - A: Gen 15:1 – a vision of God
 - B: 15:2-3 – Abram questions God
 - C: 15:4-5 – God's promise to Abram
 - D: 15:6 – Abram believes God & is credited righteousness
 - C': 15:7 – God's promise to Abram
 - B': 15:8 – Abram questions God
 - A': 15:9-21 – a vision of God

-What does Abram's example teach us about faith and about God's response to faith? (cf. Romans 4:1-5,13-25; Galatians 3:6-9)

- faith is believing the promises of God, even when they may seem incredible or impossible, or a long time in coming
- being fully persuaded that God has power to do what He promises (Rom 4:21)
- does not waver through unbelief → may struggle with understanding how God will work things out, but continues to trust (Rom 4:20)
- faith rooted in the character of the God 'who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were' (Rom 4:17)
- faith gives glory to God (Rom 4:20); is based in the fact that He is faithful
- faith calls for obedience and for endurance
- God responds to faith by crediting it as righteousness – i.e. covers their sin and considers them righteous in His sight
- i.e. we are declared as righteous (i.e. justified) in God's sight by trusting in His promises
- not based on our own good works – just as humanly speaking there was nothing Abram could do to get offspring
- God's promises appropriated by faith alone, not by our works, so that it may be by His grace alone (Rom 4:16)
- God credits righteousness to those who believe that He raised Jesus Christ from the dead (Rom 4:24-25)
- seems impossible humanly speaking; yet God credits righteousness to those who believe
- God credits this righteousness not only to Abraham, but to all who have that same faith as Abraham
- those who believe in Christ are Abraham's offspring in God's sight (Rom 4:16-17); Gentiles justified by faith (Gal 3)
- faith is the basis of intimate relationship with God, just as Abram had, since without faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6)

-Did Abram doubt that God would give him the land He had promised? (v.7-8)

- not doubt, but needed affirmation; question is in similar vein to his question in v.2-3

-How does God respond to Abram's question in v.8? What is the meaning of the ritual performed in v.9-21? (cf. Jer. 34:8-20)

- He gives specific details of what will happen before Abram's descendants take the land, so that Abram would 'know for certain'
- fulfilled in Israel's captivity in and Exodus from Egypt
- to drive home the certainty of His promise, God made (or 'cut') a covenant with Abram
- covenant was the most binding/unbreakable of agreements → punishment for breaking a covenant was death
- established blessings for keeping the covenant; curses for breaking it
- establishing a covenant required shedding of blood, symbolizing the death of the covenant-breaker, i.e. testifying to the curse/punishment that would fall on the one who broke the covenant (Heb 9:16-21 → implications for the New Covenant)
- animals killed & cut in half; parties making the covenant would walk together through the pieces
- parties were saying, in effect, "May what has been done to these animals be done to me, if I break this covenant"

-What is the significance of the fact that God (manifested through the smoking firepot) passed alone through the pieces of the animals, without Abram (v.17)?

- meant that God alone was responsible for fulfillment of the terms of the covenant (i.e. not based on what Abram did)
- Gave Abram an unbreakable guarantee of His promise
- God Himself would take on the curse of the covenant → points forward to the New Covenant in Christ's blood

Aliens and strangers in the world

Abram's example shows us what a life of faith looks like. By faith, Abram was able to put Lot's needs before his own, trusting that God would be faithful to provide for him and to give him the land, as He had promised. By faith, he routed the armies of Kedorlaomer and rescued his nephew. By faith, he gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek and refused the king of Sodom's goods, giving glory to God alone for his victories and successes. Abram's faith in God was the basis of his acceptance as righteous in God's sight (15:6) and was therefore the basis of the intimate fellowship he enjoyed with God, since 'without faith, it is impossible to please God' (Heb 11:6). And though he grappled with understanding how God's promises would be worked out through him, Abram 'did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised.' (Rom 4:20-21). As a result, he continued to know God's presence, comfort and affirmation in his life, even as he waited for fulfillment of the things promised. Spend some time reflecting on what it means to live by faith in your daily life. Are you trusting fully in God, fully persuaded that He will do all that He has promised? Are there promises that you're having a hard time trusting Him to keep? Commit your uncertainties, fears and anxieties in these areas to Him in prayer, and learn to place your trust fully in Him.