

The Journey of Faith
(5) The Precious Promises of God
Genesis 15:1-21
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As we make our way through the life of Abraham we discover this great man of faith constantly learning and growing through the experiences which the Lord allows him to pass through.

The New Testament word for a Christian is disciple, in the original Greek the word is 'mathetes' which means 'learner.' Jesus calls all of his followers to be learners.

The particular advance Abraham makes in Genesis 15 is this: he learns to believe a promise that God made to him back in Genesis chapter 12:2, "I will make you into a great nation." Because he and Sarah had no children, and it was some 10 years down the line, Abraham had begun to doubt God's Word.

But today, he advances, he grows, verse 6, "Abram believed the Lord," he believed the promise. One day he doubted the promise, but on this day he took a step forward, "From now on, I believe that a child will be born to me; I doubt God's promise no longer!"

The Story

The Lord wants all of us to grow in faith, to grow in believing his promises.

Abraham had just come back from the battlefield, where God helped him rescue young Lot. He's exhausted and what is more, he is fearful because in rescuing Lot from the clutches King Kedorlaomer he has made an enemy of the most powerful man in the area. Step, for a moment in Abraham's shoes: You're living in a tent, not in a walled city, vulnerable to attack. You are dwelling in someone else's territory, owned and occupied by ten other tribes. When we're tired, fears can easily grow, can't they?

But our Father in heaven knows our fears, for we read in Isaiah 65:24, "Before they call I will answer." Before Abraham gets the chance to voice his fears in prayer, God graciously comes to him in a vision and assures him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward." (15:1) "Don't be afraid, Abraham, I will protect you like a shield. You may feel exposed, defenceless, vulnerable, but don't be anxious, the

God who made the heavens and the earth will protect you from harm.”

God is like a sensitive parent who understands the worries their child is passing through and speaks in words of comfort.

I heard the story of a Christian who was passing through a severe trial and was approaching the point of exhaustion, when they went out for a walk in the countryside. All of a sudden a glorious rainbow appeared in the sky. (Rainbows in the Bible are a sign of future hope.) And this believer knew God had arranged his walk for him to see the rainbow and whisper, “Don’t fear, there is hope, trust in me.”

Fear has a twin-sister whose name is doubt. When we’re afraid, doubts can so easily arise. “Ten years ago, Lord you made promises to me and none of those have been fulfilled yet.”

Abraham had begun doubting two of God’s interconnected promises: The promise to make him into a great nation; he and Sarah had no children yet; and God’s promise to give him a land for that great nation to live in.

Abraham has begun to think that Eliezer of Damascus—a servant in his large household— would be the one who takes his future forward. Let’s watch how the Lord responds to the doubts of his weak children.

God is gentle with doubters, because doubt is not sin. God does not rebuke Abraham for his doubts, neither did Jesus rebuke Thomas for his doubts. Faith, which speaks “I do believe” and Doubt which says “I want to believe, but I am struggling with questions,” are two sides of the same coin, “Be merciful to those who doubt.” Reads Jude verse 22.

God is gentle with doubters. *“It’s not doubt we want to fear but unbelief, “I will not believe”.”*

Secondly, notice that God went out of his way to answer Abraham's doubts, just as Jesus showed Thomas the marks on his body (verses 4-5). Later on God does the same with Abraham’s doubts about possessing enough land to house these numerous stars-in-the-sky descendants (verses 13-16).

If you have doubts about the Bible or doubts about the resurrection, talk to a Christian or read a book to help you. There are always good answers to every difficult question.

Thirdly, God makes binding unbreakable promises to assure Abraham that he will— for sure - fulfil his promises.

Suppose a child doubts, “Daddy are we really going on holiday this summer? We’ve missed the last few years with the pandemic? Are you sure? Really?” The father replies, “Yes”, but still the child doubts. So the father says, “OK, my child, I’m going to make a *binding promise* to you today, “We *are* going on holiday this summer no matter what.” And the child’s heart is put at peace.

In those days, when two nations made a treaty with each other—this is not very pleasant—they would kill some animals, cut the carcasses in two and put one half on either side to form a pathway down the middle.

And then both parties would have to walk between the carcasses as they made their treaty with each other. The meaning was clear: if either party were to break their promise, the same fate would befall them that has fallen on these animals, namely death

God wants to make a binding “I promise” treaty with Abraham so he told him to prepare animals either side of the pathway. When evening came, God did something very unusual, and this brings us to the heart of Genesis chapter 15. God walked down the pathway alone in the form of a fire—a common image for God.

Abraham did not have to walk down the pathway, only God walked down the pathway. God was making an unconditional one-way covenant with Abraham, which he bound himself to keep. Even if Abraham failed, God would keep the promise. It would be like a mortgage company saying that in 25 years the house will be yours, even if you fail to make your repayments! God binds himself to the words he says unconditionally. “...if we are faithless, he remains faithful.” (2 Timothy 2:13)

Well, let’s zoom out from this story and apply all these things to our own lives.

#1 God has made many precious promises to us

God hasn't promised land to us, he hasn't promised to make us into a great nation, but he has made many precious promises to us. Peter calls them "very great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1:4).

God has promised never to leave us, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

God has promised to provide for all our needs: "God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19), so we don't need to worry and fret about soaring inflation!

God promises to hear our prayers: "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer." (1 Peter 3:12)

God has promised to protect us from physical harm, "no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you," (Isaiah 54:17) so we don't need to worry about enemies, we really don't.

God promises to make us more like his Son, "And we all... are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18). We may despair of our slow spiritual progress, but God is at work in us by his Spirit.

God has promised to forgive our sins: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

God has promised to save all who believe in his Son. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). And God will preserve that saving faith right to the end of our days: "He is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy." (Jude 24)

God has made many precious promises to us! Do we know them? Do we claim them? Do we expect them to be fulfilled? Abraham is expecting God to fulfil the promises he made to him, and so should we! We get to know those promises as we read God's

Word and as we hear preaching! For a season of our lives, Yvonne and I wrote up ten promises from the Bible and put them up on our noticeboard! Do you need to remind yourself everyday of some promise God has made to you?

#2 God's promises are unconditional

In the second place, God's promises are binding and unconditional. God alone walks through the carcasses and binds himself unto death to fulfil the promises, no matter what. He does not say, "We will go on holiday this summer *if there is enough money in the bank.*" He says, "We will go on holiday *no matter what!*" He is not a Santa who says, "I will bring you a present if you are good, he says "I will bring you a present, full stop."

God has forged a New Covenant with his people, not a covenant with the carcasses of animals, nor the covenant God made through Moses on Sinai, but a New Covenant through the death of his Son. Every time we take communion, we are reminded of that new covenant, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Corinthians 11). God does not ask us to be crucified, his Son alone was crucified on our behalf, forging an unconditional promise to save us from our sins.

And all of God's "lesser promises" - to provide for us, to protect us, to hear our prayers, flow out of that New Covenant, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:20) and "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things." (Romans 8:32)

God's promises are unconditional, they don't depend on our spiritual performance; they will be fulfilled, every single one of them!

What promise are you struggling with today? Which promise do you doubt? His promise to provide for you? His promise to protect you? His promise to keep you from falling? Know for sure, that God will keep that promise!

#3 Let us learn to trust the promises

Let us learn to trust the promises God has made to us. Let us believe what God says, no matter what the appearance of things. Let us not read God's delays as denials, but

continue to trust God's word. This was how Abraham grew in Genesis chapter 15: before this chapter Abraham doubted the promise that he would become a great nation, after Genesis 15 he came to a settled conviction: "Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

May God grant the same believing resolve too.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ? That he is the Son of God? That he died for your sins? We do not get into a right relationship with God by doing: coming to church, being a good person, turning over a new leaf, praying, by doing religious duties, we get into a right relationship with God simply by believing. That's why it says that the moment Abraham believed, it was credited to him as righteousness. All we are called to do is to believe the Gospel, believe in Jesus. And if you do not yet believe in Jesus, I urge you to believe today, for today is the day of salvation.