



Brown Community Group Discussion Guide

Genesis 15:1;17:27 – Covenants with Abraham

November 4, 2018

1) The Faith of Abram 15:1-6

¹ *After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”* ² *But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?”* ³ *And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”* ⁴ *Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.”* ⁵ *He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”* ⁶ *Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

Let’s breakdown our discussion of verses 1-6 into several main subject matters:

1. Abrams Faith

While Abram was a man of strong faith, he was troubled and had become fearful about his legacy. His growing despair hung heavily upon his life at this stage. Was Abram having a real crisis of faith or was this the normal doubts of life that we all have from time to time?

To help Abram address his question, God delivers a strong message through a vision. In verse 1, God simply states “I am your shield, your very great reward” referencing protection and giver of all blessings to Abram. This is the only time this phrase occurs in the book of Genesis.

In that timeframe for the ancient Near East, it was common for someone such as Abram to have another person in charge of their household if they did not have a proper heir of age to manage everything.

2. Promise to Abram

The “Word of the Lord” clearly described how he would have his own heir to inherit his household. This was the first big question on Abram’s mind, but God took it much further demonstrating how he would be the father of countless others outnumbering even the stars. This would be a flesh and blood heir, not from someone else. It is interesting to note at this point, that the promise from God was to him and did not mention anything about Sarai at this stage. Let’s park that thought away for now as we continue through the lesson.

3. Saving Faith of Abram

Verse 6 says that Abram “believed”. This word is translated from the word that “amen” is derived. Righteousness in the Old Testament was not an absolute norm but a dynamic relationship between man and God that makes him acceptable. While “Covering of Sins” was a function of the priests, interestingly here God himself did it. The ground for declaration of righteousness was nothing that Abram brought or did, such as the priest would require. His firm acceptance of God’s word was the only basis for his justification. His “acceptance” though was more than this one occasion and involved a life-style commensurate with his convictions.

The declaration of the righteousness of Abram (meeting God’s requirements for fellowship with him) clarifies forever the role of faith and works. God first desires that we trust him. If a person is receptive and responsive to the Creator, God can do the rest as he works with him in a relationship of love and trust. Some scriptural support of this in New Testament can be found:

Romans 4:1-8

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” ⁴ Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

2) Anticipating the Covenant Promises 15:7-18

⁷ He also said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.” ⁸ But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”.....¹² As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. ¹³ Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. ¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”.....¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.”

God’s declaration of his nature, “I am the Lord” is an absolute phrase. God is what he is and is known to man only in the ways he chooses to reveal himself. Even after God’s promises to Abram had been declared, Abram still needed further assurance of God’s faithfulness. This is just like you and me, if we could only believe more of what God says! God was very patient with Abram, God is the friend of the honest doubter, the one who loves and trusts him but is still prone to falter. Are you like this? Do not slay yourself over this and doubt your faith. Use Abram as your example.

At this point, God delivered a formal contract to Abram from his initial promise. The promise would be long delayed in fulfillment and they would be oppressed for over 400 years.

Abram’s responsibility in the future success of the covenant was only to accept it! It was forever guaranteed by God alone. The extent of land mentioned here was the same as that attained during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 21:8-21).

3) Covenant Blessings and Promise of an Heir 17:1-21

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.” ³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.” ⁹ Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised....¹⁵ God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.” ¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?” ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!” ¹⁹ Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will

bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. ²⁰ And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.

Interestingly after all of the previous promises and covenants, God again confirms his covenant with Abram and then seals it by his act of obedience. While circumcision is mentioned as part of the covenant, this should be viewed as an outward sign of an internal faith. Circumcision was never an end in itself, but a sign of their wholehearted devotion to God. Their observance in this matter, would encourage them in observing more weightier matters of the covenant.

Both Abram and Sarai were given new names as part of the covenant. As we discussed back in Chapters 15 and 16, this is the first time that God declares that Sarah would be the mother of Abraham's heir. After all that Abraham had gone through with the crisis of his faith, devising his own plans for an heir; at God's announcement, how did he react? Abraham did more than question God, he openly laughed at him. While some have tried to interpret "laughter" as "rejoicing beyond delight", it is clear that Abraham's reaction was a combination of doubt and faith, but his acceptance is obvious by falling to his face.

4) Group Discussion:

1. How can we determine whether a "decision or event" is within God's direction and plan for our lives as opposed to us taking matters into our own hands? How does our lack of faith and impatience play into the answer?
2. Read Verse 6 and the sub topic material of Abram in the lesson: How or was his faith and righteousness gifted from God any different from you or me now?
3. Even after all of God's promises, Abram still doubted and needed more assurance. If having direct contact with God still led to his doubting, how are we today to deal with our doubts of faith?
4. What is our specific responsibility in God's future success for our lives and plan?