**August 19, 2020 | A Study on Chapter 15 of the Book of Genesis**

**God’s Covenant with Abram**

“I do believe, help my overcome my unbelief“. This seemingly contradictory statement was made by a father who brought his demon possessed son to Jesus for healing. The man had originally taken his son to disciples of Jesus who were not able to drive out the demons. The man asks Jesus to help if he can. Jesus’ response is “Everything is possible for him who believes”. Ray Pritchard wrote that the man had to suspend his unbelief. Jesus was dealing not just with the man but His disciples as well since it was their unbelief that was the obstacle to healing the boy (Mark 9:17-29). Chapter 15 reveals Abram’s struggle to trust God to deliver on His promises.

The chapter begins with the word of God appearing to Abram in a vision telling him three things; Do not be afraid, I am your shield, I am your great reward. Abram had just fought and defeated 5 powerful kings with an army of only 318 men so it might have been natural for him to be afraid of their retribution. He had used the element of surprise to win his victory and it might be possible that his foes might counter attack. God reassures him telling him not to be afraid and that He would be Abram’s shield. This may also be a reminder to Abram that his success in the battle was due to God’s intervention, not his own efforts. In telling Abram that He is the great reward, Abrams’s rejection of a reward from the king of Gomorrah is affirmed. Abram was a wealthy man but what he really wanted was a son again showing his disregard for personal possessions. He laments that a servant would inherit his estate since he had no children, a common practice at the time. Perhaps Abram was resigned to thinking that God’s previous promise would come through his household rather than a son born to him and Sarai. God assures Abram that his heir would be from his own flesh and blood and that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. Verse 6 contains a statement about Abram that is fundamental in understanding his relationship with God. David Guzik points to Romans chapter 4 where Paul writes that Abram was justified through faith and not works. He was credited with righteousness before he was circumcised demonstrating that righteousness does not come from observation of religious practices. Finally, God credited righteousness to Abram meaning it was imputed to him. Our covenant with God is a lopsided affair, we impute sin to Jesus and he imputes righteousness to us.

What follows shows us Abram’s internal conflict, evidenced by his request for a sign. I don’t think this shows a lack of faith in God on Abram’s part, rather a lack of faith in his ability to trust God. Matthew Henry wrote “Abram desires a sign: Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? v. 8. This did not proceed from distrust of God’s power or promise, as that of Zacharias; but he desired this, 1. For the strengthening and confirming of his own faith; he believed (v. 6), but here he prays, Lord, help me against my unbelief. Now he believed, but he desired a sign to be treasured up against an hour of temptation, not knowing how his faith might, by some event or other, be shocked and tried. Note, We all need, and should desire, helps from heaven for the confirming of our faith, and should improve sacraments, which are instituted signs, for that purpose. See Jdg. 6:36-40 ; 2 Ki. 20:8-10 ; Isa. 7:11, Isa. 7:12 . 2. For the ratifying of the promise to his posterity, that they also might be brought to believe it. Note, Those that are satisfied themselves should desire that others also may be satisfied of the truth of God’s promises. John sent his disciples to Christ, not so much for his own satisfaction as for theirs Mt. 11:2, Mt. 11:3.” Contrast this with the request by Pharisees and Sadducees for a sign from Jesus who responded “A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah”. Their request for a sign was not due to a desire for their faith to be strengthened since they had none.

God responds to Abrams’s request by instructing him to bring animal sacrifices which Abram prepares by cutting and arranging the parts of the heifer, goat and ram. He did this in keeping with the custom at the time of entering into contracts by splitting sacrifices and having each party walk through the middle. There is a reference to this in Jer. 34:18. While Abram is waiting for God to perform his part of the contract, God causes him to fall into a deep sleep and reveals to him a vision of the slavery his descendants would endure in Egypt. While Abram is asleep God performs both sides of the contract ritual symbolizing that our salvation is based on faith and God’s grace, not actions on our part. The smoking firepot and burning lamp represent the duality of Christ; he will judge the lost and is the light of the world to the saved.

Abram trusted God to fulfill His promise but he probably could not comprehend the magnitude of what God would do through him since he became the foundation of the church. When God showed the stars to Abram, he could probably see a few thousand but there were millions more beyond his vision. One of Ray Pritchard’s members sent him a note saying “We never test the resources of God until we attempt the impossible.”