

Tell Me the Stories – Abram

Week 2, Genesis Chapter 15 & 17 Covenant

Abram Recap: Abram's father Terah is on the way with him and their family from Ur to Canaan when he dies. God calls Abram to continue on the journey and receive the blessing, promise & presence of God. After Abram goes through the land that will one day become his own, there is a famine causing Abram to move again. He & Sarai go to Egypt for food. While on the way, Abram is worried he will be killed and get's Sarai to agree that she is his sister. Pharaoh takes Sarai as his wife and compensates Abram greatly. Then God brings disease onto Pharaoh and his family. Pharaoh sends Sarai to Abram and tells them to leave. From there Abram & Lot separate so they can live & grow. Lot is captured and Abram goes to rescue him. As they return King Melchizedek of Salem met him blessed Abram & God. Abram gave 1/10 of what he had to the king. The King said keep the things and just leave the people with me. Abram told the King that he promised God that he wouldn't take anything from the King.

This week we are looking at chapters 15 & 17. Before we dig into the specifics these are not two different stories, nor is the second covenant replacing the first one.

All Age Question: What is one thing that you want to know more about?

Covenant

We have a pretty good understanding of covenants as an agreement between 2 parties. When we think of covenant, we think of 2 people (or parties) entering into an agreement equally. We agree to do XXX. The covenant that we encounter with Noah in chapter 9 required nothing of Noah. It certainly was not equal. It was what God promised to Noah. In chapter 15 we encounter a much more formal covenant but again did not require anything from Abram. As we continue in our study in chapter 17 God asks Abram to walk before me and that I will make a covenant with you. Abram gets a new name and additional promises and this time Abraham and all of the males shall be circumcised as a sign of the covenant. This time there is something asked of the other party (Abraham and all descendants). What we see is an evolution of what the covenant looks but a covenant with God is never equal.

Question: What covenants do you keep with God, the church and each other?

Kid Question: A covenant is a promise. What promises does God make to you? What promises do you make to God? What promises do you make to each other?

Chapter 15

Read verses 1-21

In verses 1-5 we see a different structure than we have encountered before in Genesis. In fact it looks much more like when God speaks through the prophets. We have a vision of the promise that God is a shield and that Abram will indeed have an heir that is from his own body. This was exceedingly important to Abram as we see that he questions God directly even though he had already been promised land & descendants.

In verses 7-21 we get a similar structure in that God makes a promise with the focus on land but this time instead of just words God asks Abram to complete a rite, a physical action. In ancient culture when you walked between sacrificial animals the penalty for breaking the covenant was death. Since God is the one alone who walks and takes on the obligation of death should the covenant be violated. God's word & deed makes Abram's faith possible. The covenant that God makes with & for Abram includes both promises that are now and in the future. Finally, the depths of God's promise includes a relational piece that we cannot separate from the covenant. God is all in with Abram.

When we look at the details of the covenant Abram and future descendants receive land that is currently inhabited by others. Abram gets the land not because of their quality. They receive the land because God is taking it away from the current inhabitants because they have been so bad. Not necessarily in this moment. The relationship with sin & judgment is not immediate. Sometimes judgment comes after the accumulation of sins. We see this is the flood. It wasn't that the people of Noah's time were significantly worse but that in all the generations only Enoch & Noah walked with God. In essence God could only take so much. We see the accumulation piece when we realize that the covenant promise of land will only be fulfilled in 400 years. This particular piece may be difficult for us to understand because we live in a world that prizes immediate gratification. Abram is being asked to be faithful even when the results are in the far future.

Question: What sort of promises do you have that will not be fulfilled quickly? Have any of your covenants come with actions & signs? If yes, what were the promises and what are the signs.

Kid question: What is an example you can think of that is a sign of a promise? Example do you ever ask someone to promise and cross their heart? What other examples can you name?

All age question: What promise would bring you peace right now?

Sign of Covenant

Read Chapter 17:1-27

Chapter 12 and the call of Abram happened when he was 75. Chapter 17 begins Abram is 99. God appears again to Abram and revises the covenant. God changes Abram's name to Abraham and adds being the ancestor of a multitude of nations. Next God calls on Abraham and all the males in community to participate in a sign of the covenant circumcision. This is for all males initially as they enter into the covenant promises and hereafter males on their 8th day of life. Next God adds that Sarai is included in the promises. It is no longer simply between God & Abraham. Sarai's name is changed to Sarah and that she shall have a child. And Abraham falls on his face and laughs. We can relate to this. But God doesn't let it go but instead gives them the name of their son to be – Isaac. Finally, Ishmael is given new promises, specifically that he will be blessed, made fruitful and will become the father of 12 princes. The promise of Abraham will not flow through Ishmael but nonetheless is a son of Abraham.

The sign of the covenant is significant. It is no longer in mind but in body as well. Living into the covenant that God has given is something that we do with the whole body. Also in the covenant we get a new name for God, no longer Yahweh

but now God Almighty in English and in Hebrew El Shaddai. All the revisions in the covenant demonstrate that there is a new beginning between God Almighty, Abraham & Sarah. There is also a shift in emphasis in the promise from land (though that is still in effect) to people.

All Age Question: What response does God ask of us now?

What do these stories tell us about God?

God is continually at work in creation. Though God had a good covenant as established in chapter 15, God saw that Abram & Sarai are still struggling with the fulfilment of promises. We will see that God keeps his promises when we look at the story of both Ishmael & Isaac even with the revision of the promise. We see that while God is faithful he is not afraid to begin a new by incorporating Sarah directly into the promise. The identities of Abraham, Sarah & God are not undone but added to. Just as when you become a wife or mother doesn't undo you being a daughter. God is continuing to work with humanity to bring about God's ultimate goal of restoring all creation. This is not a short fix but a long one. And God is faithful even when we have questions.

Question: What have you learned about God in these chapters?

Kid Question: What is one promise that you would like God to make you?

Prayer: God Almighty, don't stop working in us and through us when we are struggling. Help us when we struggle so that we can live into the promises you've made for us. Amen.