

A Promise of Land

Gen 15:5-21

SS Lesson for 10/06/2013

Devotional Scripture: Deut 7:7-11

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson reviews the **Promise of Land** to Abraham and his descendants. The **study's aim** is to student the timeless truths that appear in God's dealings with Abram and his descendants. The **study's application** is to align ourselves as best we can with God's ways and to trust in His plan for our lives.

Key Verse: Gen 15:18

18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates--

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

God is just, and wished to permit the sin of the Amorites to be full before He would judge them (Gen. 15:16). God would tolerate their sins until Israel under Joshua conquered Palestine. Thus the fulfillment of the promises to Abram involves a retributive judgment on the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. Abram's seed would get the land—but not one hour before absolute justice required it. God had much to do before fulfilling His promise—including disciplining His nation to make it fit for receiving the promise. Abram's seeing this in advance was horrible—like watching birds of prey. Then after sunset God revealed Himself in connection with the image of an oven (smoking fire pot) and a torch, two elements that were connected with sacrificial ritual in the ancient world. These images are part of the “burning” motif that describes God's zeal and judgment in the world. Fire represents the consuming, cleansing zeal of Yahweh as well as His unapproachable holiness, which are interrelated (cf. Isa. 6:3-7). In the darkness (Gen. 15:17) Abram saw nothing else in the vision except these fiery elements that passed between the pieces of the slaughtered animals. Thus the holy God was zealous to judge the nations and to fulfill His covenantal promises to Israel. He came down and made (lit, “cut”) a formal treaty (a covenant) with Abram (the Abrahamic Covenant). Since God could “swear” (confirm the covenant) by none greater, “He swore by Himself” (Heb. 6:13). In other words this was a unilateral covenant. So its promises are absolutely sure. God even specified the geographical boundaries of Israel's land—from the river of Egypt (Wadi el-Arish, not the Nile River) to the great river, the Euphrates. Israel has never possessed this land in its entirety, but she will when Christ returns to reign as Messiah. The Canaanite tribes listed (Gen. 15:19-21) were dispossessed later in the Conquest. For Abram God's message was clear: in spite of the prospects of death and suffering (enslavement in bondage), his descendants would receive the promises, for God assured it. So Israel could be encouraged by this at the Exodus as well as in subsequent times of distress, even during the Babylonian Captivity. God's solemn covenant assures the Chosen People of the ultimate fulfillment of His promises in spite of their times of death and suffering. Israel would also notice the parallel touch at the beginning of this narrative. (Cf. “I am the Lord [Yahweh] who brought you out of Ur,” v. 7, with Ex. 20:2: “I am the Lord [Yahweh] your God who brought you out of Egypt.”) This assured Israel that in spite of opposition and bondage God would judge their enslavers and fulfill His promises. This passage encourages New Testament believers as well. God affirms solemnly that He will fulfill His promises concerning salvation and all the blessings that pertain to that life (cf. 2 Peter 1:3-4); despite opposition, suffering, and even death, He keeps His promises.

Commentary from Barnes Notes

Verse 16. [*In the fourth age.*] An age here means the average period from the birth to the death of one man. This use of the word is proved by Num 32:13 - "He made them wander in the wilderness for forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the Lord was consumed." This age or generation ran parallel with the life of Moses, and therefore consisted of one hundred and twenty years. Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. Four such generations amount to four hundred and eighty or four hundred and forty years. From the birth of Isaac to the return to the land of promise was an interval of four hundred and forty years. Isaac, Levi, Amram, and Eleazar may represent the four ages.

[*For the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full.*] From this simple sentence we have much to learn. First. The Lord foreknows the moral character of people. Second. In his providence he administers the affairs of nations on the principle of moral rectitude. Third. Nations are spared until their iniquity is full. Fourth. They are then cut off in retributive justice. Fifth. The Amorite was to be the chief nation extirpated for its iniquity on the return of the seed of Abram. Accordingly, we find the Amorites occupying by conquest the country east of the Jordan, from the Arnon to Mount Hermon, under their two kings, Sihon and Og (Num 21:21-35). On the west of Jordan we have already met them at En-gedi and Hebron, and they dwelt in the mountains of Judah and Ephraim (Num 13:29), whence they seem to have crossed the Jordan for conquest (Num 21:26). Thus had they of all the tribes that overspread the land by far the largest extent of territory. And they seem to have been extinguished as a nation by the invasion of Israel, as we hear no more of them in the subsequent history of the country.

Verse 17. [*And the sun went down.*] The light of day is gone. The covenant is now formally concluded. Abram had risen to the height of faith in the God of promise. He is come into the position of the father of the faithful. He is therefore qualified for entering into this solemn compact. This covenant has a uniqueness which distinguishes it from that with Noah. It refers to a patriarch and his seed chosen out of a coexisting race. It is not, however, subversive of the ancient and general covenant, but only a special measure for overcoming the legal and moral difficulties in the way, and ultimately bringing its comprehensive provisions into effect. It refers to the land of promise, which is not only a reality, but a type and an earnest of all analogous blessings.

The oven of smoke and lamp of flame symbolize the smoke of destruction and the light of salvation. Their passing through the pieces of the victims and probably consuming them as an accepted sacrifice are the ratification of the covenant on the part of God, as the dividing and presenting of them were on the part of Abram. The propitiatory foundation of the covenant here comes into view, and connects Abram with Habel and Noah, the primeval confessors of the necessity of an atonement.

Verse 18-21. In that instant the covenant was solemnly completed. Its primary form of benefit is the grant of the promised land with the extensive boundaries of the river of Egypt and the Euphrates. The former seems to be the Nile with its banks which constitute Egypt, as the Phrat with its banks describes the land of the East, with which countries the promised land was conterminous.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

The Key Verse text for this lesson describes part of God's covenant with Abram. God promised to give Abram and his descendants a vast amount of land stretching on for miles. The amount of land between the Sihor River (cf. Josh. 13:3; that is, the tributary of the Nile River forming the border of Egypt) and the Euphrates River is quite large. To some in the twenty-first century, this amount of land may seem like a rather small space on a world map. But consider how different the world was in Abram's time. There was no quick access from one place to another. Abram did not have access to airplanes, boats, or cars. Traveling was either on foot or on some sort of animal, and Abram did not travel alone. He had his wife and a large number of servants, cattle, and possessions to carry with him. Abram was most likely shocked at the magnitude of the land involved in God's covenant with him. Notice that this covenant to Abram did not involve only land. It also implied that Abram would bear children ("seed"). Faith in God's promise did not instantly spring up in Abram's heart when he received this promise. In fact, he struggled to believe God. Earlier in the chapter he asked, "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless" (Gen. 15:2)? After God reassured him, Abram responded in faith (vs. 6). Abram had been given an extraordinarily large promise in the midst of a situation that made the promise impossible by human standards. Biologically, he was too old to bear a child. Yet he believed in God and set an example for God's people of all generations. The Key Verse text contains some good applications for Christians today in at least two categories—faith in God and God's plans for Israel. In regard to faith, although several thousand years have passed since God's interactions with Abram, God's people today still struggle with believing Him and His promises. The trials of life and the seemingly inescapable situations in which we find ourselves tempt us to discredit

God and His unwavering faithfulness. God's promise to Abram at first glance seems almost too good to be true. A shocking diagnosis at the hospital, a dreaded phone call, a friend or family member living life for himself and not keeping in contact with those who care about him—peace in the midst of these circumstances seems too good to be true. And God's promise to never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5) may seem like a distant promise in the midst of pain, hurt, and uncertainty. Remember that God is faithful to accomplish that which He has promised. By exercising faith in Him despite circumstances, you will know God and the peace He provides in more ways than you ever thought possible. Concerning the nation of Israel, God still has a plan and purpose for His chosen people. While the land in Israel has traded hands over the past several millennia, God will one day establish His people there once and for all. Like Paul, Christians today should desire that the Jewish people would recognize Christ as their Messiah and be saved. May we desire to see God's promises come to full fruition.

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The concept of the outline of the lesson was adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
6	And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.	The Reassurance of the Promise
13	Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years	Confirmation of the Promise Through A Covenant

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

After the Tower of Babel event (last week's lesson), the people clustered by language groups and migrated to different areas of the earth (see Genesis 10:5, 20, 31). Cities and civilizations developed. Groups such as the Sumerians and Akkadians became powerful. Their artifacts and clay tablets reveal much about them. God's redemptive plan, for its part, was moving forward according to his schedule. That plan involved relocating a man named Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans (or Kasdim) to the land of Canaan. Several sites are mentioned as possibilities for the location of Ur, but the one that is about 170 miles south of Babylon seems to have the best evidence. Ur was a progressive city that some consider as one of the largest cities of antiquity. Estimates of its population are as high as 65,000. Abram and his family left this thriving commercial area and moved to Harran in northern Mesopotamia. Genesis 11:31 states that Terah (Abram's father) is the one who led in the relocation. Abram was called to leave Harran after his father died (Genesis 12:1; Acts 7:4), and God gave the seven special promises found in Genesis 12:2, 3. The seventh promise has messianic implications: all peoples of the earth would be blessed because of Abram. So Abram journeyed to Canaan. He built his first altar to the Lord in Canaan when he was at Shechem (Genesis 12:6, 7). It was here that Abram received a promise that this was the land that would be given to his descendants. Famine drove the family to Egypt, and then they returned to Canaan (12:10-13:1). Abram and his nephew, Lot, both prospered, but they had to go their separate ways (13:2-12). Again, God promised the land to Abram (13:14, 15). The "adventures" that follow in Genesis 14 lead up to God's covenant with Abram in Genesis 15. In the opening verses of Genesis 15, we see Abram assured of the Lord's favor. That assurance includes the promise of a son to become Abram's heir. Abram's name is not changed to Abraham until Genesis 17, and that distinction will be maintained in this lesson.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

When Abram was seventy-five years old, God called him to leave the familiar territory of his homeland and travel to wherever He directed him (Gen. 13:1-4). When Moses was eighty years old, God called him to leave the land of Midian and return to Egypt to lead His people out of captivity (Exod. 3:1-10). When Caleb was eighty-five years old, he requested he be given the mountain where the giants called Anakim resided, saying he was strong enough to drive them out (Josh. 14:6-15). Abram is just one of several senior adults who accomplished great things. Abraham's life reveals he was a man of great faith and immediate obedience to God, and this remained true of him until his death at 175 years of age. Granted, he had some momentary lapses in faith, but overall his life is a radiant testimony of a man who was true to God. It is a glowing accolade to him that when he was told by God that he would have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, we read, "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). God established the Abrahamic covenant with him, but Abraham did not live to see much of it fulfilled. Our lesson centers on God's confirmation and reiteration of His covenant with Abram to give him the Promised Land. This time He delineated the boundaries of the Promised Land. God, who owns the world, can give any part of it to whomever He pleases. Except for the general truth that God determines who lives where, this is the only land given to a specific person and his descendants forever. All the redrawing of boundaries and laws or treaties of man cannot change the dictates of Almighty God. Nor does lack of faith or belief have any effect on God's Word. Our part is to acknowledge His Word and obey it.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

The Reassurance of the Promise (Gen 15:5-7)

5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

7 Then He said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

Promises that are sure (5)

God's promises are sure because of the proof of His mighty acts (Ps 145:10-13)

0 All you have made will praise you, O Lord; your saints will extol you. 11 They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, 12 so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.

God's promises are sure because by His words the creation was done (2 Peter 3:4-9)

4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God's promises are sure because His Divine creation proves His eternal power (Rom 1:20)

20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

God's promises are sure because God cannot lie (Heb 6:13-19)

13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." 15 And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. 16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

God's promises are sure because His faithfulness surrounds Him (Ps 89:6-8)

Who is like the Lord among the heavenly beings? 7 In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. 8 O Lord God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

God's promises are sure because His promises have been thoroughly tested (Ps 119:140)

140 Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.

Promises that can be believed (6)

God's promises can be believed through faith (Rom 4:3-5)

3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. 5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

God's promises can be believed because there is a blessing in having faith in them (Gal 3:6-9)

6 Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith

God's promises can be believed through obedience (Heb 11:8-9)

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

God's promises can be believed through faith and action working together (James 2:20-24)

20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

God's promises can be believed because of His eternal presence (2 Cor 4:13-14)

13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.

Promises that strengthens (6)

Our faith must be based on God's power (1 Cor. 2:5)

5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

The result of our faith should be action (2 Cor. 4:13)

13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,

It is not the size of "our" faith, it is the power of God, the object of our faith (Luke 17:5-6)

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.

Even in faith, we need encouragement (Romans 1:12)

12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Anything not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23)

23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Promises based on God's faithfulness in the past (7)

God's faithfulness can be trusted because He never changes (Mal 3:6)

6 "I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

God's faithfulness can be trusted because every day He proves He never fails (Zeph 3:5)

5 The Lord within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame.

God's faithfulness can be trusted because it is higher than the skies and mightier than mountains (Ps 36:5-7)

5 Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. 6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O Lord, you preserve both man and beast. 7 How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings.

God's faithfulness can be trusted because it stands firm forever (Ps 89:1-2)

89 I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. 2 I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.

God's faithfulness can be trusted because even though we have rebelled, He is still merciful and forgiving (Dan 9:9)

9 The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him;

Confirmation of the Promise Through A Covenant (Gen 15:8-21)

8 And he said, "Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

9 So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."

10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

11 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.

13 Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.

14 And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.

16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.

18 On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River

19 the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites,

20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,

21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

A covenant sealed by sacrifice, ultimately through Jesus (8-11)

Through Jesus' sacrifice because of its power of atonement (Rom 3:21-25)

21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished

Through Jesus' sacrifice that provided the satisfaction of the penalty for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2)

2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Through Jesus' sacrifice because of His willing obedience to sacrifice His body, once for all (Heb 10:8-10)

8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Through Jesus' sacrifice because God presented Jesus as the only sacrifice for the atonement of sin eternally (Rom 3:25-26)

25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Through Jesus' sacrifice because of the power of Jesus' blood (Heb 9:13-14)

13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

A covenant that has promises in the future (12-13)

Future blessing of rewards (Matt 10:40-42)

40 "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. 41 Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Future blessing of receiving many times as much as given (Luke 18:28-30)

28 Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" 29 "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30 will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

Future blessing in this life and the life to come (1 Tim 4:6-8)

6 If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Future blessing of the right to sit with Jesus on His throne (Rev 3:21)

21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Future blessing of being rewarded for being a good and faithful servant (Matt 25:34-40)

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Future blessing of receiving an inheritance that will never perish (1 Peter 1:3-7)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Future blessing because of suffering for the sake of God (Heb 11:24-26)

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

A covenant that provides blessing (14-15)

God's covenant promises of blessings and does not violate His covenants (Ps 89:33-36)

33 but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. 34 I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. 35 Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness — and I will not lie to David — 36 that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun;

God's covenant and His great love blesses regardless of our rebellion (Ps 106:43-45)

43 Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin. 44 But he took note of their distress when he heard their cry; 45 for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented.

God's covenant blesses by promising redemption for His people (Ps 111:9)

9 He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever — holy and awesome is his name.

God's covenant blesses by upholding His people and making them a light to others (Isa 42:6)

6 "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,

A covenant that promises being placed at the right time (16-18)

Led to the right place and the right time by believing in God's directions (Gen 22:2-5)

2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." 3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Led to the right place and the right time by being obedient (Acts 8:26-29)

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

Led to the right place and the right time by Divine guidance (Acts 16:6-10)

6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging

him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Led to the right place and the right time to accomplish a specific purpose (Est 4:12-14)

12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Led to the right place and the right time by God's arrangement (1 Cor 12:18)

18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thought From Bob Deffinbaugh

From the series: Genesis: From Paradise to Patriarchs

The bottom line for Abram was that God's promise was now much more specific. Abram would have a son of his own through whom blessings would be poured out. Abram's offspring would be very numerous and, in time, would possess the land. But before this, they would go through a time of delay and great difficulty. The essence of Abram's faith was that while he waited for the promise of future blessings, he was content in the meantime with the presence of God. Abram did not come out on the short end of the stick. Abram's great reward was God Himself: "I am a shield to you; your very great reward" (Genesis 15:1, NASV, marginal reading). Our theology has been greatly distorted in recent days. We are invited to come to Christ as Savior because of all that He can and will do for us. We may have come to Him for His presents, rather than His presence. Abram was neither cheated nor short-changed in the delay of God and in the difficulties he and his offspring faced. Abram was blessed, for if God is our portion, that is enough.

The day before I delivered this message I performed the funeral for one of the young women in our church. She was a lovely young woman, a model wife and mother. She was twenty-eight years old when she died in her sleep. We still do not know the medical explanation for her death. For the funeral message, I chose Psalm 73 as the text. In it the psalmist confesses his perplexity at the fact that so often the righteous seem to suffer (verse 14) while the wicked prosper (verses 3-12). When the writer looks at the eternal destiny of man, he realizes that God ultimately sets matters straight. The requirements of justice are often not fully met until eternity is entered. Heaven and hell are thus required by righteousness. Without them, justice is not satisfied. This leads the psalmist to the conclusion that the ultimate good in life is not freedom from pain of suffering or poverty, but knowing God: Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou hast taken hold of my right hand. With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.... But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Thy works (Psalm 73:23-26, 28).

Here, then, is the key to understanding the blessing that is to be found in delay and difficulty: while prosperity often leads us away from God (cf. Psalm 73:7-12), affliction draws us closer (Psalm 73:25-26). If nearness to God is the highest good, then suffering is good also, if it enhances our intimacy with Him. And prosperity is evil if it inclines us away from the good of knowing God. That, I believe, is the key to Genesis chapter 15. Abram's faith is strengthened by specific revelation concerning his son and the soil his offspring will inherit. But even beyond this, he is brought to the realization that faith cannot be separated from suffering, for God uses this to draw men into intimate fellowship with Himself. Faith is seldom strengthened by success (cf. verse 1), but by believing God in the midst of delays and difficulties (Romans 8:31-39; Hebrews 12:1-13).

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Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. God clearly reveals Himself and His plan to those who trust in Him (Gen. 15:7)
2. In His goodness, God often affirms His promises to His faithful children (vss. 8-9)
3. Full obedience evidences full faith in God (vss. 10-11)
4. God alone can foretell the future with complete accuracy and astonishing detail (vss. 12-15)
5. God has a perfect time for every purpose and plan (Gen. 15:16; of. Gal. 4:4)
6. What God promises, He will accomplish in His time and in His way {Gen. 15:17-21)