

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 13 (15:1-21): Some Summary Thoughts:

Chapter 15 opens as God appears to Abram in a vision and declares that He will *offer/gift* to Abram a “*reward*” far beyond anything Abram can imagine (15:1).

- Verses 1-6 deal with God’s Promise of “*seed*” or “*descendants*” couched in the vocabulary of “*gift*.” In response to the LORD’s offer of a “*reward*,” Abram asks, “...*what will you ‘give’ me, for I continue childless...?*” (15:2). Abram then offers his own solution based on his own experience. He puts forth his chief servant Eliezer as a suitable heir – a potentially viable solution based on the custom prevalent at the time. In response, God tells him clearly that the Promise will not be realized as Abram suggests. God tells Abram he will father a son who will be his heir and invites him to “*see*” the reality of God’s creation of the stars in heaven and equate that reality to God’s revelation of offspring to come to Abram over time.
- In 15:6, Abram responds to what he now “*sees*.” Scripture records: “*And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*” The language is significant. Abram is “*counted*” or “*reckoned*” as “*righteous*.” He is not *declared* righteous. “*Righteousness*,” as used in Scripture is a relational term that characterizes the nature of a relationship between two persons. In this instance, God pronounces his relationship with Abram “*right*” because Abram has embraced God’s Call. He has left land and kin to embark on his journey of faith. Certainly, Abram struggles with understanding aspects of what God’s expectation is and tries to help God out when his help is not needed; *however he never abandons the call*.
 - Like Abram, the Christian’s “*rightness*” in his or her relationship with God is not rooted in any moral perfection for “*we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom 3:23).
 - Thus, “*faith*” is an avenue, a channel through which man is able to respond to and/or accept the gift/grace offered by God. As Paul explains this passage in Romans 4:16, he shows us it is by/ through faith that man responds; not “because of” faith. Abraham’s “*faith*” was neither an arbitrary condition imposed by God, nor a meritorious activity performed by him. Rather, it was a response of holding on to the promises of God, in spite of all that appeared to contradict it (Rom 4:19), exclusively and completely (Rom 4:21). Abram did this because God taught him to “*see*” His revealed reality; not the perceived reality that is confined to human experiences or understanding. Similarly, as Paul continues to declare in Romans, the Christian’s righteousness “*will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*” (Rom 4:25).
 - For Abraham, “*faith*” was more than a theory; it was the confluence of mental convictions wedded to action. The picture that emerges is one so committed to God that he ventures into the unknown with the full expectation that God will not only meet him there, but that God will honor His promises and empower Abram as He makes the trip with him.
- After “*believing*” or taking God at His Word regarding offspring, God reveals more of Himself to Abram (15:7). Abram now expresses a desire to “*know*” how he will actually possess the promised land (15:8). The form taken by God to ratify or “*cut*” the covenant was common among ancient peoples of Abram’s time. To ratify the promise upon which the relationship is based, animals were killed and halves of the carcasses were placed over against each other (Genesis 15:7-11; Jeremiah 34:18). Then the parties to the covenant passed through the halves to signify their approval and to symbolize to each other that if they broke the covenant, may what had happened to the animal also happen to them. In the account in Genesis 15, God instructs Abram to prepare the animals for ratification; however, in a unilateral action, God puts Abram to sleep in “*terrifying*” darkness. God alone passes through the pieces as “*a smoking firepot with a blazing torch*” (15:17).
 - The significance of this action appears to be that the covenant did not depend upon Abram’s obedience, but solely upon the grace, love, and power of God.
 - It is also worthy of note that God shows His undivided allegiance to His promise not merely through speech, but through action as well. God demonstrates His commitment through a ritual “*death-embracing*” act – perhaps a precursor to our New Testament understanding of God’s total vulnerability at the cross.
 - Interestingly, Abram’s “*belief*” involves, at a minimum, fixing one’s eyes on the Promise Keeper who freely and willingly commits Himself to His creation and His Covenant people. When Abram “*sees*” the nature of God, he receives Divine affirmation of the rightness of his relationship. Similarly, our “*righteousness*” is rooted first and foremost in our acknowledgment of the essential nature of God. Like Abram, when we “*see*” Him as Promise-Keeper and faithful giver, our own actions should be and can be transformed!