

Faith = Righteousness
Genesis 13-20
March 15, 2026

How many of you like to look at the stars? Last night as I lay in bed looking up at the stars, I thought to myself, where the heck is the ceiling? We're going to be talking about stars today. Please open your Bibles to Genesis 15.

Since the first of February, we've been working our way through the early chapters of Genesis. We took a break last week to hear from Bro Barr, but we return today to a man we met in chapters 11-12 who will cast a long shadow, or light beam rather, over the rest of the Bible. Say Abram. God made 7 promises to this man and then called him to move which he did, eventually landing in Canaan. Two weeks ago we looked at how God has kept and is still keeping those promises in many ways. We didn't have time to follow Abram into Egypt where he lied about his wife, which he did again in chapter 20, nor did we examine he and his nephew separating in chapter 13. They've discovered that the land Lot chose that is now is very dry and barren was once very lush and green and would have lured any good farmer. We also won't drill down on how God rescued Lot from Sodom as fire and brimstone rained down. Many, many lessons, but suffice it to say that God is exceedingly patient, not willing that any should perish. Hopefully you read Gen 18-19. I will mention that archaeologists have discovered a 2-3-foot-thick burn layer in that area indicating intense heat of over 2000 degrees. It was hot enough to fuse sand particles into glass. It could have been caused by a meteor exploding like the one over Siberia in 1908, a violent volcanic eruption, or the ignition of natural gas released by a large earthquake. God will not be found a liar.

Back in Gen 14, there's also the brief record of the first Middle Eastern war. It tells us that Abram went as far as the city of Dan to rescue Lot and others. Here is what is called Abraham's gate at Tel Dan. It is the oldest arched gate in the world dated to about 1800 BC and Abram may have gone through it on this mission to rescue his nephew. Later, Abram returns and gives a tithe to God through the mysterious priest-king Melchizedek of Jerusalem about whom I answered a question in the February newsletter. There also appears to be the first foreshadowing of communion when Abram shares bread and wine with this intriguing character. So much to preach about, so little time to preach.

Today, we pick up in Gen 15. If you're able, please stand as we read from Gen 15:1-6 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, "O 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 coming from your own body will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens 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.

What a passage. Right after God delivered Abram from several warring kings, God says, "Don't be afraid." Just like us, Abram was prone to fear. And God says the same thing to us today. Don't be afraid! Over and over again God says this in His Word. And yet we become fearful of other people, of our finances, for our reputations, for our jobs, for our health, etc. Do not be afraid.

But God didn't stop at that for He told Abram He was his shield. Say shield. What is a shield? Something a soldier uses to protect against incoming spears, swords, arrows, or bullets. In ancient times they were usually made of leather, wood, or sometimes metal. They didn't have Kevlar. But you would be foolish to go into battle shieldless, totally exposed. Even the giant Goliath had a shield. And God promised that **He** would be Abram's shield. He would protect him from harm and danger. Israel has been using their Iron Dome shield to protect against incoming missiles and bombs. Sadly, some slip through causing death and destruction. Listen, there's not a single bullet, arrow, bomb, or BB that will slip through God's shield, Amen? He might allow some things to reach us for His own reasons as we learn from Job and others, but it's not because God missed them or couldn't stop them. Praise God for not just shielding us but for being our shield.

There is none better and there is none other. Ps 3:3 says, "But you are a shield around me, O Lord." Ps 5:12 "For surely, O Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield." Ps 18:30 He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. Ps 28:7 The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. Ps 119:114 You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word." And there are many others! Rest and relax under God's shield today!

And He told Abram He was His very great reward. Say reward. The Hebrew word for reward can be translated as salary, compensation, or benefit. How many of you know that when God is your salary, that's all you need? God said, "I myself will be your benefit package! Your compensation!" What does God own? Everything! And so I'll take Him over a billion-dollar annuity any day. This phrase can also be translated, "Your reward will be very great." Which is consistent with what God already promised him in Gen 12. God's reminding Abram in case he forgets. We forget. That's why we need to read and reread His promises to us. Praise God for being our very great reward.

But like us at times, Abram pushes back, “What good does all that do since I still don’t have a son?” God would take care of that, but let’s stop for a minute and recognize how much like Abram we are. Instead of focusing on all God HAS blessed us with, what do we do? Focus on that one unanswered prayer. If only this, if only that... Failing to be grateful for the numberless blessings He’s poured into and over us. Don’t stop praying for that one thing, but do be grateful for what you do have.

Eliezar was Abram’s servant and he was in line to get all the wealth God had given Abram. But what did God say? “Not gonna happen! I told you you would become a great nation! A son coming from your own **body** will inherit all you have!” At this time Abram was maybe 80 and Sarai about 70. You don’t have to be an OBGYN to know this ain’t gonna happen! But God shares a little object lesson, or rather a big one. “Let’s step outside, Abe. Now, look up. See those stars? Count em! And if you can, that’s how many descendants you’re going to have!” How many children does he now have? Zip. How many will he have? That many!

So how many is that? Ever seen the milky way on a really dark night? Astronomers tell us that with the naked eye, we can see about 4500 stars. If you put some telescopic clothes on your eye, you can see a whole lot more. In our own little galaxy alone, there are about 300 billion stars. But in all the galaxies of the universe, they tell us there are about 1 septillion. How many’s that? That’s a one followed by 24 zeros. The best way to comprehend it is that there are as many stars in the universe as there are grains of sand on all the beaches of the world. That’s a lot! If you were to count them, one a second, day and night, it would take you 32 quadrillion years, a 32 followed by 16 zeros. Have fun. I’ll take their word for it. When God makes a promise, He goes big, amen? How is this to be understood? Certainly in the visible stars, since Abram probably didn’t have a telescope. So that promise has been fulfilled many many times over. But who knows what God has in store, amen? Go big or go home! And who’s bigger than God? Oh wait. I keep forgetting, how many children does Abram now have? Zip.

And Moses, writing 1500 years before Jesus came says in Vs 6. Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness. Say faith. That took faith and lots of it! Romans 4:18 says, “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed.” In the hall of faith, Heb 11:11 says, Abram believed God “because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.” He believed God would keep His word. And God did keep His Word. But we know the rest of the story. Abram didn’t. He just knew God. And he believed God and he trusted God to do what He promised! And when he did believe, what happened? God credited his belief to him as righteousness. Right standing with God. Holiness, perfection. Even though he wasn’t holy or perfect. This is kind of like going to the bank and saying I believe my million dollar loan has been paid off because I trust the bank president. And she says, “I’ll take that as payment.” Faith is the currency of salvation. Paid for by Jesus’ blood. **Who** we have faith in is crucial. This is ONLY possible by Jesus’ sacrifice. We

only acquire righteousness, right standing with God, not by doing good deeds, not by being perfect, but by putting our faith, our trust in Christ.

This great spiritual truth is mentioned 3 times in the New Testament to reinforce the fact that God never changed His plans for salvation. Not one plan for the Old Testament and another for the New. From the very beginning, He wanted us to trust Him, to put our belief in Him to be our shield and our reward and not to earn it by being good enough, by working for it, by being perfect. Some of us were raised in pretty strict homes. That's not a bad thing. But let's understand that no matter how good we are, we all still sin and fall short of God's glory and without faith, we are hopelessly lost! **With** faith in Christ we are forever saved! When Paul talks about the armor of God in Eph 6, he says our shield is what? Our faith! Trusting, believing God! Even when we can't see, when we don't have what He has promised. God was Abram's shield and he had that shield by his faith. And we can too.

God also reminds Abram of His promise concerning the land. Say the land. Vs 7 (God) 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." To which Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" Which sure sounds like us. Full of faith one minute, questioning God the next. In mercy and in grace, God then reveals Himself to Abram through a very strange sounding ritual where Abram sacrificed a heifer (a cow before her first calf), a goat, a ram, a dove and a pigeon. He split the heifer, goat and ram, in two as God told him and then he waited. And as he waited, God came. Vs 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 your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 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 fathers 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."

Say wow. God prophesied over 200 years in advance how the Israelites would be enslaved in Egypt **and** how God would deliver them. He also promised they would return to right where Abram was at that moment to inherit that very land. And then Vs 17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. 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." Say covenant. The fire and smoke passing through the sacrifices was God's Holy Spirit, His presence, signing the promise, confirming His covenant with Abram.

Sadly, in the very next chapter, Abram's wife Sarai, doubts God and comes up with her own plan to fulfill God's promise. How often we do that. "I know your Word says this, but I've got a better plan, God. You need my help." No you don't and no He doesn't. We just need to trust and wait. Doubt often leads us into disobedience and sadly, Abram doesn't stand in Sarai's way and has a child by the servant, Hagar. We're still paying for that lack of faith, that lack of obedience today as all the Arabs who have been at war with Israel over the millennia came from Ishmael. It wasn't good for Hagar, for Ishmael, for Sarai or for Abram. But God was still able to work in spite of their disobedience. I wish we had time to look at how God came to Hagar who was a hopeless victim, kicked out of her home with a small child and both left to die in the desert. God saw her and He saved her! God sees you and He can save you today! No matter how you've been victimized and used, no matter how you've victimized and used others. Come to Him. Accept Him, Receive Him. Please?

Two chapters and perhaps 20 or more years after Gen 15, in Gen 17, when Abram was 99 years old, God appeared to him again and confirmed this covenant. Vs 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." So at 99, Abram gets a new name! A new identity! He's a new person in God! When we're born again and enter into covenant with God through Jesus, He gives us a new identity!

Vs 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 are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." And then God specifies circumcision as a sign of the covenant. It was a visible sign on every male descendent of Abraham. Let me say a word about circumcision as delicately as I can. This is a sign of God's covenant with the Jews, not the Gentiles. Many non-Jews are circumcised, not as a sign of God's covenant but for health or preference. I visited a dear man years ago who is in heaven today but he was worried he would not get there because he had never been circumcised. Somewhere he got that idea. Circumcision saves no one. It is by grace we are saved, through what? Faith! The same faith that Abram had which was credited to him as righteousness. Good deeds, good works, holiness, perfect living.

But notice God here promises the whole land of Canaan. Say whole land. And now you know why the enemy has been working so hard over the last 4000 years to push Abraham's descendants out of that land. Why people who don't even know what they're shouting are fighting the devil's battle trying to evict the Israelis from their inheritance and frustrate God's promise. To wrestle the promised land out of their control. This

doesn't mean Israel is perfect. They're not. But it does mean God will keep His promises. And I pray for the day the Jews embrace the promised Messiah and are saved.

Vs 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." God gives Sarai a new name too. Sarai meant princess as of a single home, but Sarah was greatly expanded, even implying Mother of Nations. Vs 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?" In chapter 18, Sarah too laughs when God's messengers tell them she would have a baby within a year. But guess what. She did! About whom we'll say more next time. But your laughter will not keep God from doing His will. It might harm you and your relationship with Him. It might cause you to disobey and create some bad circumstances for God to straighten out, but He will do His will. We're much better off to trust, believe, obey, and thank Him.

8 chapters, 25 or more years, How do we sum it all up today? Say faith. Whenever Abram trusted God as he did when he moved to Canaan, when he let Lot choose first, when he rescued Lot, when gave a tenth to Melchizedek, and when he believed God's covenant promises, he was blessed. But whenever he doubted and tried to push God, to help God, to force God's hand, it went very badly. God has made even more and greater promises to us than to Abraham. Will we believe Him? Trust Him? For when we do, our faith is likewise credited to us as righteousness as we trust in Jesus to be shield and our very great reward!