

Faithful Living in a Fallen World: A Study in the Life of Abraham

Lesson #6: *Genesis 15:7-21*

How Do You Spell “Reassurance”? C-O-V-E-N-A-N-T!



THE WORD from Boston, MASS is NOT good news for Christians. [From October 11, 2016, The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination and Attorney General Maura Healey both interpret the commonwealth's public accommodations laws, as amended by the Legislature in July, to force churches to open church changing rooms, shower facilities, restrooms, and other intimate areas based on their perceived gender identity, and not their biological sex, in violation of the churches' religious beliefs. Because those laws also prohibit covered entities from making statements intended "to discriminate" or to "incite" others to do so, the commission and attorney general also intend to force churches and pastors to refrain from religious expression regarding sexuality that

conflicts with the government's views.]

With that bit of disturbing news playing in the background of our minds, let's look at The Covenant Promise God makes to Abraham (and to his descendants, US [cf *Galatians 3:29*]) is found in something sometimes known as the "Quad Promise" of the Covenant. What is the covenantal "Quad Promise" the Lord gives US? And what deep needs do we have that God's covenantal "Quad Promise" meets?

- **God will have a PEOPLE, 12:2;** a particular kind of people, with a particular worldview, and a particular ultimate standard for values, ethics, and religion. Who GOD says we are is what we are.

(This [part of the promise] meets our deep need for IDENTITY.)

We don't get our identity from anything, or anyone (peers, culture, whatever), but from God. & our identity does NOT change, regardless of how other people identify us [as "... phobes, hatemongers, whatever..."]. You are what GOD says you are. Our identity in Christ is settled and unchanging. It never leaves us.

- **Who will have a PLACE, 12:1;** and even though we are aliens and strangers passing through this world as we know it right now, our destiny is ultimately the New Heavens & the New Earth (which is this world, restored to what God intended it to be in all its glory and righteousness). And God has told us to occupy the PLACE He has put us and to flourish there, until Christ returns.

(This meets our deep need for DESTINY.)

Contrary to a popular cultural myth, our destiny is not the grave, then nothingness. We are people on a life journey, heading towards a glorious destiny that outweighs every bad experience we will ever face in this fallen world. [One second of the “weight of glory” outweighs the weight of all our suffering, combined.]

- **And who *will* have God’s PROTECTIVE PRESENCE, 12:3a, 28:15;** and no matter what happens to us, nothing can touch our souls which are locked in the safety deposit box of God’s eternal protection. Also, in this world, every day, the Lord protects us in ways we remain blissfully unaware of. [near misses, bridge collapses, trains, planes . . . Mike Dever story . . . Dever was on security duty when Regan was shot. He was supposed to be closest to the shooter. Had he been in that spot instead of Jim Brady, who was 6 inches taller than Dever, the bullet would have hit Regan in the head!]

(This meets our deep need for SECURITY.)

There’s a reason why the security business is a booming business [alarms, doors, bars on windows, security guards.] We want to feel physically secure. AND we want to feel secure about our future. God gives us the security of knowing “ . . . Whoever comes to me I will NEVER cast away . . . “

- **And who *will* be part of God’s PROGRAM of blessing all the nations of the world, ultimately, through His Son, Jesus Christ, 12:3b. We are called by God to be a blessing to everyone we encounter, and to spread the life-altering Good News of the Gospel into every corner of our existence, and into the far corners of the world. As we witness for Jesus and people are blessed, we become part of a great movement of God.**

(This meets our deep need for SIGNIFICANCE.)

As Christians, our significance is bound up in something much bigger than we are. We are part of a MOVEMENT which is guaranteed success: The Kingdom of God.

Exciting stuff. But sometimes, we lose our PERSPECTIVE and need REASSURANCE when it comes to God’s “Quad Promise”. Especially when the “Quad Promise” seems from all appearances to be falling apart for those who claim to be True Believers. [our IDENTITY is being smeared by a fallen culture under the devil’s dominion, and even people in the church are seeking to find their identity outside of who they are in Christ. More often than not, we not only feel “out of place” in this world, but the place we are seems to always be under attack. We certainly don’t feel secure in a world without boundaries. And, this fallen world welcomes any opportunity to remind us of how insignificant we really are.]

In this lesson, we consider 3 affirmations about How God's Covenant is God's answer to our need for reassurance when it comes to us being confident that what God promises really will come to pass!

1. God's people **NEED** God's Covenant.

We see this in *Vv 7-10*. The question of *Vs 8* is not a question of Faith (Abram believes), but a question of what?

It's an issue of FAITH longing for the ASSURANCE of the promises of God. We need something concrete to affirm that everything is OK and that God is going to keep His promises to us.

**** Covenant is what God does when He gets FORMAL about a PROMISE. Covenant is the WRAPPER God puts around a promise to help you believe it. ****

[A man and woman promise privately they will love each other always (. . . always and forever . . .). But what is it that makes that promise FORMAL and BINDING? The COVENANT of MARRIAGE. Imagine . . . going into a grocery store where there's no wrappers on the canned goods. A clerk who knows and will point you to what you want is stationed at each aisle, but the canned goods just sit there in all their tinny glory. You want Del Monte cut green beans, you take the clerk's word for it, but you sure would feel better about it IF you could see red, green, and yellow label on the can with a proper picture of the green beans on the label.] God KNOWS you struggle w/the abstract promises He gives you, so He gives you something else: God stoops to our level and puts "handles" and gives you "visual aids" so we "get it". It's called a COVENANT, and it's an act of GRACE we need because we are so prone to "lose sight" of the promises of God.

2. God's **PLANS** take a **LONG** time.

- **We see this in *Vv 13-16*. How long? And why does this bother us? (*cf Luke 19:11*)**
Somewhere between 400 & 1K years before God's Promise is fully fulfilled. The plan of God frustrates us because it goes against the grain of our expectations. We are always wanting the Kingdom of God to come in its fullness immediately, right now, and do away w/our enemies! Truth be known, we prefer for God to do His work like a microwave oven heats up a meal. We take the "microwave mentality" and apply that mentality to how God "shoulda" done things (why can't the Kingdom come BEFORE the election in November?! Our expectations are full of "shoulda" regarding God.
- **What makes this long time even more difficult to deal with (and for us, too)? (*cf Acts 14:22*)**
We are told that "through MANY tribulations we MUST enter the Kingdom of God." The path to the Kingdom is a path that runs right through the valley of tribulations, not around it or over it.

**** Covenant people (believers, Christians) are not SPARED distress but PRESERVED through it. [(God's Covenant is NOT a shot to immunize you from distress. But . . . Whatever your distress, you WILL get through it. My Dad's favorite visitation passage, "It came to pass . . . it did NOT come to stay . . .)] The Lord will be faithful to His promises, not apart from but THROUGH suffering [Acts 14:22, again]. ****

What does this "heads up" on suffering underscore about the Lord? How is this different from the way most people deal with us? Our Lord doesn't try to hide the Truth from us. He's candid. He says, "This WILL happen to you in a fallen world, but NONE OF THIS will keep me from being faithful to you, no matter what." In God's Covenant contract with us, there's no fine print, no loopholes, no escape clauses, no nasty stuff hidden away somewhere in an end note somewhere in the back of the book. Unlike Today's health & wealth preachers, our God doesn't present the Christian life as something like winning an all-expenses trip to the Bahamas from "Wheel of Fortune." Friends, you can TRUST a God like this!

**** God's CANDOR stirs up our confidence; His FRANKNESS feeds our faith! ****

3. God's COMMITMENT to His people goes DEEP.

- **We see this in Vv 9-12, 17. What is the meaning of this strange ceremony?** (cartoon like "the fatted cow" on the parable of the prodigal son)
It's what was known in those days as a "Covenant Curse" ceremony.
- **The "Covenant Curse" ceremony was an incredibly sacred moment for two reasons. (...idea for a future wedding ceremony??)**
 - **Because it communicated a BOND between the people taking the Covenant.**
Walking together through the bodies of the animals communicated a bond, saying, "We are closer now than the left and right part of the animals we are walking through right now. It's an act of TRUST between the two people walking through the severed parts of the animal!"
 - **Because it communicated the SEVERITY of the promises being made.**
The 2 people walking through the animal halves are saying, "If I fail to live up to MY END of the bargain, may I be torn in two even as these animals are torn in two." This is WAY beyond, "Cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye". This is as good as a guarantee gets!
- **What does the firepot symbolize? The flaming torch? What do both represent?**
Firepot = God's JUSTICE / Flaming torch = God's RIGHTEOUSNESS, His JUDGMENT. Yahweh Himself. The LORD is passing through these severed animals.

- **What is Abram's part in this ceremony?**

Nothing. Abram is a non-participant. This Covenant is NOT conditional upon ANYTHING Abram does or does NOT do! Yahweh Himself is taking on the curse of the Covenant & saying "If I am unfaithful to my promises to you, may I be dis-membered and destroyed like these animals have been."

**** In an amazing act of grace, in living color (!), Yahweh is saying, "I would rather DESTROY Myself than be UNFAITHFUL to My people. God Himself is willing to SUFFER the CURSE of the Covenant! ****

"You WILL be a PEOPLE with a PLACE and under my PROTECTION who will carry out my Kingdom PROGRAM. That's my PROMISE to you, and here's my COMMITMENT to keep this promise!"

***** The grace of God in the OT is AMPLIFIED in a way we will never fully appreciate this side of Heaven when in the NT (cf Galatians 3:10-14), in the person of Jesus, God takes OUR curse for breaking the Covenant (cf Exodus 20:1-7) upon HIMSELF and SUFFERS, in our place, for US. Jesus is DESTROYED for OUR Covenant-breaking! *****

WE FAILED TO BE FAITHFUL TO GOD, AND JESUS PAID FOR OUR UNFAITHFULNESS WITH HIS DEATH! In our place, Jesus experienced the CURSE of the Covenant! As the blood ran down the cross & dripped on the ground, the smoldering firepot of God's justice met side by side with the flaming torch of God's holiness & righteousness, and together on the cross, God's justice and righteousness passed through the broken body of Jesus.

- **Ultimately, how do we KNOW (total reassurance) the "Quad Promise" will come to pass for us?**
We KNOW because of the COVENANT. In the person of JESUS, God both KEEPS the Covenant, and was punished in our place for NOT keeping the Covenant. God in Christ has done EVERYTHING WE NEED to fulfill EVERY promises He makes to us. We ARE a PEOPLE w/a PLACE under God's PROTECTION gladly carrying out God's Kingdom PROGRAM / we have an IDENTITY, a DESTINY, God's SECURITY, and the SIGNIFICANCE that comes from being part of an awesome MOVEMENT of God B/C . . . we serve a Good who is just THAT DEEPLY COMMITTED to us.