

Plan and Purpose Bible Lesson #III-5—Genesis 15-19

In Genesis 15 God adds another promise and elaborates on a couple that have already been given. (Read Genesis 15:1) We said in our last lesson that there were five things that are necessary for any nation or kingdom to exist. One of those was to have a religious system. God is providing that in this promise. Their religion was to be monotheistic, i.e. there was to only be one God. God establishes Himself as that God, He was to be **“thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”** Not only was He to be the protector, the one upon which the people could depend, but He was to be an **“exceeding great reward,”** i.e. He was to be a great provider for them. As we will see as we study further, the greatest reward is immortality and all that goes with it.

(Read Genesis 15:2-6) The promises that we have looked at so far either are that Abram will have a great number of descendants, or the promises are to go to the descendants. Abram is beginning to realize that there is a problem. He is getting to be an old man and, even more importantly, his wife, Sarai, is getting beyond child bearing age and they have yet to have a child.

So we find him trying to help God out with the problem that Abram sees. The law of the land at that time was known as the **“Code of Khammurabi,”** which was written and established by King Amraphel, one of the four kings we discussed earlier. In this law, one born in ones household was considered to be an heir, though he might be a servant. Abram asks God if Eliezer, Abram’s steward, who was born in Abram’s house, could suffice as his heir. God rejects this idea and then, strangely, proceeded to emphasize to Abram what a multitude of seed Abram would have by showing him the stars in the heavens and telling Abram that if he could count the stars, he would be able to count his seed. This is the second of four versions of the promise that Abram’s seed would become a huge multitude. He tells him again that Abram would have a child that was his own child. Then a very important statement is made: **“And he believed in the LORD: and he counted it to him for righteousness.”** We will see the importance of this statement when we study Paul’s epistle to the Romans where he explains the doctrine of **“imputation.”**

(Read Gen. 15:7-14) God then repeats the land promise. Abram, while he believes God, still would like to have something to hold to as evidence that he would have a child. So Abram asks God, **“whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?”**

Today, if two people make a legal contract with each other, the common practice is to write out the contract, both people sign it before a Notary Public to assure each other that they are who they say they are, and then they file it with the county clerk and recorder as a matter of public record. A custom at that time was, if two people wanted to assure the other that they would keep a covenant, or agreement, or contract, that they would make with each other, was to take an animal (sheep, goat, or cow, probably depending on how important the contract

was) and kill it and divide it in half and lay the two halves out opposite each other. Then the two parties to the agreement would walk arm in arm between the two halves of the animal, in effect saying, may the same happen to me if I don't keep my part of the agreement. In answer to Abram's question, God told him to take 3 animals, a heifer, a goat, and a ram plus a turtle dove and a young pigeon (this tells us how important this covenant or contract was) and prepare them for the ceremony of confirming an agreement, or covenant. Abram did as God told him by killing and dividing the animals, though he was not to divide the birds, and then waited. As the sun was going down, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Abram. We're not told whether it was by a dream or whether God spoke to Abram, but He prophesied telling Abram that his seed would be a stranger in a land that is not theirs and that they would serve that nation and be afflicted by them 400 years. Also that God would judge that nation and Abram's seed would come out from it with great substance. We now know that the nation God was speaking of was Egypt. We're told in Exodus 12:40 that the sojourning of the children of Israel in Egypt was 430 years. Both the 400 and the 430 years are correct. At the time that God was telling Abram this, the land of Canaan was under the jurisdiction of Egypt. The 430 years is dated from the calling of Abram telling him to travel to the land of Canaan, while the 400 years dated from the birth of Isaac. The Israelites were only in the actual land of Egypt for about 210 years.

(Read Genesis 15:15, 16) God promises Abram a long, peaceful life and then tells him that his descendents would return to the land in the fourth generation, for He says, **“the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full.”** We have discussed the difference between God's will and His purpose. As so often with the Israelites, God seems to me to be giving the Amorites and the people of the land of Canaan time to repent, though His plan is that they will not do so. If I am right, they have a little over 400 years to make things right, but when that 400 years is up, God is going to bring Abram's descendents back into the land to possess it.

(Read Genesis 15:17-21) When the sun went down, vs. 17 tells us **“behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.”** The significance is that God alone, manifested as the smoking furnace and burning lamp, took full responsibility for the covenant that He made with Abram by passing between the halves of the animals without Abraham. While it might first appear that this only applied to the promise of the land, that is extended in vs. 18 to include all of the land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River and south to the border of Egypt, Gen. 22:16-18 and Heb. 6:13-14 confirm that all of the promises are included in this **unconditional** covenant. It is very important that we remember that these promises are unconditional as we will come across events and covenants that seem to contradict this, but the ultimate purpose of this covenant is expressed in passing by the apostle Paul in Romans 4:13, that Abram's seed would inherit the world, i.e. become the rulers with Christ of the whole world. God has kept true to these promises and as confirmed here, has done it Himself; the number one thing He has done was His dying on the cross in the

personage of Jesus Christ and His resurrection, which we will see as we study further, is the foundation of God's plan. We will see much more of what He has done to carry out these promises as we continue our study.

As we study throughout the Bible, we will frequently find that God does something for His name's sake. These all refer to these promises. God has put His name at risk if He fails to keep any of these promises. An example of this is in Psalms 106:7-8, **"Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea. Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known."** Israel provoked God at the Red sea, yet because of these promises, God saved them. We will see many examples of this as we study.

(Read Heb. 6:16-20) God's promises are immutable, or unchangeable. The author of Hebrews is attempting to show this fact to his readers. These promises here in Genesis were the first of two immutable things that God promised unconditionally that the author of Hebrews discusses in verse 18. We will look at the second one when we study the book of Hebrews. This unconditional nature of these promises is something that was recognized by the prophets and the apostles in their writings. It has a definite bearing on history, past, present and future, even into eternity.

Some have argued that the fact that Abram was humble before God and believed Him actually became a condition for the promises. It may have been a reason that God made the promises to him, though if we believe in the sovereignty of God, I think we have to believe that this was part of God's plan from the beginning. But it was not a condition, i.e. Abram was not required to perform any level of performance to receive the promises. This does not mean that Abram did not continue to believe and worship God as he did so out of his love of God. But the statement in Gen. 22:16, **"By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord."** is a statement in principle we see repeated in Gen 26:3 and Gen. 28:12-15 when God confirmed these promises to Isaac and Jacob respectively.

(Read Gen. 16:1-6) Recall in chapter 12, we were told that Abram and Sarai, his wife, and their household went down into Egypt because of a serious famine in the land of Canaan. Because Sarai was so beautiful, Abram told her and their household to say to the Egyptians that Sarai was his sister, which she actually was his half sister, so that the Pharaoh would not kill Abram and take Sarai for his wife. They did this, but the Pharaoh was so taken with Sarai that he took her into his harem. However, God plagued the Pharaoh so badly that he realized that he had made a mistake and he asked Abram to take his wife and his household and leave Egypt. The Pharaoh gave Abram considerable wealth and he gave Sarai a handmaid. The book of Jasher says that this handmaid was one of the Pharaoh's own daughters he had by a concubine. This is Hagar, actually an Egyptian princess, who became a handmaid in the household of Abram.

Both Abram and Sarai are guilty of trying to help God provide an heir to them that could

inherit the promises that God made to Abram and his seed. This is Sarai's attempt to do so. As we can see, this turned into a disaster so far as Sarai was concerned. Keep in mind that both Sarai and Hagar are aware of these promises to Abram. When Hagar conceived, Sarai realized that it was really possible, though she was the one who came up with the plan, that the child that Hagar, instead of her, would bring forth could be the inheritor of these promises, so she became very jealous. She mistreated Hagar so badly that Hagar fled.

(Read Gen. 16:7-16) God had a plan for the child that was to be born of Hagar. He instructed Hagar to return to her mistress and when the child she was carrying was born, it would be a son and she was to name him Ishmael, which means "God hears." He also promised that Hagar's seed would be multiplied exceedingly. We know today that the Arab people are the seed of Ishmael and that the prophecies that God gave to Hagar concerning her son have come to pass in the Arab people.

Hagar did as the angel told her and returned to Abram and Sarai's household. Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born. But we see in the promise that God made with Hagar that the promises that were made to Abram would not be inherited by Ishmael, so we still have the problem of Abram and Sarai having no children.

(Read Gen. 17:1-8) In verse 1, God tells Abram that He is the Almighty God, El Shaddai. This is the first occurrence of this name for God in Scripture, and the meaning of the name tells us much about the circumstance here. The Companion Bible gives the following explanation as an appendix: *SHADDAI is in every instance translated "Almighty", and is indicated by small capital letters ("ALMIGHTY"). It is God (El), not as the source of strength, but of grace; not as Creator, but as the Giver. Shaddai is the All-bountiful. This title does not refer to His creative power, but to His power to supply all the needs of His people. Its first occurrence is in Gen. 17:1, and is used to show Abraham that He Who called him out to walk alone before Him could supply all his need. Even so it is the title used in 2 Cor. 6:18, where we are called to "come out" in separation from the world. It is always used in connection with El (see above).*

Abram was 99 years old by this time and obviously concerned about not having seed, so by God telling him He was El Shaddai, He is assuring Abram that He will do as He promised. As Abram worshipped God on hearing this, God also changed Abram's name to Abraham. Abram means "Exalted Father," and Abraham means "Father of a Multitude." God then reiterated some of the previous promises He had made and added some additional ones. Not only would Abraham's seed be a great nation, but Abraham would be the father of many nations. The promise that God would be Abraham's shield and exceeding great reward is expanded as God says of Abraham's seed, **"I will be their God."** The land promise is reiterated as well. New to the list is in verse 6 after He reiterates the fruitfulness promise, **"and kings shall come out of thee."** While there have been a large number of kings, or rulers, come from Abraham's seed, the King of Kings Himself, by being born of the virgin Mary, is a descendent of Abraham. The purpose that God has is to, from Abraham and his descendents, develop a kingdom of rulers. I

need to point out that not all of Abraham's descendents will be part of these rulers, for as Paul points out in Galatians 4:29, **"And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."** This statement applied not only to those who were genetically descendents of Abraham, but non-descendents as well who have been justified and sanctified in Christ.

(Read Genesis 17:9-14) This covenant of circumcision has since been badly abused by men. By the time we get to the New Testament, the inference is that it is part of the law that God gave to Moses and the Pharisees and Sadducees had made it a condition for eternal salvation. So it is important to note the source of the ritual and the real reason for it. This was to be a token, or a sign of the covenant, or promises that God made to Abraham, not a condition for their implementation. Remember that the promises are unconditional, i.e. God took total responsibility for their implementation. Abraham, every man child of his seed, any male born in his house or purchased with money, not of his seed, was to be circumcised. The babies were to be circumcised when they were 8 days old. Doctors today tell us that a baby's highest resistance to pain is on the 8th day from their birth. Anyone who is not circumcised was to be cut off from his people as this would, in a sense, signify that they did not believe God.

(Read Genesis 17:15-22) After promising Abraham, for quite a number of years, that he would have a large family, God is finally pinning down the birth date of Isaac, Abraham's son that would inherit the promises. Abraham laughs at the thought of him and Sarah, who was 89 at the time, having a child. He regards this as an impossibility, even though he believes God. In Abraham's mind, the problem was with Sarah and her age, as Abraham continued to father children with another wife after Sarah died. To him it would be so much easier for God to accept Ishmael as Abraham's heir, so he said to God, **"O that Ishmael might live before thee!"** Again, God rejects Abraham's offer to help the problem of him not having a son by Sarai. In making the promise that Sarai would have a son at the same time in the next year, He changed Sarai's name to Sarah, or Princess. God did hear Abraham's plea for Ishmael and reiterates his promise concerning Ishmael and enlarges it some, but He makes it very clear that the promises were to go to Isaac, the son of promise.

(Read Genesis 17:23-27) Abraham was obedient to God's requirement that he be circumcised as well as Ishmael and all of the men servants of his household.

(Read Gen. 18:1-8) This gives us a look at the character of Abraham. At this point, there is no indication that Abraham knew who these three men were, yet he offered the best hospitality he could offer.

We see the word "lord" used several times in this chapter. They all come from the Hebrew *adon* or *adonai*. In the King James translation, if none of the letters are capitalized, it is the word *adon* and refers to man. If only the L is capitalized, it is from Adon or Adonai, and can refer to either God or man. If the L is capitalized and the rest of the letters are in smaller capitals, it is from Adonai or Yahweh, and of course refers only to God.

(Read Gen. 18:9-15) Very quickly, the identity of these men comes to light. Obviously one of these men is Yahweh. First we saw that Abraham laughed when told that Sarah would bear a son, now Sarah laughed when she heard the same. It is interesting then that they were to name their son, Isaac, which means laughter. The propensity to laugh has been a characteristic of Isaac's seed ever since. At any rate, God has set the time for the birth of Isaac.

However, there is a more immediate and pressing problem at the moment. (Read Gen. 18:16-22) the LORD tells Abraham the reason for Him being there. He is there to see how great the sin is in Sodom. The two men with Him travel on toward Sodom, but He stays to talk further with Abraham.

(Read Gen. 18:23-33) Abraham intercedes for Sodom. Remember that this is where Lot and his family are. In verse 25, Abraham addresses the man who stayed as the **"Judge of all the earth."** In the gospel of John 5:22, we're told that the Father **"hath committed all judgment unto the Son"** and then in vs. 27 Jesus says, **"And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man."** I think this leaves little doubt that the "man" to whom Abraham was talking was Jesus Christ. Abraham starts out asking if He would destroy Sodom if there were fifty righteous men in Sodom. When the LORD said He wouldn't destroy it if there were fifty, Abraham thought he might better play it safe and asked if He would destroy it if only forty-five righteous men were found there. The LORD promised not to destroy it if there were forty-five, but Abraham again thought he better play it safe and lowered the amount to forty, then to thirty, and finally to ten and the LORD promised to not destroy it if there were only ten. They then left off communing and the LORD went His way.

(Read Gen. 19:1-3) Lot certainly knew the moral character of Sodom and seeing these two angels, who appeared as men, he sought to protect them by having them stay in his home that night. The fact that Lot sat in the gate indicates that he was a judge in the city. The gates of the city was the equivalent of our city hall. The men of the city derided him for being in this position later in verse 9.

(Read Gen. 19:4-11) The margin of my Bible adds the word "carnally" to the phrase **"that we may know them"** in verse 5. This is not in the original text, but adding it makes sure we know the intent of these men of Sodom. Lot tried to reason with them but to no avail. He even offered his daughters to them to do as they would with them, but the men of Sodom were determined to have the two men. Finally, the two angels smote the men with blindness so that they could no longer find the door.

(Read Gen. 19:12-14) When warned to leave the city by the angels and to take his whole family with him, Lot was unable to convince his son-in-laws and his daughters, that they had married, to leave with him. They just thought he was joking.

(Read Gen. 19:15-28) Even Lot is hesitant to leave the city. The angels had to literally physically force him to leave.

In Gen. 13:10-11 we're told that Lot chose to move to Sodom, that was located on the plain of Jordan, because it was well watered and was like the garden of the LORD. Then in Gen. 14:10 we're told that the vale of Siddim was full of slime pits. This was apparently where the Jordan River ran through this plain where Sodom was located. Slime, as used in the Bible, is asphalt. In Gen. 14:3, Moses tells us that the vale of Siddim is now the Salt Sea, or the Dead Sea. We discussed in our last lesson that these slime pits supplied the fuel for this great destruction of these cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Before the destruction of these cities, the Jordan River continued on a course between the Sinai Peninsula and Arabia and emptied into the Gulf of Aqaba. Due to the burning of these slime pits and oil that was deep underground, the intense heat and the underground explosions made the area, now the Dead Sea, one of the deep depressions upon the earth's surface. The Jordan River then ran into this depression and was never able to flow out of it. Evaporation and other causes have kept the river within these bounds so that it no longer flows beyond the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea water today is very high in various minerals.

This high mineral content, as a result of burning of the asphalt and oil, probably contributed to Lot's wife becoming a pillar of salt when she stopped to look back. This also tells us how narrow Lot's escape was with his two daughters. Verse 28 describes how huge the fire was as Abraham viewed it from several miles away.

(Read Gen. 19:29) It was because of Abraham's intercession for the cities that God sent Lot out of the midst of the destruction. Lot was first afraid to go to the mountains, but chose to go to the city of Zoar, but then he feared to live in Zoar so then went into the mountains and lived in a cave with his two daughters. (Read Gen. 19:30-38) He was aware of the wickedness of the people in the cities, but probably like most of us, felt that wickedness would not rub off on him. While he apparently maintained his own virtue, the wickedness affected his family to the point that he lost all that he had plus all of his family with the exception of his two daughters. His two daughters were affected as well. It did not seem wrong to them to decide that since they were separated from all other people, they would get their father drunk and then lie with him in an attempt to preserve his seed. They took turns and both conceived and each had a son. The oldest named her son Moab and the younger named her son Benammi who became the father of the Ammonites. We find the descendents of these two individuals quite a bit in the rest of the Bible. However, it seems that the fact that they were conceived in sin affected their seed as the record we have of them is far from good. JRL

