

This Land is Your Land

- Genesis 15:7-21
- We saw last week that Abram believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. God promised Abram a people. Now God promises Abram a land. He says, this land is your land, as the folk song used to go. Abram utters a faith-question, not a doubt-challenge in response. “How am I to know that I shall possess it?” He essentially says to God’s promise, “Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!” But this promise will come at a very high cost, as we will see. Let’s look at this passage today under three main points: Covenant cut, Suffering and salvation promised, Redemption won.
- **Covenant cut (verses 9-12)**
- If I told you to go home, take 5 animals you own, maybe your dog, cat, parakeet, gerbil, and goldfish, and cut them in half and lay the pieces side by side, each half across from the other, I am guessing you would all walk out of here and never come back. But that’s what God told Abram to do with a cow, a goat, a ram, a dove and a pigeon, and Abram didn’t bat an eye. It was normal in those days, including in Mesopotamia where Abram had come from, that two parties would make a covenant in just this way. They would both walk between the bloody pieces, a gruesome path of promise. They were saying to one another by doing so, “May it be done to me what was done to these animals if I do not keep this covenant.”
- Each of these five animals God commanded Abram to cut in half would become part of the sacrificial system that would continue for God’s people until Jesus became the perfect and final sacrifice. This day in Abram’s life reminds us that since the fall, when God covered Adam and Eve with animal skins, requiring the life of those animals, that the covenant we have with God is a blood covenant. As Hebrews 9:22 says, “...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” This is how a covenant was made. Something had to die, and eventually, praise be to God, that something became a Someone. The only One. The Son of God as our perfect high priest would enter the holy place, but not like all the other priests who entered “with blood not (their) own.” (Hebrews 9:25). Jesus entered as the priest **and** the sacrifice.
- Verse 11, the birds of prey come down to devour the dead animals, but Abram drives them away. Many believe this is a foreshadowing of the attacks that will come on his people, and the protection God will give to his people.
- As the sun went down, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a “dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.” The last time the Bible mentioned a deep sleep was when God caused Adam to go to the third level of anesthesia so he could remove a rib and make Eve. But here, the sleep comes as the covenant sacrifice is made, attended by deep darkness and great dread. It foreshadows the cross, where from noon until 3pm, the last three hours of Jesus’ crucifixion, there was darkness over the whole land as the new covenant was being cut. “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice...My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34) The darkness and the weight of that moment we will never understand. We can only imagine the horror and be amazed at the sacrifice.

- Derek Kidner writes of this scene with Abram, “The setting is somber in every detail, partly no doubt to emphasize that the covenant must be carried through in the teeth of opposition (11) and by means of great judgments (13-14).” That brings us to...
- **Suffering and salvation promised (verses 13-16)**
- God now tells Abram what is going to happen to his offspring after he is gone. Aren't you glad God doesn't tell us those things? Would you want to know that many years after you died, all your family would be enslaved and afflicted for hundreds of years? But it was necessary for Abram to be told so that we would have a record of God's covenant-keeping love for his people. And remember, this book was written by Moses in the wilderness, inspired by God, so that the people of God would know where they had come from. And to know that the 400 years they spent as slaves in Egypt was part of God's plan and purpose. (Again!)
- As I told you last week, someone said to me recently that his life is based on the belief that good things happen to good people. Karma. Three comments about that as a foundation of faith are: 1. There are no good people. We are all sinners at birth, separated from God. Jesus asked the rich young ruler why he called Jesus good when in fact there is no one good but God. He was testing the young man to see if he knew that there was no one good, including himself, and to see if he believed that Jesus was God! (Mark 10:18) 2. Bad things happen to all people because of sin; we live in a broken and fallen world. 3. ALL things work together for good for only one group: those who are called according to his purpose. (Ro. 8:28) For that reason, we who are followers of Jesus: called, justified, being sanctified, and one day glorified, should rejoice with all our might!
- Next, God promises that the nation that afflicts his people will be judged and that his people will come out with great possessions. God told Moses at the burning bush that he would bring the people out and they would also “plunder the Egyptians.”
- Then God tells Abram he would not possess the promised land as his ancestors would but good news, Abram, you will die in peace at a good old age. God promises a peaceful death, but not a peaceful life. It reminded me of when Paul and Barnabas were encouraging the believers to continue in the faith, saying that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) Phillips Brooks, the great American preacher in the 1800's said, “Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men (and women)! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks! Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle. But you shall be a miracle.”
- God then promises that the people will come back to the land in 4 generations, which was 400 years during the time of the patriarchs. He says, “for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” The Amorites were wicked people living in Canaan and were known mainly because of their obsession with sex and war. They practiced ritual child sacrifice and many other abominations that I will not mention. God gave them many years to repent, but when their sin loop was full, God released the army of Israel, led by Joshua, to destroy them. You know the only time anyone ever asked the sun to stand still, and it did, happened as Joshua was battling the Amorites? He needed more daylight to conquer them, and with God's favor, a stopped-sun, and help from some

heaven-sent hailstones that killed more Amorites than the sword did, the battle was won, and the Amorites were completely destroyed.

- God gave them many years to repent, and the testimony of God's goodness was all around them, but they would not. Paul wrote about those who refuse to come to God in Romans 2: "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" Derek Kidner said, "Until it was *right* to invade, God's people (had to) wait, if it cost them centuries of hardship." God tarries for the sake of the lost. The people who had been enslaved in Egypt heard that their suffering was in part for the sake of the Amorites, to give them time to repent. That leads us to...
- **Redemption won (verses 17-21)**
- This is the most beautiful part of the story, though it may not seem that way as you just read through it. When there was no daylight left, the sun was gone and it was totally dark, Abram saw a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch pass between the pieces. What is going on? This was a theophany! This was God appearing to Abram as he would hundreds of years later to the children of Israel in the wilderness. There he is a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When God met with Moses to give him the 10 Commandments, Exodus 19 says, "Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire." Abram is witness to this appearance of God in the covenant. But! Even more amazing and important to our faith, this is a unilateral covenant. When a man and woman get married and they make a covenant with one another at the altar, and he kisses the bride and they are pronounced husband and wife, BOTH walk down the aisle together to ratify the covenant they just made. But here, God walks down the aisle, if you will, right between the bloody halves of the five animals. He makes the covenant by himself. Because there is no one greater to swear by, God swears by himself to Abram, and all of Abram's descendants, including you and me who are in Christ, that he will keep his promise. Joshua saw the fulfillment of the promise and wrote, "Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass." (Joshua 21:43,45) It is true for us as well! "And if you are Christ's," Paul wrote, "then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." What are the promises we have from God?
- 1. He will make us a people. 2. He will take us *through* trials and tribulations. 3. He will give us grace for each moment and strength equal to the calling on our lives. 4. He will hold our hands as we pass from this realm to the next, in peace. 5. He will give us a home.
- Prayer
- Greet One Another