

GENESIS 15:1-12,17-18 ST JAMES'; 21.2.16; 11.00 am

INTRODUCTION

After this, the passage in Genesis begins. After what, we might ask! Abram has been fighting a battle. His nephew, Lot, had been captured in an attack on Sodom, so Abram gathered his forces together, and mounted a successful counter-attack to rescue him. In the aftermath, Abram had refused to keep any of the spoils of the battle. He told the king of Sodom: *I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich'* (Genesis 14:22-23). In saying this, Abram declared his allegiance to the LORD, and his confidence that the Lord would provide for all his needs. It was an outstanding act of faith. The problem is that after the exertion of the battle, and making such a bold declaration of faith, Abram was left fearing that the kings he'd defeated would be coming after him, and wondering whether he'd done the right thing in renouncing the spoils he'd won in the battle.

ABRAM . . . HEARD THE LORD

But of course the Lord knew all about it. He knew that Abram needed reassurance. The Lord didn't even wait for Abram to come to him with his misgivings. No, the Lord took the initiative and came to Abram with words of comfort: *Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward* (v 1).

But Abram isn't ready simply to accept the Lord's comfort! He's got a bone to pick with the Lord! Eight years have already passed since the Lord promised to make Abram into *a great nation* (12:2); three years later, the Lord promised to make Abram's *offspring* as numerous as *the dust of the earth* (13:16). And yet, Abram still has no children. And so, Abram's response to the Lord's words is, *what can you give me since I remain childless?* (v 2)

It might not be obvious, but Abram's response is a demonstration of his faith. He knows what the Lord has promised him, and he's not prepared to give up on that promise. Over and again, Scripture shows us that it's good to express to the Lord our frustration, our bewilderment, in fact whatever our reaction to the things that happen to us. There are times when God seems far away, when he seems to be deaf to our prayers, when he seems to allow wrongdoers to prosper. Scripture doesn't encourage us to resign ourselves, and accept things as 'God's will'. Instead, we're encouraged to follow the example of Abram here, and of the psalmist in many places, and to tell the Lord all about it.

After Abram has challenged the Lord, he hears the Lord speak again: *. . . a son coming from your own body will be your heir . . . Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them. . . . So shall your offspring be* (vv 4-5).

Like children, we often want to have everything, now! I know we often have to tell our two that they need to learn to be patient, to wait . . .

Like Abram, we all need to learn the same lesson in our relationship with the Lord. At times, we'll have to wait to receive what he's promised. That doesn't mean that the Lord's forgotten his promise. But the Lord is patient with us, and he'll encourage us when we're struggling.

ABRAM PUT HIS TRUST IN THE LORD

If Abram had simply accepted the Lord's comfort in verse 1, this would have been a very different story! In verse 6, we have a vital key to the way the Lord wants us to relate to him: *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness*. There were lots of reasons why Abram might have doubted the Lord's promise. His wife, Sarai, had never fallen pregnant, and was now too old for childbearing. Abram himself was an old man. It's easy not to believe: but Abram was convinced that *with God all things are possible* (Matthew 19:26). So he took God at his word.

Paul quotes verse 6 in two of his letters (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6), and James also quotes it. Putting our trust in the Lord, or believing the Lord, is the first thing the Lord requires of us. It's always tempting to think that we can earn God's favour by keeping his law. But Abram received God's favour 430 years *before* the Law was given to Moses! Yes, if we've put our faith in the Lord, we'll seek to obey his law. Those who obey the law are showing the evidence, or fruit, of their faith. But what the Lord looks for first in our lives isn't obedience to his law, but faith in him. Faith like Abram's, which is prepared to take the Lord at his word, and trust him even when it makes no sense.

CONCLUSION

Abram only ever saw the tiniest part of the Lord's promises to him fulfilled in his lifetime. He still had to wait another 25 years before Isaac was born. The promise that his descendants would be given *this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates* (v 18) wasn't fulfilled until the reign of King David. He never saw his physical descendants become as numerous as the stars in the sky. And of course, added to those are now his spiritual descendants, those who are not of his flesh and blood, but who've put their trust in the Lord God of Abraham. So when you're feeling discouraged, when it feels as if the Lord doesn't hear your prayers or answer them, when it feels as if his promises are empty ones – remember Abraham! Don't be shy about having it out with God – but at the same time, be patient! The Lord's promises may not be fulfilled today, tomorrow, next week, or even in your lifetime; but you can be sure that they will be fulfilled. Don't give up on the Lord; he certainly won't give up on you!