

Study Guide

Genesis 15:7-21

In the previous passages, Abraham was struggling with his belief in God's promise. He had presented his concerns to God, and God responded by repeating his promise to Abraham. God was patient with Abraham during his doubts. In verse 6, it says that Abraham "believed the Lord" and that the Lord "counted it to him as righteousness." Thus, God restored Abraham's faith, and God considered him righteous for that faith. God promised Abraham that he will get the land.

In verse 8, Abraham says "Oh Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" Abraham is asking God to demonstrate his promise. In two verses before, it says that Abraham believed in God's promise, so it is not the case that Abraham doubts God's deliverance in verse 8. Rather, Abraham was asking God for reassurance. Abraham is humbly coming to the Lord asking for confidence in the promise. This demonstrates to us that it is not wrong to ask God to help us believe, as long as we do it humbly.

God reassures Abraham by making a covenant with him. In verses 9-11, God takes Abraham through a cultural ritual that demonstrated two people entering into a covenant. During that day, it was normal for two people to make a deal with each other, and then seal that deal by performing a ritual like this. Animals would be cut in half and put on either side of a path, and then the two parties of the covenant would walk in between the two halves. At first, this might just seem that God is having Abraham do something morbid and violent. We have to understand, while this means nothing to us, this would have meant a great deal to Abraham. Abraham would have recognized this as God committing himself to the promise. It would be like God "swearing on the Bible" that he would be committed to keeping his promise to Abraham.

After Abraham set up this ritual, it says that Abraham fell into a deep sleep. In verses 13-17, God speaks to Abraham. God gives Abraham a vision of some of the major events that will happen before Abraham's decedents receive the land. It says that his offspring will be "afflicted" for four hundred years, and that God would eventually bring judgment on the nation they served. This is referring to the period of time when Israel will be enslaved to Egypt, and God bringing about the ten plagues on Egypt. God says all of this to further demonstrate his promise to Abraham. He is giving Abraham a reason to trust in his promise. After hearing all of this, Abraham woke up.

In verse 17, God appeared as a "smoking firepot" and a "flaming torch." The "smoking firepot" and the "flaming torch" passed through "these pieces" which is referring to the pieces of the animal. In essence, God is sealing the covenant. God just explained his promise to Abraham, and now he is performing the ritual to demonstrate to Abraham that he will hold himself to his promise. By doing this, God has demonstrated to Abraham that he will hold to his promise.

Study Questions

Remember: You do not need to answer all of the questions. Just pick a couple of questions from each category.

Opening Questions:

- 1) How do you deal with doubt?

- 2) What were some key points that you took away from Cliff's sermon?

Study Questions:

- 1) What are some initial thoughts and questions you have about this passage?

- 2) How would you describe God's character in this passage?

3) Why did God ask Abraham to cut the animals in half (vs. 9-11)?

4) What is significant about God's words in verses 13-16?

5) This passage is about God's promise to Abraham. What are some ways that this passage is relevant for us today?

Application Questions:

1) This passage begins with Abraham struggling to have confidence in his faith. What can we learn from this passage about how to deal with our doubts and lack of confidence in the promises of God?

2) How can you better demonstrate your confidence in the promises of God?