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Sermon Notes

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God's Covenant in the Stars and in the Blood

Genesis 15:1-21

Introduction

A. The Varying Glory of Scripture

1 Corinthians 15:41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

All of Scripture shines as starlight in an otherwise dark world, testifying to the glory of God

However, not all stars have equal glory... neither is every chapter of the Bible alike in its revelation of the nature and purposes of God

In 1995, Astronomers using NASA's Hubble Space Telescope have identified what may be the most luminous star known – a celestial mammoth called the Pistol Star which releases up to 10 million times the power of the Sun, is over 100 times bigger than our Sun, and is big enough to fill the diameter of Earth's orbit. The star unleashes as much energy in six seconds as our Sun does in one year.

The pistol star is probably the brightest star in the cosmos... and so rightly did Paul say that star differs from star in glory... all of the stars in the cosmos glorify God, and God knows them each by name... but not all are equally bright

So it is with Scripture...

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

But not every passage of Scripture is equally glorious

As we come to Genesis 15, we come to one of the greatest and more glorious chapters in all the Bible

Here we see God make the eternal promise to Abram which Abram is still enjoying today:

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

B. The Glorious Topics of Genesis 15

- God's Promise of Abram's Eternal Reward
- God's Promise of Abram's Glorious Offspring
- Abram's Faith in the Promise and God's Resultant Gift of Righteousness
- God's Solemn Covenant with Abram Concerning the Land
- God's Remarkable Sevenfold Promise Concerning the Future of His Descendants
- God's Somber Warning Concerning the Measure of the Amorites' Wickedness

C. The Significance of Genesis 15

- The first time it is said "The word of the Lord came"
- The first vision
- The first time it is ever said "Do not be afraid"... repeated over 170 more times
- The first time God is ever called a Shield
- The first time God is called "Adonai Jehovah" "The Lord God"
- The first time we find the words "Believed" "Reckoned" and "Righteousness"
- The first mention of reward
- MOST OF ALL, the Apostle Paul find in Genesis 15:6 the pattern for the salvation of every person who ever has been or ever will be saved

Genesis 15:6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

If you are to spend eternity in the presence of God, it will be on the same basis as this... simply faith in Jesus Christ, and in Christ alone

The glorious company of the saved from every tribe and language and people and nation are Abraham's children by faith, and he is our father in faith... and that glorious multitude will stand by this alone on judgment day:

[They] believed the LORD, and he credited it to them as righteousness.

At the center of this chapter and at the center of our hope, is the concept of WORDS... of promises that God makes and keeps. All that happens in Genesis 15 is that God speaks words to Abram, and Abram believes them

Abram refused the riches of this world... God gave him something far more valuable: WORDS... promises of immeasurable wealth and blessing for the future

If words mean nothing, our faith is worthless. But if God's words cannot be broken or removed, then our reward is absolutely secure and our joy has an eternal foundation

- I. God's Promise of Present Protection and Eternal Reward (vs. 1)
- II. God's Promise in the Stars: Abram's Glorious Offspring (vs. 2-6)
- III. Abram's Justification by Faith Alone (vs. 6)
- IV. God's Covenant with Abram in Blood (vs. 7-21)
- V. Why God Made this Dramatic Covenant
- VI. Application

- I. God's Promise of Present Protection and Eternal Reward (vs. 1)

Genesis 15:1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

A. Context: Abram's Defeat of Kedorlaomer

1. "After these things" = strong link to Genesis 14
2. Sometimes chapter divisions hinder rather than help!!

B. The "Word of the Lord Came"

1. Abram was a prophet
2. God spoke directly to Abram... this was the foundation of Abram's faith, and it is the foundation of ours as well

"The word of the Lord came" to Samuel, David, Nathan, Solomon, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jehu

24 times "The word of the Lord came" to Jeremiah

50 times “The word of the Lord came” to Ezekiel

“The word of the Lord came” to Jonah, Haggai, and Zechariah

Isaiah 1:2 Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken

3. Note: the word of the Lord came **in a vision**

Isaiah also saw the word of the Lord in a vision

Isaiah 1:1 The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Ezekiel saw dramatic visions of the glory of God, and traveled great distances in visions given by the Spirit of God

Ezekiel 1:1 In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

Ezekiel 11:24 The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the exiles in Babylonia in the vision given by the Spirit of God. Then the vision I had seen went up from me

What did the word of the Lord speak of?

Two issues after the battles of Genesis 14: 1) Abram’s Need for Protection 2) Abram’s Desire for Reward

C. Abram’s Need for Protection

1. Kedorlaomer was an awesomely powerful king from hundreds of miles away near Babylon
2. No local army had been able to stand up to his might

He had defeated the Rephaim, the Zuzim, the Emim, the Horites, the Amalekites

He then defeated a powerful coalition of five kings... it seemed nothing could stop him

That is, until Abram got a paltry 318 night riders to go on a raid with him and attack them

They slaughtered Kedorlaomer and scattered his army

3. This left Abram in a very dangerous position... he’d made some powerful enemies now
4. God wanted Abram to know he was completely safe

Genesis 15:1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield..."

It was really God that had won that victory, and God would continue to protect Abram

Nothing would get through God's protective shield

D. Abram's Desire for Reward

1. Also, Abram had refused to share in the plunder from the raid
2. This was almost unheard of... a commander taking no material benefit from the plunder
3. But Abram had made a solemn vow

Genesis 14:22-23 But Abram said to 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 23 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.'

4. Now, God was strongly motivated to bless Abram in return

Genesis 15:1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

- a. KJV, NIV has it best
- b. most other translations "Your reward will be very great"
- c. NIV gets to the heart of what the reward is
- d. Abram will receive nothing of lasting value here on earth

Hebrews 11:13-16 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

God Himself will be the reward of God's faithful

Psalm 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

Steve Green: "God and God Alone"

**God and God alone will be the joy of our eternal home
He will be our one desire Our hearts will never tire of God and God alone**

A desire for reward is not evil... it is REQUIRED!!!

Hebrews 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

Abram would get the greatest reward imaginable... God Himself!!!

II. God's Promise in the Stars: Abram's Glorious Offspring (vs. 2-6)

vs. 2-6 *But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." 4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

A. Abram's Turns His Sorrow Over to God

1. Great cause of grief and agony for couples... childlessness
2. Americans don't see this as the tragedy the Bible does
3. NOTE: Abram definitely sees God's hand in Sarai's barrenness... this is the decision of God

vs. 3 *And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."*

Genesis 30:1-2 *When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!" 2 Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?"*

Job 1:20-22 *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship 21 and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." 22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*

Job 2:9-10 *His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" 10 He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.*

God decides what trials will come to our lives... but like the man born blind in John 9, this trouble came only so that God could demonstrate His amazing power

John 9:3 *"... this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."*

God ordained Sarai's barrenness so that God could dramatically remedy the situation with a miracle later

4. Abram did the right thing with his sorrow... he turned it over to God in prayer

1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

B. God's Promise Stated

vs. 4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."

1. Progressive revelation... little by little God is unfolding His will to Abram
2. This was inherent in the original promise to Abram in Genesis 12

vs. 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

vs. 7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."

3. Now the promise gets strongly clarified... "a son coming from your own body"

C. God's Promise Displayed and Restated

1. One of the most significant moments in the Bible... but yet so quiet
2. If you had been there on that starry night, you would have seen nothing noteworthy... just an old man looking up at the night sky
3. But inside his soul, the word of God came

vs. 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Note the personal touch... the intense relationship

"He took him outside..."

The text doesn't say how the eternal God "took him outside", but so it was, for Abraham was God's friend

James 2:23 Abraham was called God's friend.

Like Enoch, Abraham walked with God, and followed his lead... when God said "Come out here with me under the night sky," Abram left the tent and followed meekly... where God went, Abram followed

4. The promise displayed

And what did Abram see outside the tent? God's power and glory strewn across the dark canvas of the heavens

How many stars can the unaided eye see? Perhaps several thousand... few would have the patience or the mental discipline to count them, but if you did, you could count all you could see in an hour or less

BUT on a clear night, you could also see the hazy Milky Way... and perhaps your mind would tell you that you haven't seen all there is to see

If Galileo had been there and said to Abram, "Here, try this... it's a telescope!", Abram would have been astonished and could resume his counting. But it wouldn't have changed the problem... he just would have been able to count more before the same instinct would kick in... I have seen all I can see through this instrument, **BUT I KNOW THERE ARE MORE!**

God used the stars to display His promise to Abram

III. Abram's Justification by Faith Alone (vs. 6)

vs. 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

A. Central Question of Our Existence: How Can I Be Saved?

B. Simple Statement in Genesis Text... Easily Missed

C. Justification By Faith

1. Justification = being made righteous in God's sight
2. All of us are wicked sinners, vile in God's eyes
3. How can we be seen righteous on Judgment Day?
4. What did Abram DO? Not a single thing!!! He simply believed a promise, "So shall your offspring be."
5. What did God do? God "credited to him as righteousness" Hebrew means "saw Abram as righteous"

D. Paul's Main Point: Everyone Gets Saved the Same Way

Romans 4:1-5 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? 2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-- but not before God. 3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. 5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Romans 1:16-17 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Abram got saved simply by believing the promise of God

E. Hadn't Abram Already Displayed Faith?

1. Faith to leave Ur of the Chaldeans, yes
2. Faith to build altars, yes
3. Faith to call on the name of the Lord, yes
4. BUT NOW, faith concerning the seed of Abraham, the Messiah who would come later, no... that happened for the first time that starry night

Galatians 3:16 The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

Matthew 1:1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

Jesus stated openly that Abraham's joy was focused on the person of Christ, whom He saw by faith that starry night

John 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

Everyone in history who ever has been saved from sin or ever will be saved from sin is saved the same way: by faith in the promise of Christ... the promise as revealed as it was at the given point of Redemptive History

Abraham believed what he could at that moment, and God credited to Him as righteousness

IV. God's Promise in the Blood: The Promised Land (vs. 7-21)

A. God's Second Promise Stated Again

vs. 7 He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

1. Two Great Promises Made to Abram: Many Descendants, Promised Land
2. God had already promised this once... Genesis 12:7

Genesis 12:7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

3. Here God links it to His covenant name, and to His original call of Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans
4. God uses our past dealings with us to give us certainty about future promises

B. Main Question: How Can I Know?????

vs. 8 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

1. Not faithless, for God does not rebuke Abram for asking it
- 2. Faith is a living thing... it needs food in order to live!!!**
3. The food of faith is the word of God and experience with God in establishing that word to us
4. You will not understand the somber covenant ceremony that follows if you forget Abram's question:

vs. 8 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

5. Verse 8-21 is God's answer to Abram: "You can know because of the covenant I have made with you supporting my word of promise to you. That should be enough."

C. The Biblical Significance of Covenants

1. A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more persons
2. Most common form of covenant today: marriage
3. Ancient people used covenants for many things
 - a. conquering kings would make covenants with the kings they conquered
 - b. neighboring tribes would make covenants with each other concerning wells and grazing rights
4. God used covenants at key moments throughout the Bible
 - God made a covenant with Noah to protect him and all that were with him on the Ark
 - After the flood, God made a covenant with the earth never again to destroy it with a flood, and the rainbow was the sign of God's faithfulness to His covenant promise
 - Here, in verse 18, this commitment the Lord makes to Abram concerning the land is called his covenant with Abram

- In Genesis 17, he will establish the covenant sign of circumcision for all the descendents of Abraham
- At Mount Sinai, he makes a covenant with Israel based on the Law of Moses
- Later, God will also make a covenant with David to place one of his descendent eternally on the throne

5. There are two types of covenants: conditional and unconditional...

- a. Sinai was a conditional covenant: if you obey me fully, I will bless you
- b. the rainbow after the flood was the sign of God's unconditional covenant with the earth... whether they obey or not, God will never again destroy the world by flood
- c. this covenant in Genesis 15 was an UNCONDITIONAL covenant... it is not tied in any way to Abram's obedience... God WILL give his descendents the land

6. Some theologians make God's covenants the center of their entire understanding of God's dealings with the human race...

Wayne Grudem: "A covenant is an unchangeable, divinely imposed legal agreement between God and man that stipulates the conditions of their relationship."

From the covenant of works between God and Adam, through the covenant with Noah and Abraham, through the covenant of Sinai and the covenant with David, ultimately to the new covenant of salvation written in the blood of Jesus Christ, the whole pattern of God's dealings with man has followed the pattern of a covenant

D. Why Does God Make Covenants?

So that we may KNOW and trust Him, and cling to His promises and obey His commands

E. The Mechanics of the Covenant (vs. 9-21)

1. The Sacrifice

vs. 9-11 So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." 10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two

This covenant would be made at a price... the blood of the sacrifice

Here, like all other times of godly animal sacrifice in the Old Testament, the sacrifice represents Christ

God will have NOTHING to do with sinners like us apart from the sacrifice of blood as an atonement for sin

Hebrews 9:22 ... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

The animals, however, are merely symbolic... representations of the true sacrifice of Jesus Christ

Hebrews 10:4 ... it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

So, this covenant will be paid for at a great cost over two thousand years later, when Christ shed his blood at Calvary

2. The Pieces Separated

and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. 11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

The separation of the pieces is done in order to make a pathway between them

Why? We will see more in a moment!

3. The Terror of the Lord

Genesis 15:12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. [NASB]

The Lord “arrives” to make the covenant with Abram, surrounded by darkness and terror

Darkness similar to Sinai

Deuteronomy 4:11 You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness.

Psalms 97:2-3 Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. 3 Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side.

Terror because of God’s immense holiness and power... the immediate response of any man, no matter how righteous to the overwhelming holiness and power of God is sheer terror. God does this even to Abram, his friend, for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom

Fear of the Lord promotes holiness

Exodus 20:18-20 When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance 19 and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." 21 The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

4. The Covenant Promises Stated (note... no requirements!)

- a. first remarkable predictions about the next four hundred years, including Abram’s own future

vs. 13-16 Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. 15 You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. 16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here

Note amazing details of this prophecy

- 1) Your descendents will be strangers in a country not their own (fulfilled by their time in Egypt... although frankly they would not own the Promised Land until Joshua led them to the conquest)
- 2) They will be enslaved and mistreated
- 3) Four hundred years (also four generations... see verse 16, "In the fourth generation"... note that this was literally fulfilled as we simply look at the genealogy of Moses: Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses)
- 4) I will punish the nation they serve as slaves (fulfilled in the plagues of the Exodus)
- 5) Afterward they will come out (amazing prophecy of the Exodus)
- 6) With great possessions (the plundering of Egypt, fulfilled in Exodus 11)
- 7) You will go to your fathers in peace, and be buried at a good old age

These details are essential to the reason for the covenant ceremony... it will be a **LONG ROAD** to fulfillment, and Abram himself would never see it happen

b. second, the reason given for the delay

, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

God's patience means salvation for at least one Amorite: Rahab the Prostitute would come to believe

Note also the incredible patience of God in dealing with the wickedness of the Amorites; four hundred years of smelling the stench of their child sacrifices; AND four hundred years of watching His own people suffering in slavery in Egypt... all for His own strange inscrutable purposes

Romans 9:22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-- prepared for destruction?

When Joshua slaughtered the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Amorites, and Jebusites, it was the final act of judgment on a people who had been wicked idolators and child-sacrificers for hundreds and hundreds of years

Note also the fearsome and quiet day of God's wrath... God has a measure of wickedness, and when at last it is full, the judgment falls

God owes not a single day more to wicked sinners like us, and He DOES NOT REVEAL His measure of when enough sin is enough

How terrifying for the unrepentant sinner, who presumes on God's patience day after day

Romans 2:4-6 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 God "will give to each person according to what he has done."

c. then clear boundaries for the promised land

vs. 18-21 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram: "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates-- 19 the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20 Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, 21 Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

5. The Covenant Warning Implied

vs. 17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

Amazing, shocking symbolism... which adequately satisfies Abram's question

vs. 8 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

The symbolism is lost to us today, but Abram understood fully what was happening

More Biblical data comes from a statement in Jeremiah 34:18-20

Jeremiah 34:18-20 The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. 19 The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, 20 I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.

In ancient days, one did not "MAKE a covenant", one "CUT a covenant." It was related to the cutting up of a sacrificial animal and arranging the pieces apart from each other... those making the covenant would then pass between the pieces and in effect call down a curse on themselves:

"May what has happened to these animals happen to ME if I fail to keep this covenant!!"

The covenant-cutting ceremony was thus capped by the solemn walk of the covenant-cutting parties between the pieces of the sacrifice. If they failed to keep the terms, they were under a curse that their own bodies would be severed completely and destroyed

NOW SEE THE POWER OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE!!!

Abram asked,

vs. 8 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

God's answer is more than just, "Because I said so." For a God who cannot lie, who NEVER lies, "Because I said so," is enough. But God went beyond that, and gave Abram a symbol he would NEVER forget...

God called down a curse on Himself and in effect said, "May I cease to exist if I fail to keep this covenant."

The smoking firepot with a blazing torch represent God... just like the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire would later represent God himself in the Exodus

Note also that this symbolizes the cost of the covenant... God prefigures the death of His only begotten Son, who would die in order to accomplish this covenant

V. Why God Made this Dramatic Covenant

A. Why God Made This Solemn Promise

1. Why didn't God just answer Abram, "Because I said so?"
2. God never lies... His word ought to be enough
3. BUT God had His reasons for this solemn chapter... the look at the stars and the solemn covenant ceremony
4. God's reason: our faith, our hope, our courage... in short, our salvation

B. Providence Seems Contrary to Promises

1. Look again at the predictions God made about Abram's descendents
2. FOUR HUNDRED YEARS in great affliction and bondage
3. God's ways of getting to His purposes is sometimes the exact OPPOSITE of our ways

C. Salvation for Slaves

1. How is anyone saved? "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited to him as righteousness."
2. One MUST believe God's promises, or one will die in their sins
3. Imagine an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham, slaving under the broiling sun of Egypt making brick after brick

4. Imagine he was born 250 years after Jacob entered Egypt... there is still another 150 years until the Exodus under Moses
5. He was born in slavery like his father, and he will die in slavery as well
6. What is his ONLY HOPE? Some ancient promises... some ancient words made by God Almighty, to Father Abraham
7. The look at the stars has already been fulfilled... Abraham has descendents as numerous as the stars in a night sky. But the covenant also concern the PROMISED LAND
8. God made this solemn promise so that the slaves in Egypt could hear, believe, and be saved... they would believe the Lord, and He would credit it to them as righteousness

D. Encouragement Until the End of the Age

Hebrews 6:13-19 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." 15 And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. 16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

Hebrews tells us WHY God made this solemn oath... so that we who have trusted in Christ might also be greatly encouraged in our faith

Why is courage needed? Because the world, the flesh, and the devil fight our faith every day

Because God's providence so frequently seems to run contrary to His promises

Because we get worn out and weak, and discouraged pilgrims stop traveling, and discouraged soldiers stop fighting... and we must travel and we must fight in order to work out our salvation to the end

Because faith is alive and needs food to survive

THUS YOU CAN SEE HOW VITAL IS ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE!!

God did this solemn ceremony so that countless ages of believers might be renewed again and again in their faith

VI. Application

- 1) Concerning the Nature of Rewards

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

2) God's Faithfulness to His Promises

God fulfilled BOTH of His promises to Abraham

BUT our promises are FAR GREATER than those made to Abraham

[He got promises of 1) many descendents and 2) land in Palestine... we get far greater things: full forgiveness of sins, indwelling Holy Spirit, security of salvation, life after death, resurrection bodies, eternity on God's presence]

3) God's Incredible Patience Toward Sinners

God waited for the sin of the Amorites for four hundred years

God is slow to anger, and abounding in mercy

God is also willing to make His loved ones suffer greatly to accomplish His purposes

4) The Solemn Warning Concerning the Measure of Sin

Don't presume on how long God will allow you to continue in sin

5) God's Amazing Knowledge of the Future

Be astonished at with what great detail God foretold the future of the Jews

God knows everything in detail before it happens

6) Be Greatly Encouraged

Hebrews 6:18-19 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

7) Encourage Greatly

Notice how much God did to encourage weak believers to keep trusting in His promises

Hebrews 12:12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Hebrews 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

