

Introduction

When the Bible speaks about Abraham, it often emphasizes his faith. He believed God's promises and he was counted as righteous. But if you pay close attention, Abraham's obedience is also highlighted. Perhaps the most famous episode in Abraham's life is when God calls him to sacrifice Isaac. Abram was ready to obey. Faith and obedience go hand in hand and both are present in Abraham's life.

But there is something else present in today's passage that receives less press than Abraham's faith and obedience. It is the fact that Abraham also needed to be reassured by God. What's fascinating about this is that the presence of Abraham's doubt does not ultimately cancel out his faith and obedience. Rather, as he brought his doubts to God, God was able to increase Abraham's faith and give him new opportunities for obedience.

Our passage this morning breaks down into two parts:

1. Verses 1-12 present this relationship between faith, doubt, and obedience.
2. Verses 13-21 present God's covenant with Abram.

Faith, Doubt, and Obedience (vv. 1-12)

The context of this account is that it takes place after Abram's conflict with Chedorlaomer. This makes sense of what God says to Abram in verse 1, "***Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.***" God comes to Abram to assure him that He will continue to protect and bless Abram.

This is a common theme in the Bible for God's people. God is the protector and shield of His people and this brings reassurance to God's people in times of distress. [Psalm 3:3](#) states, "But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head." God often places His people in desperate places, all the while assuring them that he is their shield and calling on His people to place their trust in Him.

But, in verses 2-3, Abram responds to God by expressing some measure of doubt. God has made great promises to bless Abram, but Abram responds to God by saying the blessings have not yet come to pass. [Gen 15:2-3](#) "***But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."***"

In Genesis that God's blessing takes the form of a man bring fruitful and multiplying (1:28; 9:1; 35:11). God has blessed Abram but He has withheld the central blessing of children from Abram.

What is clear in this passage is that Abram is in dialogue with God. Abram brings his complaint before God. As you read through the Scriptures, you find that prophets are those who are brought into the council of God. [Amos 3:7](#) "For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets." Genesis presents Abram as a prophet who has the privilege of speaking to God.

God doesn't need anything. However, He has ordered things in such a way to draw humanity into the life of God. Throughout the story of the Bible, God has been in the process of disciplining and maturing humanity so that they might be fit to participate in life of God. This ultimately finds its fulfillment in Jesus. In the incarnation, the divine nature takes on human flesh. This is part of Jesus' humiliation. In His humiliation He takes on our nature, is subjected to our limitations, and even cruelty and persecution leading to the Cross. But there is also Jesus' exaltation, in the resurrection and ascension into heaven, **as a man** where He sits at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is still a man after His resurrection and ascension. And as man, He represents humanity in its full maturity, participating in the life and council of God.

Because we are in Christ, we participate by faith in these realities **now**, by the power of the Holy Spirit. We have full access to the throne of grace through the shed blood of Christ.

- › But practically speaking, how is this done? It is done in the same way Abram brings his concern to God in these verses. In prayer we can come to God and remind Him of His own promises to us and asking Him to act in the name of Jesus. Abram's complaints aren't irreverent toward God but they are real. We too, because we are children of Abram, in Christ, come to God our Father and ask Him why His promises for us have not yet been fulfilled in our lives.

After Abram petitions God, God reminds Abram of the greatness of His promises and offers assurance that He will keep His promises in time. This is often how God deals with us as well when we bring out petitions to Him. In verses 4-6 God tells Abram that Eliezar will not be His heir and that He will give Him offspring as numerous as the stars in the heavens.

It is at this point that we read the wonderful statement that, "Abram believed YHWH, and he counted it to him as righteousness." Paul picks up on this in [Romans 4](#), explaining that just as Abram was counted righteous by God because he believed, so too are we counted righteous because we believe God's promises to us in Jesus.

This section ends with God telling Abram that He will confirm all these things to Abram by way of covenant and He gives Abram instructions on how to set up the covenantal rite. And Abram is quick to obey. Abram does exactly what God tells him to and this is thematic for

Abram throughout Genesis. Abram's faith is a working faith. Moreover, it is a working faith even though he seeks assurance from God.

We tend to break apart things that the Bible holds together. Things like faith, doubt, and obedience. In the Bible, all of these things can live in harmony with one another. The presence of faith doesn't do away with either the presence of doubt or the need for obedience. In fact, it is often the case that in the acts of obedience or in the presence of doubt, that God strengthens our faith.

If you have doubts about God's promises or His Word. Do not think that means you cannot have faith. Go to God like Abram, asking God to work according to His Word and promise. Do you have faith? Do not think that you have no need for obedience. As James states, faith without works is dead.

The Covenant (vv. 12-21)

At the end of verse 11 the stage has been set for Abram to enter into a rite of covenant with God but things take a strange turn in verse 12. The sun goes down and a deep sleep fell on Abram. It's described as a "**dreadful and great darkness**".

In this deep sleep, God spoke to Abram about the future of his descendants; "**Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgement on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.**"

God's promises are so sure for Abram, that not only will Abram be given offspring, but God already has centuries planned for Abram's descendants to be involved in God's purposes in the world. This points back to God's initial promise that He will bless those who bless Abram and curse those who do Abram wrong. When Pharaoh deals harshly with Abram's descendants, God will judge Pharaoh.

The strangeness continues in verse 17 when **a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch pass between the pieces of animal** that Abram had cut up for the covenantal rite. Smoke and fire are representative of the presence of God. When God descends upon Mt. Sinai to enter into covenant with His people, he descends in a fiery cloud of smoke.

Theologians are divided on what the whole event means. Some draw attention to the covenantal rites of ancient near eastern Lords. They would cut up and divide animals and walk between them. This was to say that, "If I don't keep my side of this covenant, let me become like these cut up animals."

If this is what's going on here, then God Himself, is taking a self-maledictory oath regarding His promises to Abram. "Abram, if the terms of our covenant aren't met, let Me become as these cut up animals."

But there is also the interesting feature that these animals are all sacrificial animals that are used for sacrifice in Leviticus. Sacrificial animals represent the worshiper. Does this rite represent God's promise to be with His people even as He would be with Israel after Sinai as a smoking cloud by day and a fire by night that was in the midst of His people.

Both of these sentiments are true regardless of which one is in view here in [Genesis 15](#). What is clear is that God has now entered into covenant with Abram and He establishes His promise again in verse 18 by stating the extent of the land promise and by outlining the peoples who live there.

Conclusion

The term covenant gets thrown around quite often in our circles. This is the case because we believe that the Bible is organized around God's covenantal dealings with mankind.

What we find in the Bible is God is always the one initiating covenant with His people, guiding His people in covenant life with God, and making things right when His people break covenant.

You could spend a lifetime studying the various intricacies of all the covenants in the Bible, but what you need to be reminded of this morning, is that you serve a God who has entered into covenant with us His people. And He is committed to guiding us this covenantal life together with Him by His word. Moreover, He helps restore us when we stray from His love and covenant promises.

In fact, this is what church is all about. God calls us to come and renew the covenant each week. He forgives our sins and sets us back on the right track from His Word. Moreover, He invites us to His table, where we partake not in the broken bodies and shed blood of animals, but the broken body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus.

It is in Christ, that we have peace with God. And because of this, we can come to His table of peace and pass the peace with one another.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.