

The Father of Nations:

A Study of Abraham

Lesson Four: The Covenant of the Father of Nations

June 14, 2020

"Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."

Mark 9:24

Opening Illustration: What are some common, legally binding agreements that we make in life? How do we make these covenants...these legally binding agreements? Why do we need these legally binding agreements?

I. Introduction/Review

II. Abram and his children (vv. 1-6)

A. God's Reminder (v. 1)

1. Do not fear
 - a) There is only one reason why God would tell Abram not to fear. That is because the LORD understood that Abram might fear.
2. I am a shield to you.
3. Your reward will be very great.

B. Abram's Rejoinder (vv. 2-3)

1. What will You give me, seeing that I am childless?
2. I am going to have to give everything I have to somebody else's son.
 - a) Would Eliezer of Damascus be an adopted servant?
 - (1) To adopt a servant and make him the heir was a familiar practice in the ancient near east.
 - (2) It seems that they had not yet made the official move:
 - (a) since we hear nothing else about him.
 - (b) since they would try other options in the following chapters.

C. God's Redirection (vv. 4-5)

1. You will not need to adopt an heir.
2. You will have a multitude of descendants...too many to count.

D. Abram's Righteousness (v. 6)

1. Abram believed God (אֱמַן אֱבְרָם)
 - a) What does this mean?
2. Abram's belief was credited (חֶסֶד וְאֱמֵן) to him as righteousness
 - a) What does this mean?
 - b) What else does the Bible say about this?
 - (1) See Romans 4 & Galatians 3

III. Abram makes the cut (vv. 7-11)

A. The LORD's declaration (v. 7)

1. I am the one who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to this land.
2. I did this so that you would truly possess this land.

B. Abram's demand (v. 8)

1. Notice what Abram asks: "How will I know?"
 - a) Is this a sinful request for a sign?
 - (1) I don't think so.
 - b) If it is not sinful, what could be going on here?
 - (1) Abram could simply be experiencing the natural struggle of faith.

- (2) Abram could simply be looking for something official to seal the deal.
- 2. Giving Abram the benefit of the doubt here:
 - a) The LORD had repeatedly made promises. We can understand a little impatience by Abram.
 - b) People long for tangible signs and/or results of their faith to keep holding on.

C. The LORD's demonstration (vv. 9-11)

- 1. The LORD proposes an official covenant.
- 2. Making this covenant includes:
 - a) Cutting animals in half and setting the parts apart on the ground.
 - (1) In Hebrew, to "make" a covenant is literally to "cut" (כָּרַךְ) a covenant.¹
 - (2) This form of official covenant making was common in Ancient Near Eastern culture.
 - (3) This "cutting" was intended to signify what would happen to the person who broke the covenant. They would be like these dead carcasses, cursed.
 - (4) Compare **Jeremiah 34:18-19** for similar imagery.
 - b) Protecting the carcasses from scavengers until the covenant is "cut".
 - (1) Again, we see here that the LORD makes Abram wait.

IV. Abram sees the Clouds (vv. 12-16)

A. As the sun is going down—*why mention this?*

- 1. Because the covenant will be cut when the sun is down. See v. 17.
- 2. Because it fits with what Abram is about to experience.

B. Abram was put to sleep—*literally.*

- 1. Before the covenant was cut, Abram had to know:
 - a) That there would be bad circumstances as well as good circumstances.
 - b) That even the bad circumstances would work for the eventual good of his seed.
 - c) That he himself will live to a nice, old age.

C. Abram was struck with terror and great darkness.

- 1. He was given a glimpse into the future torment of his seed.

V. Abram receives the Covenant (vv. 17-21)

A. Notice that the sun had set.

- 1. To Hebrews, a day began in the evening.
- 2. Because of the symbolic forms the LORD was about to take.

B. Notice Who walks through the pieces!

- 1. Abram did not walk through the pieces
- 2. Only God walked through the pieces
 - a) A smoking oven—probably symbolizes God's righteous wrath.
 - b) A flaming torch—probably symbolizes God's holy truth.
- 3. What's the point of this?

C. Notice what this ensures:

- 1. I have given this land to your descendants.
- 2. I will deal with your enemies and obstacles.

VI. What are our Conclusions?

¹ See Genesis 26:28, 31:44, Exodus 23:32, 34:10-12 for some more examples of the expression "to make (cut) a covenant."