**Lesson 3**

**4, 5 October 2021**

**Genesis 14-16**

***Another Perspective*:**

**Concepts To Consider –** As you continue to read and study God’s Word, there are a couple of concepts to keep in mind that may be new to you. The first is the idea of **progressive revelation**. That sounds complicated, but the concept is actually simple. It just means that **God does not reveal all the details about His plans all at once;** rather, He reveals more and more as time goes on. And each time He adds a new detail, it is at an appropriate time in the life of the hearer, and it usually meets a specific need in his/her life at that time. So let’s see how that plays out in the chapters we studied this week.

**Example 1: The Land –** We first hear about the land at the beginning of Genesis 12 when the Lord tells Abram to **“go to the land that I will show you.”** So all Abram knows is that there is some country out there to which he is to go and God will let him know when he has arrived. Then after Abram got as far as Shechem in the land of Canaan, God appears to him and says, **“I will give THIS land to your offspring.”**  So now Abram knows which place has been promised, and he builds an altar to the Lord in response. He continues to head south, builds a second altar at Bethel, but then he takes a wrong path to Egypt. God intervenes, and Abram returns to Canaan and then Lot takes his own wrong path: he leaves the land of promise and gets as close as he can to Sodom.

**Third Detail About the Land –** At this point God gives assurance to Abram that His gift to Abram is not some small, insignificant one. In Genesis 13:14-15 He reveals to Abram that his inheritance will extend as far as his eyes can see. He says, “Look from the place where you are. Look north and south, east and west, for **I will give you all the land that you see.** Now go check it all out!” So Abram took God at His word and he traveled to Hebron, where he built a third altar to the Lord.

**Fourth Detail About the Land –** Then we come to Genesis 15, which tells about the special ritual that was used to confirm covenants at that time. God appeared as a “smoking fire pot and a flaming torch” that moved between the divided animals. And then He said an amazing thing: “Abram, your vision has been far too small. I am not giving you just this relatively little land. **I will give you ALL the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates River.”** Look at the map and think about all Abram’s travels, even the ones that were “wrong”. God, in His sovereign greatness, has allowed Abram to see everything that his descendants will eventually inherit. 🎜 How great, how great is our God! 🎜

**Second Concept: Various METHODS of Revelation –** Not only does God’s revelation of truth happen in stages, a bit at a time, but it also happens in many different *ways*. Hebrews 1:1 tells us, “Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and **in different ways**.” Looking at Genesis 12-16, we see at least three different means God used to communicate with His people. In Genesis 12:1 and 13:14 the text simply says, “The Lord **said** to Abram…” In Genesis 15:1 we are told, “…the word of the Lord came to Abram **in a vision**.” And in Genesis 16:7, 9-11 God spoke to Hagar as the **Angel of the Lord**. [Note: The term “Angel of the Lord” is used in the Old Testament to describe the pre-incarnate Christ. So Jesus Himself appeared to Hagar, to comfort and encourage her. See the “Take Away” on page 5.] As you read through the chapters for this coming week, be on the lookout for *other details* that are added to God’s previous revelation and for *other means* He might have used to communicate.

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**Jen Wilkin, *God of Covenant* video #2: *Calling and Covenant*, part 2**

**Review** – We saw last week that God made a covenant with Abram, consisting of a series of promises about Abram’s offspring, the land of Canaan, and how Abram would be a blessing to the entire world. We also saw Abram begin his journey in Canaan in faith, building altars to the one true God. But then he faltered when famine struck and put his wife in harm’s way in Egypt. At the end of chapter 13 he had returned to Canaan, but his nephew Lot separated from him and “pitched his tent toward (near) Sodom.” Lot’s desire for the things of Sodom will create many problems for him and his family, as we will see. At the end of Genesis 13 we see a reiteration of God’s covenant promises, we see Abram—who walks by faith—and we see Lot, who walks by sight.

**Battle of the Kings** – Genesis 14 opens with an account of a battle between two groups of kings. Lot, who by this time is living inside Sodom, is taken captive in the midst of this battle, and Abram has to rescue him because Lot is his kinsman. **Abram thus becomes the first *kinsman-redeemer* mentioned in scripture.**

**Melchizedek, a Picture of Christ** – Melchizedek is a rather mysterious figure who is mentioned in just three verses in Genesis. The book of Hebrews reveals that he is a type, or picture, of Christ in the Old Testament. Here are some of the parallels between Melchizedek and Christ.

* His name, Melchizedek, means “king of righteousness”.
* He is king of the city of Salem, which means “peace”, so we can also say that he, like Christ, is the king of peace.
* He fills the roles of both priest and king.
* He brings bread and wine out to Abram, reminiscent of the Last Supper Christ had with His disciples and of the serving of communion down to the present day.
* He blesses Abram, which means that he is greater than Abram, just as Christ blesses His followers.
* Abram gave Melchizedek a tithe or a tenth of everything that he had.

**So Jesus is the *fulfillment* of the type that Melchizedek gives us.**

**The Covenant Renewed and Strongly Affirmed** – Abram has gone through a very troubling, expensive and dangerous battle to rescue his nephew. God gives him a very specific message as an encouragement. Because of his role in the battle, Abram knows that he will be viewed as an enemy by the Canaanite people around him. He needs to know that what shields and protects him is not his own strength or his little army, but God Himself. He has also had to spend a lot of money to raise the army to rescue Lot, and he did not take any of the spoils of war for himself. So he needs to know that God will provide for him. God meets both of these needs when He tells Abram, “*I am* your shield and your great reward.”

**Abram’s Fear** – Abram tells the Lord that since he still has no child, “Eliezer of Damascus” will be his heir. We don’t know for sure who Eliezer was, but he was probably the chief steward of Abram’s household. But God says, “No, your very own son shall be your heir,” and then He leads Abram outside to look at the stars and says, “Your offspring will be that numerous.”

**Abram’s Faith** – And then we encounter one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. It is quoted several times in the New Testament: “Abram *believed* the Lord and He *credited* it to him as righteousness.” This verse is crucial to our understanding of salvation. **Salvation is *always*, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, by grace through faith.** Abram had faith looking forward to the cross, while we have faith looking back to the cross. We must understand that Abram’s faith was rooted in the promises of God, just as ours is.

**Promise of the Land** – Abram’s first question was about the promise of *offspring*. In Genesis 15:8 he asks the Lord about the promise of owning the *land*. This time the Lord doesn’t direct Abram’s attention to the stars; instead, He performs a ritual that would have been very familiar to Abram and to Moses’ original audience. The ritual described at the end of chapter 15 was what was done at that time to ratify a **covenant**.

**Covenant versus Contract** – What is the difference between a covenant and a contract? A contract involves two parties, each promising to fulfill certain conditions. But a covenant is more like a *promise*, a very strong promise, made by one person to another. God’s covenants are unilateral. In other words, God commits to do something for you and me whether we “show up” or not.

**Prophecy of Slavery and Rescue for Abram’s Descendants** – What God said to Abram during the ritual would have had deep meaning for Moses’ original audience. In Genesis 15:13-16 God tells Abram that his offspring, i.e. the nation of Israel, will be enslaved for 400 years in a foreign land, but that God will judge that nation and Abram’s descendants will go out “with many possessions”. Hearing that must have sent chills up and down the spines of Moses’ hearers, because that is exactly what happened to their ancestors in Egypt. They can know that God’s plan for them to possess the promised land of Canaan was already in place, long before they were even born.

**The Ritual for Us** – Think of how this covenant ritual pictures our salvation. There is divided flesh of the animals in the Old Testament, and Christ offering his flesh for us on the cross in the New Testament. God Himself passed between the pieces of animals in the Old Testament, and the Son of God offered Himself in the New. Abram was in a deep sleep, as good as dead, just as we were spiritually dead before Christ’s sacrifice.

**The Smoking Firepot and the Flaming Torch** – Why would God choose these two particular items to represent His presence in the ritual with Abram? Think of how meaningful these two things would have been to the people of Moses’ day. For 40 years they have followed a pillar of cloud (like smoke) by day and a pillar of fire (like a torch) by night. That is how God manifested Himself to *them*, so they would have immediately associated the objects mentioned in Genesis 15 with the symbols of God’s presence that they had experienced!

**Sarai’s Plan To Get a Child** – Hagar was an Egyptian girl, probably acquired when Abram and Sarai were in Egypt. When Moses mentions that detail about her, we should take notice. Egypt is always a symbol for self-reliance in scripture, which means that we shouldn’t be surprised that this Egyptian girl will have a place in Sarai’s scheme to build a family her own way. What Sarai suggests was not illegal at that point in history and was, in fact, an accepted way to acquire children. But it was not right in God’s eyes. Remember that God had clearly specified right from creation that His definition of marriage is the union of one man with one woman. And unfortunately we see an “echo” from Genesis 3 that is not good: Abram listens to Sarai and does what she asks, just as Adam listened to Eve and ate the forbidden fruit.

**Sarai’s Plan To Fix the Problem** – Sarai’s scheme has unwanted consequences when Hagar begins to treat her with contempt. And once again we hear ugly echoes of Eden when Sarai and Abram both begin to shift the blame for what has happened. Sarai blames Abram for Hagar’s attitude, and Abram says, in effect, “Hey, this is *your* problem. *You* deal with it. Do what you want; I don’t care.” And so Sarai begins to treat Hagar very harshly, perhaps even physically abusing her. Why is Sarai’s reaction so violent? Because the very fact that Hagar is pregnant by Abram brings home the terrible realization that it is Sarai who is unable to conceive, not Abram. So now she feels the stinging reproach of her culture more than ever before. The scorn and the shame must have been almost more than she could bear.

**God’s Plan for Hagar** – God, in the person of the Angel of the Lord, finds Hagar in the wilderness where she has run away and begins to gently question her. He tells her that she must return and submit to her mistress. Hard as that sounds, it was actually the safest place for her to be. And He gives Hagar both a promise (“you shall have a son”) and a strong assurance when He tells her to name her son Ishmael. Ishma-EL means “God hears”. So every time she says the name of her baby, she will be reminded that God has personally come to her rescue and that He cares for her deeply. She responds with a beautiful statement of faith, expressing her realization that she has now seen and experienced personally the God that she has only heard about up to this point. And by reading her story, we realize that there are NO “minor characters” in the story of God. He cares about her just as deeply as He cares about Abram and Sarai. [God also reveals to Hagar that her son will be an adversarial person who will “live at odds with all his brothers”. That certainly was true in his own lifetime, when he heckled his half-brother Isaac, and his descendants are the modern day Arabs, who are still quarreling among themselves down to this day.] And when Hagar returned and told her story, it is apparent that she was believed because Abram named her son Ishmael, just as God had commanded.

**God’s Stars** – Throughout the account of Abram, Sarai, and Hagar’s lives, we see the interplay of self-reliance, but we also see the sovereignty of God. The story of Abram is ultimately the story of Christ, upholding the covenant made with Abram of a line of descendants leading all the way down to the Messiah. The story of Abraham is the story of all believers, those who are his spiritual descendants.

* Psalm 147:4 – “He determines the number of the stars and **calls them each of them by name**.” When Abram looked up at the stars, one of them was you!
* Philippians 2:14-16 – “Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, **among whom you shine as lights in the world**…” Each of us who has trusted the God of Abram and come to faith in Christ, who has built an altar in the place where the pagans have worshipped, has a place in the firmament of believers. So may we shine like stars, radiating the character of Christ in the midst of the darkness around us.

**TAKE AWAY:** Once again the Bible Study Fellowship’s course on the book of Genesis provides some very helpful information. On page 3 of their Lesson 10 we read, “Genesis 16:7 tells us that the angel of the Lord found Hagar. God seeks us even when we are fleeing from Him. This verse represents the first mention of *the* (not ‘an angel’) *angel of the Lord.*

* The angel of the Lord **identified with Yahweh.**
* He spoke and acted with **God’s authority.**
* He **accepted the name** Hagar gave Him, “the God who sees.”
* He **received her worship.**
* **The location is recorded in history as an encounter with God** by its name, Beer Lahai Roi, which means “a well of the Living One who sees me”.