

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, February 20, 2022

Genesis 15 – Teaching Christ to Abraham

In order to set some context for our topic, we will start with a brief look at the events of Genesis 12-14, beginning with God calling Abram from his home to be a pilgrim and sojourner in a strange land:

Genesis 12:1-5 *“1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. 4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.”*

Here we find the first mention of the promise – the covenant – that God makes with Abraham, and then reiterates with Isaac and Jacob. On its face, this appears to be a new, unique, and separate covenant with the Abraham’s seed. In some ways, that’s true, but in other ways it is an elaborate, illustrative teacher of the eternal covenant of grace – that covenant that was made amongst the godhead before the earth was even formed. I believe that we must keep that perspective with us while we consider every event in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the nation of Israel. While there is indeed a particular covenant with Abraham’s seed, that has some unique behavioral requirements, and some particular temporal blessings that are attached to obedience, it is ultimately all about Christ, the Messiah. It is a teacher of the same things that Adam and Abel and Enoch and Noah believed and taught, and that we believe and teach today. It is a teacher of the same salvation that Abram believed prior to this covenant that God made with him. I am not remotely discounting any part of that covenant that God made with Abraham, but we have to be keenly aware of the way that the world – and particularly apostate Jewry, treat that covenant. They have made it a works-righteous culture of ritual that removes God from the equation and focuses entirely on the notion of temporal blessings that they can “earn” by virtue of their superstitious, soulless “observance” of those rituals. Physical seed, and physical land are the object of Jewish obsession. Those things were promised to Abraham, but they are secondary blessings; primarily, he was promised an eternally fruitful seed in the Messiah that would spring from his loins, and an eternally bountiful land in heavenly places. Abraham died in faith, with a hope for a better and heavenly country, not an earthly one.

- Hebrews 11:8-19** “8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: 19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”

With that backdrop, we find faithful Abram sojourning in the land of Canaan, when this next event happens:

- Genesis 12:10-20** “10 ¶ And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land. 11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: 12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. 13 Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. 14 ¶ And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. 15 The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. 16 And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. 17 And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram’s wife. 18 And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? 19 Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. 20 And

Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.”

Afterward, in chapter 13, Abram and Lot return to the land of Canaan, and end up separating for lack of space, such that Lot sets up camp near Sodom. Chapter 14 tells us about Abram and Lot being caught up in the midst of warring nations:

Genesis 14 *“8 And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim; 9 With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five. 10 And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain. 11 And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. 12 And they took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. 13 ¶ And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram. 14 And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. 15 And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. 16 And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. 17 ¶ And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king’s dale. 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. 19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: 20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. 21 ¶ And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. 22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, 23 That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: 24 Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.”*

Now, at long last, we come to the main text for today:

Genesis 15:1-6 *“1 ¶ After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. 2 ¶ And Abram*

said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? 3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. 4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. 5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. 6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

- We reviewed the events that led up to this moment, so that we could get some perspective on Abram’s mindset in chapter 15. Considering the great victories that the Lord had wrought in Egypt, and amongst the warring kings, it seems a little bit odd that Abram is clearly fretting and afraid at this hour. Why might he be afraid?
 - Five kings had just been put to shame by the mighty hand of God, and while they had been defeated for the moment, Abram may well be worried that they would lick their wounds while taking a long hard look at the nomad and his rag tag band of herdsman, with vengeance on their mind.
 - Five other kings were likely suspicious, given the power that God displayed through Abram. The fact that he would not share in their reward, showed that his allegiance was not to them, which could make him look like a threat.
 - Here sat Abram, fresh from victory, and yet surrounded by those that hated him, and would do him harm. He was not mighty in the flesh – in a military sense – he was dwelling in tents, and tending his flocks / herds. Here we sit, my friends – sheep in the midst of wolves. Even after a great deliverance, it is not long before our ears perk up, and our hearts begin to stir at the sounds of the howling in the distance. How often do we find ourselves in spots like this? When we find ourselves there – under some affliction - how often are we less distressed by the affliction itself, than by the heart rending fears that we have offended God, and brought wrath upon ourselves? When we look for comfort in his promises, how often do we find ourselves doubting whether they truly apply to us? This is no new thing. In those hours we must hold fast to Christ, and call upon the Lord for light, wisdom, clarity, while continuing to do those things that we know we are supposed to be doing. God takes pity on his people – he knows our frames and our fears, and he sends us instruction, correction, encouragement and comfort in measure sufficient for the hour.
 - **2Corinthians 7:5-7** *“5 For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. 6 Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; 7 And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told*

us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more.”

- ***Psalms 31:7,8*** “7 I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities; 8 And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a large room.”

- Here our eternal King not only promises Abram great rewards, but also that God **is** his exceeding great reward. Not only will God protect him, but God Himself **is** Abram’s shield. What great comfort and confidence for our weary souls to know that this is the God that we trust in! Despite this strong consolation, Abram struggles to reconcile the promises of God that he assuredly believes, against the providence of God that is falling out before his eyes. How can I receive this reward when I’m old and childless? Do we not often find our own hearts wrestling in this same fashion?
- Having received this instruction from God, Abram believed, and God counted that belief as righteousness. What a great comfort to our weary souls to consider that even when we are not faithful – even when we wrestle against our weak flesh – God is faithful. When He goes to take account, He graciously overlooks our sinful doubting, and our presumptuous questioning of His providence, and sees only the faith that He gave us, and the righteousness that Christ enrobed upon us. When we read about the faithfulness of our dear friends Abraham and Sarah in Hebrews 11, we don’t see one word about Sarah’s chuckling disbelief, or Abram’s doubtful fretting, or the mess that they both made in the matter of Hagar and Ishmael. God Almighty – the judge of the quick and the dead – counted it all for righteousness. Praise God! More on this shortly in Romans 4.

Genesis 15:7-11 “7 ¶ And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. 8 And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? 9 And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. 10 And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. 11 And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.”

- While Abram clearly believed God and counted him faithful, he still struggled in his flesh to see how it would be possible, so he asks God for a sign that these promises were indeed for him personally. The Lord graciously and patiently committed to providing further assurance to him.
- The concept of sacrifice is nothing new to Abram at this point. God taught the need for blood sacrifice, atonement, and substitution in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve fell in sin; Adam taught it to Cain and Abel, the first men born in the earth,

and from that day forward, the Quarrel of the Covenant was set. While sacrifices clearly weren't new, here we have a foreshadowing of the sacrifices that God would later appoint for the Jews in the law of Moses. These animals (cow, goat, ram, turtledove, pigeon) are the entire list of animals that will later be used in the sacrifices made at the Tabernacle and Temple. Their gender and age may vary, but this is the entire species list, as far as I can tell. As we know, each sacrifice has its own intricate meaning, and points to various attributes of the Messiah, and His sacrifice on our behalf. All that He would appoint for the Jews to observe is nothing more than a guide to teach them about the covenant of grace, and a sign that they understand where their salvation lies. Of course those who are Israel of the flesh and not the spirit only see the works of the law, and presume to be justified by them; those who are Israel of the spirit, recognize the covenant of grace, and the blood of the Messiah, as the only source of hope.

- Having completed this difficult work, Abram expected to hear further from God, but the Lord delayed, such that carrion birds began to descend upon the flesh. Even when our hearts and actions are most focused on God – as Abram's certainly were at this moment – we are still set upon by Satan and the world – assaulting, accusing, tempting, and distracting. When we go to do good, evil is indeed with us. (**Romans 7:21**) Our spirits are in bloody war against our flesh. This work that Abram did – while faithful and obedient – could not produce true relief from the burden of sin. It could not save him. It only served to make him bloody, distressed, and exhausted, such that he fell into a deep sleep.

Genesis 15:12-16 *“12 ¶ And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. 13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; 14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. 15 And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.”*

- Think back to the events in Genesis 12, where Abram dealt with Pharaoh, and consider the way that the Lord prepared him to understand what was going to happen to his lineage, before they would be allowed to inherit the promised land. Consider the parallels:
 - They went down into Egypt because of famine in Canaan.
 - Sinful deceit was involved, lying about relationships to “protect” themselves.
 - God plagued Pharaoh and his house, as a part of keeping and delivering His people.
 - God's people were brought out of Egypt with a high hand, and were returned to the promised land greatly increased by the spoils of Egypt.

- Abram's heart moved from distress to horror when he understood the severe bondage that awaited his seed. How was this reassuring? What was he to take from this that reassured him of the promises of God? The fact that the Lord had already walked him through those experiences in Egypt helped him to understand the hopeless plight that his people would be in, but it also helped him to understand the mighty delivering hand of God. He knew how afraid and helpless he was while wandering in Egypt, but he also knew first hand just how incredibly God delivered him. By any natural analysis, Abram was a dead man walking, and yet the Lord turned an entire nation on its head in order to save His servants and deliver to them all that He had promised.
- Not only did this comfort Abram as it pertained the promises for his seed in the earth, but it much more comforted his soul – and our souls – to understand the deeper lessons of Egypt. We are all under the burden – the hard bondage – of sin, and surrounded by the darkness of this world and her murderous Prince. We are no more able to deliver ourselves from the penalty of sin than those Israelite slaves were able to rise up and overcome Pharaoh. Yet, there is hope. We see the mighty deliverance that God appointed from that bondage. We see that He raised the dead to newness of life, whereby we are taught the saving power of the resurrected Christ.
 - Abram's lineage was dead before it started when his wife was taken from him.
 - Abram's life was forfeit when his lies to Pharaoh were uncovered.
 - Abraham's lineage was again dead when God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham was obedient to the command, causing him to be taught 1) the sacrifice of God's only son, and 2) the beautiful doctrine of substitution.
 - The first born of all in Egypt were killed, but the Israelites were delivered by the innocent blood of the Passover lamb. Here we see that the destruction of reprobate men and the deliverance of God's redeemed sheep are tightly tied together.
 - The Israelites were as good as dead when Pharaoh cornered them at the Red Sea, until the Lord opened the waters. As they made that miraculous crossing, journeying into the deep with deadly walls of water looming above them, they were dead and buried, only to arise to newness of life on the other side of the river. Here we find the dead, buried, and resurrected Christ in the exact same symbol that we find in Noah's flood, the crossing of the Jordan, Jonah's whale, and John's baptism.
 - The Israelites were dead in the wilderness, until God miraculously provided water from the rock, and manna from heaven, showing forth Christ as the living water and the bread of life.

Genesis 15:17-21 “17 ¶ And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. 18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, 20 And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, 21 And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

- Abram’s horror has now turned to comfort and hope, and it is time for God to seal the deal.
 - While the sacrificing of those animals clearly foreshadowed the Mosaic Law, the sacrifice itself was not the primary goal in this situation. This method of cutting animals in the midst and creating a path between their halves was a common method used for the sealing of a covenant.
 - Consider these words in **Jeremiah 34:18**: “*And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof.*”
 - It appears that the parties of a covenant would cut the animal in half, and then pass between the halves to swear the covenant. Matthew Poole describes the significance of the general practice like this: “*In the way of a solemn promise, or confirmation of their resolution to make their promise good, they passed betwixt the parts of the calf or heifer so cut; silently agreeing that God should cut them in pieces like that beast if they did not make their words good. Hence is the Hebrew phrase of cutting a covenant, for making it. This was a ceremony ordinarily used also amongst the heathens, as we are informed by Cicero, Livy, and others.*”
 - Here then, we have God sealing the covenant with Abram. Notice that God and Abram don’t pass through the animals together. God alone passes through in the form of a smoking furnace and a burning lamp. Abram is not a party to the covenant, he is only a beneficiary. As we have discussed, this covenant with Abram serves to give him an understanding 1) of what is going to happen with his seed in this world, and 2) how everything that they are instructed to do as a part of that covenant, and everything that they will endure in Egypt, points directly to Christ, and incorporates the Covenant of Grace. Abram wanted assurances about the physical things that God had promised, so God pointed to the eternal and spiritual things that He had already accomplished: the same God that has already promised to deliver your soul is certainly able to do the lesser work of delivering you a son.
- God reveals himself as a smoking furnace, and burning lamp. What do we learn from these symbols?

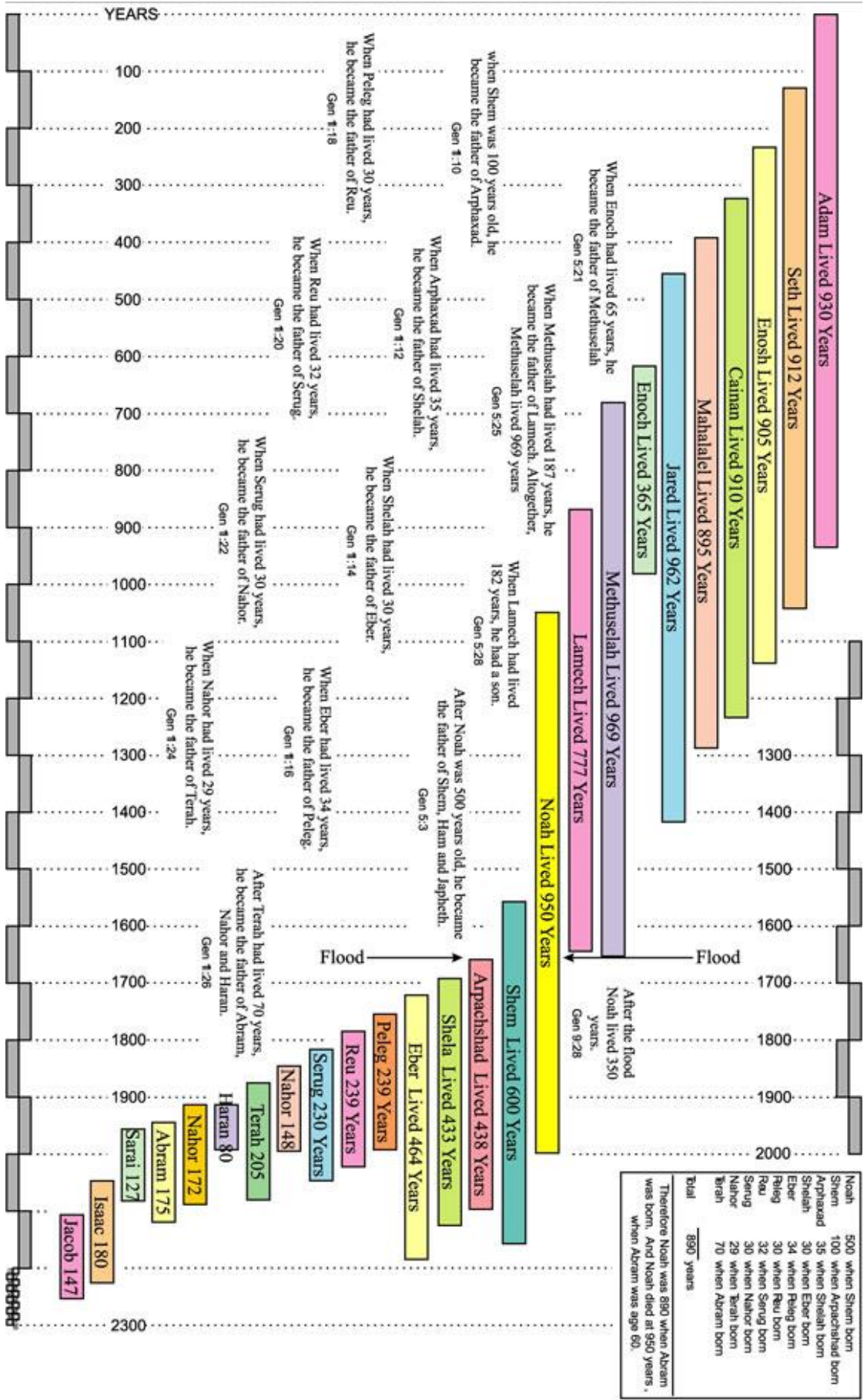
- This is the Shekinah – the presence of God. He presents Himself in the same way that He was present with them in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, leading them out of Egypt, delivering the law on Mount Sinai, and dwelling with them in the wilderness.
- Burning furnace: Here we see the heat of affliction, by which God’s people are tried and purified. Also, we see the judgement of God satisfied in consuming and accepting the sacrifice as would be done on the brazen altar.
- Burning Lamp: Here we see God as a bright light shining in the midst of great darkness. Where Abram was first overwhelmed and horrified at the thick and consuming darkness, here comes this warming, life-giving light. We are brought to understand the darkness of our own sinful flesh, and the hopelessness of accomplishing our own salvation by groping around in that darkness, such that we feel the absolute need of the light of God, and the path of salvation that He wrought in the Messiah, who the scriptures call the “light of the world”. (**John 12:46**)
- The combination of these things shows the presence of God with us, both in afflicting and delivering us.
- The promise of the land: here is the land that He ultimately gave them; He lists the current inhabitants, showing the fact that the earthly view of these matters is not the view that will prevail; the current prospering of the wicked is very temporary. I find great comfort in the fact that the list ends with the Jebusites. Their city would become Jerusalem – that place appointed to teach peace and reconciliation to the people of God – that place where the quarrel of the covenant will resolve, and where Christ the conquering King will triumphantly take His throne in this earth.

Romans 4

1 ¶ What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? 2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. 3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. 4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. 5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. 6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, 7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. 9 ¶ Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. 10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed

unto them also: 12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. 13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: 15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. 16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, 17 ¶ (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. 18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. 19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: 20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. 22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. 23 ¶ Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; 24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; 25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

I love you all. Amen.



Patriarch Time Line