

GENESIS

Why The Beginning Matters

Study 12

Dealing with Doubt in the Journey of Faith

Genesis 14-15

Recap

Genesis 12 is the covenant initiation, Genesis 15 will move into the covenant ceremony.

Part 1 of 2: Genesis 14- Military Exploits of Abraham

Genesis 14:1-16

At the time when Amraphel was king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goyim, these kings went to war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboyim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). All these latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea Valley). For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emites in Shaveh Kiriathaim and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran near the desert. Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazon Tamar.

Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboyim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goyim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills. The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.

A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.

1) Fill in the blanks. According to Genesis 14:1-16 and the video lecture, there was a war. Fill in the blanks on who was defeated by who.

Kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboyim, and Zoa	Defeated by->	King of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam, Goyim	Defeated by ->	Abram and 318 men
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Genesis 14:17-24

After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.

And praise be to God Most High,
who delivered your enemies into your hand.”

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.”

2) a) Discussion question. According to Genesis 14:17-24, Hebrews 7, Psalm 110:4 and the video lecture, who is this Melchizedek, and what is the significance?

Melchizedek is a forerunner to Jesus as the ultimate high priest, which is not determined by genetic lineage (no father no mother).

Hebrews 7:2-3,4,9-10

and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!

One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

Psalms 110:4

The Lord has sworn

and will not change his mind:

“You are a priest forever,

in the order of Melchizedek.”

b) Discussion question. According to Genesis 14:22-23, why didn't Abram accept the offer from the King of Sodom?

He doesn't want to give credit to the King of Sodom or any man but all credit should go to God alone.

Part 2 of 2: Genesis 15- Covenant Ceremony

Genesis 15:1-3

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.”

But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.

3) Reflection question. Abraham had a doubt, how do you think God will react when you are doubting?

Genesis 15:4-5

Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

4) a) Discussion question. How did God respond to Abraham's doubt?

b) Reflection question. Look at 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, and share how you are encouraged by the passage.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Genesis 15:6-7

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. 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."

5) Discussion question. According to Gen 15:6-7 and Romans 4:1-5, what are the criteria for righteousness?

Romans 4:1-5

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Genesis 15:8-21

But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

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.”

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

As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”

When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi[g] of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

6) a) Discussion question. In the covenant ceremony, what is the significance of cutting the animal in half? (you may refer to Jer 34:18-20 and the video lecture)

To agree to the terms of the covenant, people walk between the halves, if they fail to keep the covenant, they are cut into pieces

Jeremiah 34:18-20

Those 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. 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, I will deliver into the hands of their enemies who want to kill them. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds and the wild animals.

b) Fill in the blanks. Verse 17 says “a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces”, refer to the video lecture slide to fill in the blanks on what the verse implies.

Only ___ passed between the animal parts

___ is accountable for the promises, and _____ of the covenant if He fails

_____ does not pass through, means when he fails, God is accountable and will pay the price.

God, God, penalty, Abraham.

c) Discussion question. According to Isaiah 53:8 and the Genesis 15 passage, who paid for those who failed to keep the covenant?

Isaiah 53:8

By oppression and judgment he was taken away.

Yet who of his generation protested?

For he was cut off from the land of the living;

for the transgression of my people he was punished.

Take Away

Part 1 of 2: Genesis 14- Military Exploits of Abraham

Part 2 of 2: Genesis 15- Covenant Ceremony

Case Study

Case 1 – Handling Doubt

Jillian had become a Christian for the past 2 years but most of her friends were not believers. One Easter she tried to invite them to church but they ridiculed her and told her that Jesus did not really rise from the dead. He merely went unconscious and was probably revived and left the tomb. Another friend also told her that there were indeed over 300000 errors found in the New Testament alone and there wasn't even one source of the NT. How could he base his faith upon such a document as the bible?

Jillian could not answer the questions and it made her confused. She believed in Jesus but these doubts would come on again and again.

1) a) Discussion question. Should she ignore and suppress her doubt and just believe no matter what? Why?

Model Answer

Ignoring doubt is the most dangerous proposition as it will fester and destroy faith. Humans are designed to think logically and our faith is a rational faith. We are not expected to believe stupid irrational things in the name of faith.

Doubt is not a sin; she should not be afraid to bring it up. There is no merit in blind faith.

b) Discussion question. Should she raise these questions to her leaders in the church to help resolve her doubts? Why?

Model Answer

This allows an opportunity for her doubts to be answered wherever possible. In doing so her faith is actually strengthened and becomes more dependable. She will become a better witness as she becomes comfortable with her own faith as the answers will only confirm what she has already believed as a rational faith hence as a witness she will be a better one for Christ.

c) Discussion question. How would you answer her doubts?

Model Answer

The swoon theory was a very old suggestion put up by critics to debunk the resurrection. It is not rational because Jesus had undergone

- a. A very deadly scourging called the “verberatio”. This was used for people who would be crucified to help them along the path to death. It is said that it was so brutal that some of its victims had their intestines exposed as the nails of the whip would tear through the back muscles
- b. Jesus was so traumatized from the scourging that he could not carry the cross and had to be helped along
- c. He was crucified by a professional team of executioners in public who would not make a mistake
- d. His side was pierced with a spear to ensure he was dead and the description of the event was confirmatory
- e. He lay in the tomb, after being beaten, crucified, and impaled by a spear for 3 days. There were no intravenous resuscitative fluids given nor medical care. How could he have survived
- f. His followers were thoroughly emboldened by his death and resurrection, willing to die for him. How can this be if he did not die but was resuscitated? His wounds would have taken months to heal and he would have been a pale shadow of his former self.

Hardly an inspiring figure for the very disciples who had to rescue the very Saviour they were inspired by.

Yes, there are in fact so many errors but most of them are spelling mistakes as the manuscripts were copied from the original autograph. There were word repetitions. There are no errors that affect any central or major doctrine in the bible.

One of the issues is for example, the letter of Paul to the Ephesians. The word to the Ephesians is actually missing in the manuscripts and it was thought to be a general circular letter sent to the churches in the area. These sorts of errors in no way disqualify the bible of its authenticity as God's word. In fact, there are almost 15000 NT documents from which we derive the NT which is far more accurate than let's say the history of Julius Caesar for which there are less than 10 manuscripts and yet the world regards his existence with such certainty.

Case 2 – Prosperity of the Wicked

Ronald had just tried to tender for a project for his company which specialized in doing test piling for construction. His tender was defeated by his classmate who was a son of a very rich developer. Although his tender was very competitive, his classmate's company was much larger and well connected and was well known to grease the palms of those in charge. Ronald was devastated as his company was struggling and he envied his classmate. He grew bitter and running his company according to the Lord's will had brought him nothing but misery. He had no more leads in terms of getting new projects.

He grew distant from his church and dropped out of Life Groups. He started to doubt if God could ever pull him through. A friend of his started bringing him to his church where the pastor preached that if he really trusted God and gave of his resources sacrificially, God will bless him with prosperity. It was a promise in the Bible to Abraham and he as a Christian now inherits this promise. He needed to start unlocking all the treasures in the bible that the Lord had meant for him. His old church never taught all these new and exciting things. He started attending and got more and more into the teaching there and was convinced God will get his company out of trouble.

2) a) Discussion question. Look at Psalm 73 and see why Ronald had started to doubt God.

Model Answer

Like Asaph in Psalm 73, he started to doubt because in verses 2-3, he saw the prosperity of the unbelievers and envied them.

In the back of his mind, he wanted material wealth and success of his classmates like the Psalmist. He was not doubting because of any intrinsic injustice done to himself, he wanted what his classmate got. It was a comparison, and he did things God's way and did not get as rich as his classmate and he lusted for what his classmate got.

He was also convinced that God owed him a living or riches just because he was faithful and did things God's way. The blessing of Abraham was interpreted as physical riches.

b) Discussion question. What do you think about his joining this other church that claimed all these promises of God?

Model Answer

There are so many churches out there and it is often those with a big crowd who achieve this by telling people what they want to hear. The blessing of Abraham was about the restoration of people to God to live optimally under the love and fellowship of God from whom they were alienated by their sin. Genesis describes the main problem from Eden to Babel as sin, and salvation from that sin is a rescue from alienation and death. The blessing of Abraham is to bring people back to fellowship with God. Hence it would be a gross misinterpretation to believe all along that God only intended for His people to be prosperous.

These churches also ignore the other parts of scripture that clearly state that those who intend to live righteously will be persecuted.

2 Tim 3:10-13 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived

c) Discussion question. Look at Psalm 73. How does the author there deal with his doubt? And how should Ronald have dealt with his doubt?

Model Answer

In Psalm 73:16-20, the psalmist is distressed until he enters the sanctuary, until he sees the sacrifice for sin on the altar and is reminded that the world spins not on physical things but ultimately, there is a spiritual reality to which we all must answer to. The wicked will perish forever, their sin is unatoned for. Going into the sanctuary reacquaints him with the true picture of the world not the one slanted by materialism, and allows him to refocus.

In practical terms, coming to church for bible study will reacquaint us with what God really thinks matters, and praying over his doubt will allow him to do this.

e) Reflection question. Can you share about a time in your life that you too were affected by doubt?

f) Reflection question. How does Genesis 15 help you to cope with doubt?

Case 3 – Understanding God’s Grace

Max was a Christian leader in the university when he got into a relationship with another Christian student. They were in a relationship and pretty soon things got physical and they had premarital sex. The moment that happened they broke up and they went on to their separate lives.

Max was haunted by his sinful acts in that relationship. He could not continue to go to church or lead a bible study. His friends tried to counsel him but he was too ashamed. He cited other sins like lying and paying a policeman a bribe. Being too greedy in the love of money. Deep in his heart he loved the Lord and wanted to be faithful but he feared he could not. He doubted if he would ever live a life pleasing to Him.

However, in the past two years, he has been faithfully attending discipleship classes and growing in the Lord, and serving sacrificially.

Kirk on the other hand was brought up in a Christian family with Christian values which he assiduously kept. He went to church every Sunday and to BSF as well. He always helped the poor. He was rather critical of a lot of people in the church like Max who have compromised, and was pretty harsh with them.

3) a) Discussion question. Who is legalistic? Max or Kirk?

Model Answer

Kirk – as he relies on his own self-righteousness, which leads him to be overly critical of people

b) Discussion question. If you had a choice of a Christian leader in your church which of the two will you choose? Why?

Consider the aspects of:

- a. Personal encounter with Jesus
- b. Understanding of sin
- c. Reliance on grace or works

Model Answer

Choosing Kirk will be a mistake. Firstly we do not know if he actually had a personal encounter with Jesus and understood that despite his moral upbringing and record, he was still a sinner before God and needed grace. He needs to understand that it is not his good works that bring merit to him. He is a legalist by practice even though he may say the words that he has accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour, but in practice, he relies on his moral achievements.

Putting such a person in leadership is dangerous and will result in the church being a cold institution without grace and without real power to live for Him. Most will be hypocrites like him.

Max on the other hand is more of a typical Christian, with clay feet. He realizes the gravity of his sin. There is mourning and seriousness about his failings, and there is a desire to please Him. His sense of unworthiness will serve to teach him to have mercy and grace on others and hold him back from pride. Encouraging him that it is the Lord who has given grace and righteousness will comfort him, that his sins are no longer taken into account against him. This sense of His grace should fill him with confidence in the love of the Saviour and inspire him to rely on Jesus' power to live a holy life.

He needs to rely upon Jesus in living his holy life. It is not a striving to live the perfect life but living a holy life as a reciprocation of Jesus' love. It is not living to qualify but being qualified by Jesus to live a holy life. The power for which to do so comes entirely from God. Once he

understands this, he will be a great leader.

Case 4 – Test of Prosperity

Sharma and Jenar are twin brothers who were born into a Christian family. Both of them grew up in Sunday school and were inseparable like two peas in a pod.

They eventually went abroad to study overseas together at the University of Southern California. After they returned, they both worked together and formed their own company, called PetroMalaysia. The company did well and grew quite sizably to be Petronas' biggest rival.

Due to their expansion, the nation of the UAE was interested to have PetroMalaysia join a venture with them in petroleum exploration and refinement in a city named Fujairah. This requires one of them to migrate there to oversee operations for the next 8 years. In terms of compensation, the one who establishes the relationship with the UAE will get the lion's share (90%) of this RM1.2 billion joint venture.

At this point in time, Sharma and Jenar have already met and married their spouses. Sharma had 2 children and Jenar had one.

Sharma was hesitant to go as there were no churches in that area in Fujairah where he could attend. Both his children will not be able to attend Sunday school. However, Jenar was willing to go with his family since it could lead him to early retirement and was willing to make that sacrifice.

4) a) Discussion question. What does the choice of Sharma and Jenar tell us about their priorities?

Model Answer

Both Sharma and Jenar were faced with a test - not adversity, but prosperity! (Prosperity and success can be as great a trial and problem for our faith as difficulty and failure.)

Sharma responds to the situation in a remarkable way. He makes a firm decision for his own spiritual well-being as well as his family's.

How did he arrive at this conclusion? He first sorted out his priorities – his “core values” as they are often called today. Sharma chose to put “God and family” ahead of “career and

wealth”.

b) Discussion question. What does this imply about our priorities?

Model Answer

The practical implications for us are obvious. We may live in a time and place in which the demands of career and wealth creation have never been more all-encompassing. The 40-hour week is a thing of the past for most professionals.

Obviously, we are not being much of a help to our families if we make no sacrifices for our careers, but there must be balance, and in the end, our spiritual growth and our relationships have to take precedence.

c) Discussion question. What does Jenar’s choice tell us about his heart and character?

Model Answer

Jenar was led by the luxury, sophistication, and wealth he saw in this joint venture.

It may also be an indication of the kind of spiritual idolatry that the heart is capable of. Sin leads us to treat good things like career, family, or money as ultimate things — things that will fulfill our deepest spiritual longings. All human beings who live alienated from God are always restless and unhappy, even in the best conditions. Nothing can give us that fulfillment except the Lord.