

Session 4

November 7, 2021

CONFIDENCE IN SEASONS OF UNCERTAINTY

Genesis 15:1-6, 13-16

The events of Genesis 14 were likely scattered over several years. But three main events occurred in the life of Abraham: a military victory to recover his nephew Lot (14:1-12); a blessing from a “priest of the Most High God” (14:17-20); and an act of grace and generosity toward a wayward king (14:21-24). The variety of unrelated events over the course of a dozen years or so must have made Abraham wonder if God was actually still at work in his life. In chapter 15, Abraham is assured that God had not forgotten him. Three key words stand out.

Fear (vv. 1-5). While Abraham’s journey through the *promised land* of Canaan moved from adventurous, to dangerous, to blessed, the second half of God’s promise—a *people*—depended upon descendants. And as of yet, nothing had happened in that area. Abraham’s obedience must have given way over the years to creeping doubt, and then to outright fear. Had he been wrong? Had he gone out from among his own people to die childless in a foreign land? Where was God’s hand in all of this? This questioning is implied in verse 1, when the Lord said to him, “Do not be afraid.” The word for Lord here is *Yahweh*, the same covenant-related name used in Genesis 12 when He first called Abraham into service. The statement “I am your shield” emphasizes the promise of divine protection in the midst of difficult circumstances. The fear Abraham felt was no doubt clearly focused on his lack of children. In his mind, Abraham had no one to fulfill God’s promise. Would all he had really go to the steward of his household, a common servant? (vv. 2-3). In response, the Lord restated His promise: Abraham would indeed father a son, and his descendants would fill the land as the stars filled the sky (vv.4-5). For reflection: *Can you think of times in your own spiritual journey when you were certain God was at work, yet still fell into doubt and fear? Why do you think God allows that to happen?*

Faith (v. 6). Even after much tribulation, and understandable doubts, the Lord’s reiteration of His previous promise was welcomed wholly by Abraham. This statement (v. 6) is the basis of two important Bible doctrines: the doctrine of *justification by faith*, and the subsequent doctrine of *imputed righteousness*. Whereas no works could ever be enough to earn even Abraham the status of “righteous,” God awarded that status based entirely apart from his works, and entirely as a result of his faith (see also Rom. 3:28; 4:5; Gal. 2:16, et al.). That is the doctrine of justification by faith. The doctrine of imputed righteousness is wrapped up in the word *credited* (v. 6). Placing his trust in the Lord and His word (rather than relying on himself) resulted in righteousness being credited to Abraham’s account. In a practical sense, Abraham was certainly not truly righteous; but was *declared* to be so in the sight of God. This righteousness was not his own but was given to him on the basis of his whole-hearted acceptance of the Lord (see also Rom. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:21; 2 Pet. 2:24, et al.). For reflection: *Notice how the two doctrines work together. Justification means that our sin debt is wiped away. But God doesn’t stop there. Rather than leave our account empty, He makes a deposit of His own righteousness!*

Future (vv. 13-16). No doubt, after hearing from the Lord, Abraham thought his worries were over and that Sarah his wife would immediately conceive a son. But Hebrews 11:1 reminds us that the essence of faith is “the substance of things hoped for.” Faith draws from the past...but it

looks to the future. The phrase “Know this for certain” demonstrates God’s sovereignty. These four promises to Abraham could not and would not change. First, Abraham’s descendants would live as strangers in a land not their own (v. 13). Second, they would be pressed into slavery for four hundred years before they were freed (v. 14). Third, when freed, they would enter their own land with many possessions. Fourth, Abraham would personally live to a very old age (v. 15). While these events would end with a happy ending, Abraham was reminded that faith looks to the future—with confidence—even in the midst of difficult circumstances. For reflection: *Why do you think God allowed His chosen people to remain in bondage for so long before fulfilling His plan for them? What are the implications for us today?*