

International Bible Lesson Commentary
Genesis 15:7-21

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, October 6, 2013

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, October 6, 2013**, is from **Genesis 15:7-21**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the *International Bible Lesson Commentary* website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught and in *The Oklahoman* newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Genesis 15:7-21

(Genesis 15:7) Then God said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.”

The official *International Bible Lesson* selection is preceded with this statement commending Abram for his faith: “And Abram believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Abram expressed his belief in God when he moved from Ur (an area in Mesopotamia, an area in what is now known as Iraq) to the Promised Land. After he arrived, the LORD came to Abram again and identified himself as the God who had called Abram to move to the land of Canaan; the God that Abram had believed and obeyed when he had moved according to God's command. In the Promised Land, the LORD came again to Abram in order to reaffirm His promise that Abram and his descendants would possess the land He promised him.

(Genesis 15:8) But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"

Abram believed the LORD, and Abram wanted God to make a contract with him, called a covenant in the Bible, because the long-term possession of the land would include his descendants. They would need to know with contractual certainty that God had promised the land to them. Abram knew that if the LORD made a contract or covenant with him that God would not break His covenant, and Abram's descendants would know that they would possess the land no matter what difficulties they faced in the future. Abram would understand a covenant or contract similar to the way contracts were made in his day, in his culture and time; so, that is the type of contract God made with Abram.

(Genesis 15:9) He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a

ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”

To make His covenant the most firm or unbreakable covenant possible, God told Abram to bring Him several animals. The valuable domestic animals would have been used because of the importance and value of the contract. God also included a turtledove and a young pigeon. Later, doves and pigeons were used by the poor to fulfill God's law when making sacrifices to God. God was making His covenant with all of Abram's descendants, both rich and poor. Rich and poor alike among Abram's descendants would possess the Promised Land. Later, God gave His law through Moses to protect the rights and property ownership of the poor among Abram's children, the Israelites. When Joseph and Mary presented Jesus at the temple on the eighth day, we know they were among the poor because Luke wrote, "And they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons'" (Luke 2:24).

(Genesis 15:10) He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

God either told Abram to cut these animals into two halves (the Bible does not say) or Abram did what the covenants of his day demanded when an important contract was made. The covenant required sacrifice, and Abram offered three of these animals in sacrifice by cutting them into two pieces. He may have sacrificed the birds as the priests

would do in a later time according to the Law of Moses (the Bible does not say that he sacrificed them, but we may assume that he did). Abram cut the animals into two pieces and left a space between the parts.

(Genesis 15:11) And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

God gave His promise of descendants as numerous as the stars in the evening when Abram could see the stars (Genesis 15:1-5). God began to make His contractual promise or covenant with Abraham during the day (perhaps the next day, we are not told in the Bible). Abram no doubt exhausted himself keeping the birds of prey away from the dead animals in the heat of the day. Abram fulfilled God's will and command; Abram provided the best animals he could for God to make the contract; Abram protected the animals from being eaten before the contract or covenant could be made with God.

(Genesis 15:12) As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

As the day turned to early evening, a deep sleep came upon Abram, and he was terrified because the darkness was more than the natural setting of the sun in the evening. God was making with Abram the most solemn covenant possible, a covenant that would last for generations, a covenant that Abram would never forget and would never ask for again, a covenant that Abram would tell to His

descendants. Abram needed to know, and God determined that Abram would know without question or room for doubt. Abram's descendants would also need to know, and perhaps think twice before asking God to make a similar terrifying covenant with them. They would need to believe God based on the testimony of Abram, and God would account their belief as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).

(Genesis 15:13) Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years;

God told Abram this future fact, and Abram's later descendants could verify this fact through their own experience. When this future fact eventually became true, a fact they could not deny from their own experience because of the suffering they would endure and the miraculous rescue by God from slavery in Egypt, they would know with certainty that the contract or covenant God made with Abram included them as well. They would know with the fulfillment of Abram's prophecy that indeed God had given Abram and Abram's descendants the land to possess. 400 years is a rounded number for a period of time that Abram's descendants would be slaves in Egypt. One hundred years was a rounded number for an average generation in Abram's lifetime; however, blessed by God, Abram lived to be 175 (Genesis 25:7) and Moses lived to be 120 (Deuteronomy 34:7).

(Genesis 15:14) but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

Because God is both merciful and just, God would punish Pharaoh and the Egyptians for enslaving Abram's descendants. God was merciful to free Abram's people from slavery after they had become a numerous people in the land. God was just to pay the Israelites for their labors during their slavery by having them leave Egypt with great wealth given to them by the Egyptian people as God influenced them. The Israelites would know of this prophecy and see it fulfilled; thus, they would have confidence that God had given them the Promised Land, and God would be just and merciful to meet their needs.

(Genesis 15:15) As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.

God told Abram that Abram would not see all that God had promised him in his lifetime, but his descendants would see all that God promised him. Abram believe God's promise and covenant, and Abram went to his ancestors in peace. Though he would be buried physically because his body would die, he would continue to live spiritually, because Jesus said that God was the God of the living; Jesus said: "And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is God not of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 22:31,

32). Abram's "good old age" was 175 years of life on the earth when his body was buried.

(Genesis 15:16) And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

Four generations was approximately 400 years. God's great mercy influences God to postpone punishments for sins by individuals, people groups, and nations for as long as He wisely can postpone them. God postponed the great flood in Noah's lifetime until the thoughts and actions of everyone but Noah (and perhaps Noah's family, we are not told) were evil only continually. God told Abram that his descendants would not possess the Promised Land until the evil of the Amorites was so complete and they were so evil that He must justly punish them, and do so for the benefit of others and them. God waited 400 years from Abram's time before he gave the land of the Amorites to the Israelites. The Bible teaches, "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

(Genesis 15:17) When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

The fire pot and the flaming torch represented to God in His holiness. Later, God would appear to Moses as a fire in a burning bush and the Holy Spirit would descend on

Jesus' disciples as flames of fire on the Day of Pentecost. The symbolism represents the one making the covenant as though he were saying, "May I be cut in half (or killed) like these animals if I do not keep my promise, or contract and covenant" (see Jeremiah 34:18). Perhaps the Father and the Son are making this promise and covenant with Abram as symbolized by the flaming torch and the smoking fire pot.

(Genesis 15:18) On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

God gave this promise to Abram and it was an unconditional covenant or promise; which means Abram and his descendants did not need to do anything to "earn" their possession of the Promised Land. However, because the Israelites God freed from slavery in Egypt would not believe and obey God, only their children were allowed to enter and possess the Promised Land. Furthermore, God's people would need to obey God in order to keep possession of the Promised Land (because they disobeyed God, the Kingdom of Israel lost possession of their land and the Kingdom of Judah spent 70 years in exile). Abram was counted righteous because he believed God, and he expressed his belief by trusting and obeying God. The Israelites entered to possess the land in the time of Joshua, but they did not acquire control over the entire promised area until the time of King David. They began to lose control over the entire Promised Land after King Solomon

led them into idolatry.

(Genesis 15:19) the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,

The people groups listed in Genesis 15: 19-21 forfeited their land slowly in the time of Joshua, the Judges, and King David. Moses saw the land, but he could not enter the Promised Land because he sinned against God as a leader of His people. Later, Moses would appear with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, so we know Moses repented and lived spiritually with God after his physical death (Matthew 17:1-8). Joshua's experiences in conquering the land through various battles show that their success depended on their obedience, and people were conquered or evicted from their land as punishment for their sins.

(Genesis 15:20) the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,

The Canaanites may have been metalworkers of some kind, perhaps in copper, since only the Philistines worked iron. There may have been a close relationship between the Canaanites and the Midianites. They were never totally removed from the Promised Land, but lost control of their land. Caleb's father was a Kenizzite and they were eventually absorbed into the tribes of Israel (Numbers 32:12). We know very little about the Perizzites, but King Solomon enslaved them. The Rephaim were probably giants who lived in the land (see Deuteronomy 3:11).

(Genesis 15:21) the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

When God gave the Amorites over to Israel, God made the sun stand still so Joshua’s army could defeat them (Joshua 10:12). “Canaanites” is a general name for all or most of the people who lived west of the Jordan River in the land of Canaan. The Girgashites were a tribe of people who lived in the land of Canaan. The Jebusites inhabited the City of Jerusalem and they were not conquered by the Israelites until King David defeated them.

**Five Questions for Discussion
and Thinking Further**

1. What did Abram do to show that he believed God?
2. Why do you think God made a covenant or contract with Abram the way He did?
3. Why do you think God included in His covenant the revelation to Abram that his descendants would be enslaved four hundred years and then freed to take possession of the Promised Land?
4. What reason did God give Abram for His giving the land of the Amorites to his descendants when He planned to give it to them?

5. Why do you think God promised through Abram that his descendants would leave their land of slavery with great possessions?

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