

Genesis 12-23

Introduction

- I. God is a God abounding in “love and faithfulness” (Hebrew: hesed and emet)
= Loyal love, steadfast love, a love that sticks, a firm commitment to someone
- II. Stories of Faithfulness
Sam and Frodo in Lord of the Rings, Hawkeye and Cora in Last of the Mohicans

The Passage

- I. Gen 12:1-7
 - A. The promise
 1. Blessing
 2. A nation/descendants
 3. A land
 - B. Notice the unmerited nature of the promise
Abraham has done nothing to deserve this blessing
 - C. Notice the barriers to the promise being fulfilled
 1. God promises numerous descendants to an old barren couple (11:30, 12:4)
 2. God promises land without Abraham having ever seen the land before
- II. God reaffirms the promise (Genesis 13:14-17)
- III. God reaffirms the promise again (Gen 15)
 - A. Consider time frame
This is almost 10 years later! Abraham and Sarah have waited for a long time and God has not yet fulfilled the promise
 - B. God reaffirms his promise to give Abraham many descendants (v. 1-6)
 1. He gives him the sign of the stars in the sky
 2. Abraham responds with belief (v. 6)
 - C. God reaffirms his promise to give Abraham the land
 1. He gives him the sign of a covenantal ceremony (v. 9-11, 17-21)
 2. Today we have the covenant of marriage that contains vows and symbols (rings, unity candle, etc)
 3. In the ancient near east, they had a covenantal ceremony performed by two parties, where the parties would walk between the halves of animals as a solemn vow that they would be faithful to their side of the covenant
 4. This is what God does for Abraham (the smoking firepot with the blazing torch represent the presence of God). God is saying, “may I be cut in two if I don’t fulfill these promises to you, Abraham.”
 - D. Notice the unmerited/unconditional nature of this promise
 1. In most ancient near eastern covenantal ceremonies, both parties would pass through the animals. But only God passes through as if to say that he alone is responsible for making sure the covenant is fulfilled.
 - E. Notice the barriers to the promise being fulfilled
 1. = 400 years in slavery before they inherit the land (v. 12-16)

- IV. God reaffirms the promise again (Ch. 17)
 - A. Consider the timing: 24 years after God made the initial promise, and still the promise hasn't been fulfilled!
 - B. God reaffirms the promise (v. 1-8)
 - C. God gives him the sign of circumcision (v. 9-14)

- V. Finally God fulfills his promise of a son (Ch. 21)
 - Sarah is 90 years old when she gives birth!

- VI. Finally God begins to fulfill his promise of land (Ch. 23)
 - Abraham is able to purchase a plot of land to bury Sarah (v. 17-20)

- VII. The rest of Scripture
 - A. God's ultimate fulfillment of the promise to Abraham is seen in us today. 4000 years later, Abraham has countless descendants around the world
 - B. Ultimately God's faithfulness to the covenant cost him nothing less than the death of his son.
 - C. He is a God of faithfulness; a God who makes promises and fulfills them.

Conclusion

- I. Our response should be the response of faith/trust in a faithful/trustworthy God

- II. Four promises each one of us can hold onto every day because God is faithful
 - A. There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Ro 8:1)
 - B. God who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it on the day of Jesus' return (Phil 1:6)
 - See 2 Timothy 2:12-13: "if we deny him, he will also deny us. If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he can't deny himself."
 - C. He promises his presence with us through every circumstance (Mt 28:20)
 - See Hebrews 13:5-6: Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." God's faithful presence, not money, is what gives us security.
 - D. He promises to work all things in our lives for our ultimate good (Ro 8:28)

Discussion Questions

1. How did seeing the big-picture story of God's relationship with Abraham from start to finish add to or change your understanding of God's faithfulness?
2. Throughout his life, God gave Abraham several concrete signs to remind him that He would fulfill his promises (e.g. the stars in the sky, the covenantal ceremony, circumcision). What role do/should concrete signs play in our relationship with God today?
3. Read Hebrews 11:1-2 and 8-16. As you hear those descriptions of faith, what strikes you most? How are you encouraged to live in light of that? Can you think of any specific action steps?
4. Where in your life are you most in need of being reminded of God's faithfulness? One way to answer this is to look at the four promises mentioned at the end of the sermon and ask yourself which one you most need to hear right now.