

## Look up at the heavens and count the stars

Genesis 14:1 - 15:21

Key verses 15:5,6

“He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”

Genesis chapters 14 and 15 are the climax of God's promise. Therefore, today we want to reflect again on God's great promise and vision for Abram. Abram had been nothing but an idolater and a childless old man with a petty mind. But the God of hope called him to bless him and make him into a great nation as numerous as the stars in the sky. Abram just wanted a son quickly. But God called him with a more than 1,000-year plan. Today, let us accept God's promise for Abram and also for us, and look up to the Almighty Creator God to give us countless spiritual descendants like the stars in the sky.

### 1. Abram saves Lot and honors God (14:1-24)

Chapter 14 tells of the battle of the kings. A coalition of the kings of the north led by the Elamite king Kedor-Laomer fought against five Canaanite kings, including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Canaanite kings were defeated and fled to the mountains. The victors took all the possessions of Sodom as booty and led its inhabitants into captivity. In the process, Lot was also taken captive with his family and their belongings and led away. In the previous chapter, we had learned how Lot had separated from his uncle Abram and moved to Sodom with great hope. Living near the city seemed to offer him more opportunities, especially in terms of material benefits, self-realization and opportunities for development. But now he had lost all his possessions and freedom and had become a miserable prisoner of war. There is no true security in this world. The true security and guarantee is in a life with the promise of God.

Let's look at verse 13: “One 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 Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram.” When Abram heard through the messenger that Lot had gone into captivity, he immediately set out with 318 of his servants and chased after the enemy forces. Here we see Abram's shepherd's heart for his nephew Lot. Instead of thinking that Lot himself was to blame for his plight and now had to bear the consequences Abram risked his own life and the lives of his associates for the sake of his nephew. When he and his servants had caught up with the enemy's convoy in the region of Dan in the north of the country, Abram divided his band and launched a surprise attack in the middle of the night. Abram's victory over five armies from Mesopotamia was truly sensational. Abram defeated and chased the enemies all the way to Hobah, which is north of Damascus. Let's look at verse 16: "And he brought back all the possessions; also Lot his brother's son with his possessions, also the women and the people."

God is pleased with us, when we, with the shepherd's heart, fighting spirit and sacrifice of Abram, serve young people, children and Bible students and save them from the captivity of sin and humanism. How many young people are seduced by the lies of the spirit of this age (e.g. godless humanism, relativism, hedonism, gender doctrine...) and live miserably and spiritually dead trapped in such teachings. Shall we remain indifferent? Let us set out like Abram. Let us invite the students to the Word of God and serve them with Bible study. God may give us His grace to establish 10,000 1:1 Bible study teams in the winter term. God will give us the great victory of faith.

Let's look at verses 17,18: "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," Abram had won a great victory. At the same time, he was in great spiritual danger, namely, attributing the success to himself and thereby forgetting God's grace and God's promise. Then Abram experienced spiritual help through Melchizedek, the king of Salem. Melchizedek was the city king of Salem (Jeru-Salem). He was a Canaanite. But he knew God Most High and is even called a priest of God Most High. Through Melchizedek's spiritual help, Abram realized that it was not he himself who had won the victory by his own power, but that the sovereign God had given him the victory. As a result, Abram gave glory to God by offering tithes to Melchizedek.

Look at verse 21: "The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself." This was a very tempting offer for Abram, to receive the recognition and wealth of a worldly king, but – like Lot – to lose the promise of God. What did Abram say? Let's read verses 22.23: "But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'" Abram chose to live with the promise of God alone, rather than depend on people and goods. By this decision, Abram gained a great spiritual victory, much more valuable and important than momentary human advantage! The decision for the promise of God is much more important than a small human advantage. The promise of God is the greatest wealth.

## 2. God's vision for Abram (15:1-21)

Abram had won a great victory of faith and delivered Lot from captivity. Then God spoke to Abram again. Let's look at verse 1: "It came to pass after these things, that the word of the Lord came to Abram in a revelation, saying, Fear not, Abram. I am your shield and your very great reward." Abram had learned that Lot had gone back to the city. Therefore, he had a sense of loss. At the same time, Abram must also have been inwardly fearful, imagining that the enemies might return and come upon him. Fear and worry are powerful weapons through

which Satan tempts us to abandon the promise of God and act in a human way.

Let us read verse 1 again: "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." God is Abram's shield. Abram was full of fear because he had forgotten the Almighty God and also God's promise. But God Himself was Abram's shield. Abram did not need to fear or worry, but he was allowed to look up to God, who is almighty and protects him and surely fulfills His promise.

God is also Abram's reward. Abram thought that he had sacrificed very much for God and God had not given him any reward. But God had already given Abram the greatest reward, Himself. There is no greater reward than for the eternal God to call you (and me) and become your (and my) God.

God has given us the very greatest "reward" in Jesus, the Messiah and Savior sent into the world. Because of the power of sin, we humans had lost everything. We had even become the enemies of God and had to remain separated from God forever, even judged and condemned. But how great is God's love that He gave Himself in Christ to us the sinners! Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Through Jesus, without our own merit, we have been given the grace of salvation, the grace of calling, and new life with God's promise. It is the greatest reward for us that instead of serving the old slave master of sin, we may now give our bodies as instruments of righteousness for God. That is why five baptized young people chose much rather to rejoice in the remaining suffering of Christ than to have the enjoyment of sin for a little while.

It is our great reward that instead of living petty lives like Lot, we are allowed to serve the campus mission and cooperate with God for the pioneering of 1,700 universities in Europe and even for the establishment of the three base camps for the M mission. We are truly blessed people because God Himself is our shield and very great reward.

How did Abram respond to this revelation from God? Let us read verses 2 and 3: "But Abram said, "O 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." God's word to Abram was so encouraging. Yet he could not accept it. His hidden concern became obvious. For Abram, his biggest problem was his childlessness. He needed a son who would be his heir. All he saw was that he still did not have a son. Abram sighed, "Lord my God, what can you give me?" As Abram thought about himself, his thoughts became very dark, thinking that his servant would inherit everything and that his life would end fruitlessly and meaninglessly. Especially the nights were very difficult for Abram. But God did not leave him in his self-pity. Let us read verses 4 and 5: "Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be.""

God told Abram to go out of his tent and out of his self-occupation. God was a good shepherd to his desperate sheep and helped him through audio-visual instruction. Let's read verse 5 again, "He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Perhaps Abram thought about what the stars had to do with his problem. But when Abram obeyed and turned his gaze upward outside the tent, he saw a huge canopy of stars in the sky. God's question was not a rhetorical question. To count the stars, in Hebrew, means to give them names. Abram began to count the stars by giving them names. But he didn't call them Sirius, Aldebaran, or Betelgeuse; he might have called them "Isaac," "Jacob," "Joseph." At the beginning it was not easy for him. But with time he got more and more joy and vision. He saw more stars and named them "Moses", "Joshua", "Samuel", "Ezra". Then he saw a triple star and perhaps named it "Sarah", "Andrea" and "Rebecca". He saw king stars and called them "David". He also saw older, reddish stars and called them "Enoch" and "Noah". Abram could not hide his amazement. Then Abram heard God speak to him again, "So shall your offspring be!" At that moment he realized the limitations of man and the infinite wisdom and omnipotence of the living Creator. He realized how small he himself was, but how great God was. When Abram looked up to heaven and saw the stars, he

could see his innumerable descendants in faith in the omnipotence of God, even though he did not yet know all of their names.

Abram teaches us to look up to the living Creator God and to His promise. As children of God, we may always look upward, as Hebrews 12:2 also says, "...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith..." Through faith we may also count the stars and give them names. Our Next Generation co-workers are still small, humanly speaking. But the servant of God is counting the stars with great hope and vision, helping each of them with prayer and by faith to prepare history lectures. Currently, he is also visiting different cities in the Middle East, counting the stars that God wants to entrust to us for establishing spiritual base camps.

How did Abram respond to the promise of God? Let's read verse 6: "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." Abram's response to the promise of God is truly awesome. In which God did Abram believe?

First, Abram believed in the Almighty Creator God who created the heavens and the earth. Abram was about 85 years old and Sarai 75 years old. However, Abram overcame his human thoughts by faith. He believed, "If God created all these countless stars by the power of His word, then He can also give Sarai and me countless descendants like the stars in the sky."

Second, Abram believed in the gracious God. Abram had reached a low point in his life because of his unbelief and because of his human desire. He had been full of human thoughts and calculations. Thus, he had even grumbled and sinned against God. But when he heard the word of God, he believed that God would forgive all his unbelief and all his grumbling and make him a blessing to the world. Scripture testifies (in Romans 4:3-5) that because of this faith, God declared Abram righteous and made him a father of faith. We are also often weak and sinful like Abram. However, instead of being preoccupied with the situation or with ourselves, we may accept God's word of promise. Through faith, God makes us righteous and even a blessing to the world like Abram.

Third, Abram accepted God's promise. Abram wanted only one son. But God wanted to give him descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. Abram could have been angry at God's audio-visual teaching. But Abram put aside his

own desire and accepted God's promise and God's plan. God also says to us, "Look up to heaven and count the stars; if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be."

God has abundantly blessed the faith of M. Peter and M. Sarah during the past 40-plus years in God's word of promise. They held on to Mark 11:22 "Have faith in God" and Philippians 1:21 "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." even in the midst of persecutions and served the work of God by faith. God blessed this faith and worked mightily by raising up natives and the Next Generation as shepherds and Bible teachers. Also, among the Next Generation, God revealed His great vision for raising up global spiritual leaders. God will also continue to bless M. Sarah's faith in the promise from Genesis 12:2 to raise 12 mothers of faith at each faculty of Bonn University and establish countless spiritual descendants through them. We see that God is blessing the faith of M. Peter to establish three base camps for the M mission by preparing the practical environment for it.

Here, I may renew God's promise from Genesis 15:5,6 in my heart. I could repent of depending on the visible results and the change of young people instead of living by faith in the promise of God. Thus, I lacked faith and hope of God for the students and children. Here I may lift my eyes to heaven anew, count the stars, and hear God's promise: "So shall your offspring be." God is the almighty creator. He created all things out of nothing by His omnipotent word. With faith and trust in this Almighty God, I may see that God has already established an Abraham and a Sarah of faith and 12 disciples of Jesus at the Rhine-Sieg Campus and has preciously used Noah, David, Andrea, Olaf, Kai as disciples of Jesus and pioneered through them 1,700 universities in Germany and Europe to Istanbul and Kazakhstan and North Korea.

With God's vision and hope that God has already raised up countless spiritual descendants, this winter semester we may get to know the young people on campus, especially freshmen, and encourage them to accept God's hope and promise by forming one-on-one Bible study teams with the Word of God. By faith, we serve as one, thereby challenging the pioneering of all 1,700 universities in Europe. By faith we prepare the environment for the establishment of 3 base camps for M-Mission. By faith we see God using Neh 2:17 and Ezek 37:10 to rebuild the broken spiritual walls of Europe and raise up a

vast army of 100,000 Bible teachers. By faith we see Germany restored as a shepherd nation and Europe as a missionary sending continent for world mission. God will credit our faith as righteousness and fulfill His promise. Amen.

Now let's look at the rest of the verses from 7 to 21. God continued to speak to Abram, "...I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." God reminded Abram again of His long-term plan, which had already begun in Ur in Chaldea. Abram's countless descendants would possess this land of Canaan. God continued to help Abram in faith by having him bring sacrifices and by revealing to him the future of his descendants. Look at verse 9: "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 obeyed and offered the sacrifice God had asked for. Let's look at verses 12,13: "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 your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years." God revealed His long-term plan to Abram. Abram's descendants would go to Egypt and not be brought out of the land until 400 years later by the grace of God, and eventually return to Canaan.

Let's look at verses 17-21: "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 river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites." Here God told Abram that He would give his descendants the territories between the Euphrates River on the east and the Nile River on the west. God even gave the names of these peoples. Almost 1,000 years later in the time of King Solomon, this word was fulfilled (2 Chronicles 9:26). God raised Abram with a 1,000-year plan and helped his faith that he could also have such a millennial vision. God gave Abram a great vision that even included the birth of the Messiah and was connected to eternity.

What plan and vision are you living with? In our time, many people live only with a very short-

term and small-scale plan - until graduation, marriage, having children and then retirement. But God did not raise Abram in such a petty way. In this hour, God also speaks to us: "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be." God has a 1,000-year plan for our lives as well. Like Abram, God is raising us to move out of our petty and self-absorbed lives and take up God's vision. Thus, with God's word of promise, we may live blessed lives as fathers and mothers of faith and as blessings to all generations on earth. God wants to bless through us 1,700 universities in Europe, the M countries, further China, North Korea and Cambodia.

Today we have learned to get out of our self-preoccupation and petty mindset and embrace God's heart and God's vision. We may hear God's call: "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be." God bless you to believe the promise of God and to live with the long-term promise of God and to have it counted for righteousness.

Let us read the key verses 15:5,6: "He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."