

Text: Genesis 15

Title: "Whose idea was Exodus?"

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Place: NBBC

Introduction: In 2013 the Dead Sea Scrolls came to the Museum of Science in Boston. Some in my family and I went down to see the collection. The Dead Sea Scrolls discovery has been the most important archeological find when it come to our understanding of God's providential preservation of the Old Testament Scriptures. Prior to that discovery, the earliest Hebrew manuscript of Exodus dated to 915 A. D.. Manuscripts found in the Qumran caves, including what amounts to the entirety of Exodus, are 1000 years older, and their testimony to the careful accuracy of the transmission of the Hebrew Scriptures from that time to today is truly remarkable.

In spite of this exciting affirmation of God's work of Bible preservation, I came away from the Boston display somewhat saddened. What saddened me was the audio that you could listen to on headphones while you viewed the display, which taught the thousands of visitors to the museum that the originals of our Old Testament were produced in the days of Ezra, and so were not the product of Mosaic authorship. This unsubstantiated claim would have saddened Jesus as well. Let's see what He says about Exodus's author in Mark 12:26.

So whose idea was Exodus? Was it some creative genius in the days of Ezra who wanted to publish a legend against slavery? Or did God really speak to Moses, who then wrote about the Exodus in what Jesus calls "The Book of Moses"? It turns out that Genesis 15 weighs in on the correct answer.

I. Exodus was the idea of the God who speaks (vv. 1-6).

Illustration: Our son Kent was home for Thanksgiving, and one of the things that has always happened when our kids have come home is the refrigerator and the cupboards become emptier quicker. Not only are there more of us who are eating, but now some of us are eating like individuals that are still growing. There is a relationship between physical growth and physical appetite.

Application: The Apostle Peter picks up on a principle of spiritual growth from this truth in 1 Pet. 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." There is a relationship between our desire for God's Word and our spiritual growth, because spiritual growth is about getting to know better and become more like the God who speaks to us in His Word.

The Apostle Paul summarized the life of Abraham as a life of spiritual growth (Rom. 4:16-25). How did he become strong in faith (v. 20)? He learned to believe what God says. He listened to and learned to trust what God has said. Our Genesis 15 passage describes not only the growth of Abraham's faith, but also a growth spurt he went through. Notice with me how important God's Word is to Abraham in this very important chapter of his life (vv. 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 13, 18).

The power of God's Word brings needed change, and it changed Abraham in two ways in this chapter:

1. It changed Abraham's fear by reminding him who his God is (vv. 1-5). Abraham feared because he had concluded from his circumstances that his God was the one who had

called him out of Ur of the Chaldees to leave him childless. He had a lot of evidence in support of this conclusion.

God's Word reminds Abraham in his time of need that God is not only a shield and an exceedingly great reward, but Abraham's shield and reward (v. 1). He explained that a miracle was coming in spite of his old age (v. 4), and then He takes Abraham outside. That is God's Word too - "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard." The omnipotent Creator of the stars used them that night to illustrate how many descendants Abraham would have - too many to number like the number of the kernels of grain Joseph would store in Egypt (Gen. 41:49).

2. It changed Abraham's unbelief by helping him believe who his God is (v. 6). This verse is the first time believing is mentioned in Scripture. What did Abraham believe? He believed that his God was indeed his Savior - his shield of salvation and his exceedingly great reward (v. 1). The bread and wine of Melchizedek in the previous chapter may have had much to do with Abraham's understanding of his need for salvation and of what Jehovah would do to provide for that need.

Verse 6 describes what believing in the Lord for his salvation did for Abraham. God counted his believing for his righteousness. The righteousness we read about in verse 6 is the imputed righteousness of God's work of salvation, which is the righteousness of Christ credited to the believer in exchange for our sin. It did not make Abraham's nature sinless and his faith now flawless. The reader of Genesis sees that plainly in chapter 16, at which point Ishmael is

born. But it does mean that from that point on, God would see the perfect righteousness of Christ as Abraham's life record in spite of his continued struggle with sin.

What must we believe in order to have Abraham's saving faith and God's imputed righteousness? We must believe the same truth illuminated with even greater light. Paul explains in Rom. 4:23-25, "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification."

Do you believe that Jesus, God's Son, was delivered for your offenses? Do you believe that He arose again for your justification? Do you have the faith of Abraham? Has the Word of God corrected your unbelief? Exodus was the idea of the God who speaks so that men and women and boys and girls can be counted righteous by faith. He is our shield of salvation, and our exceedingly great reward. This we must believe.

II. Exodus was the idea of the God who requires patience (vv. 7-16).

Illustration: Robert W. Service was a Canadian poet who enjoyed writing about the rugged West of that nation, especially about Yukon gold miners. He wrote a poem called "Carry On!" about the patience and perseverance of these men. It says in part:

"It's easy to fight when everything's right,  
And you're mad with the thrill and the glory;  
It's easy to cheer when victory's near,  
And wallow in fields that are gory.  
It's a different song when everything's wrong,

When you're feeling infernally mortal;  
When it's ten against one, and hope there is none,  
Buck up, little soldier, and chortle:

"Carry on! Carry on!  
There isn't much punch in your blow.  
You're glaring and staring and hitting out blind;  
You're muddy and bloody, but never you mind.  
Carry on! Carry on!  
You haven't the ghost of a show.  
It's looking like death, but while you've a breath,  
Carry on, my son! Carry on!

Application: In our passage, God is encouraging Abraham to carry on because He has a plan. God's plan is seldom what we would draw up for ourselves. He planned on making Abraham a great nation, but He planned on doing it after Exodus – after four centuries had passed and by way of the bondage of Egypt.

His plan for us may involve time frames that are longer than we want them to be, and circumstances that are more difficult than we would want them to be. We may need to learn what it is to have patience even while we are losing, while things are not successful, while things are not what we wish they were. God required this kind of patience from Abraham, and so we may expect that He will from us. This morning I want us to see three keys to this kind of patience from Abraham's example.

1. Patience with God's plan involves step-by-step obedience (vv. 7-11). I am sure that Abraham had a hard time seeing the connection between his question and God's command to split and arrange some animals on the ground. Yet Abraham obeyed. There may be something that we really desire that God would do for us, and we cannot see how getting to

prayer meeting on a Thursday night is going to help accomplish that. Yet we need a patience that sees the importance of step-by-step obedience.

2. Patience with God's plan involves courage in tribulation (vv. 12-16). Bondage in Egypt was not a tragic consequence of Israel's foolishness or sin. It was a part of God's plan for their blessing (v. 14). They had to understand what it was like to face tribulation before God could use them as the kingdom of priests that He wanted them to be. Without the trying circumstance described by Exodus, Israel's faith in the Lord would have been impoverished.

Robert Service's poem has another verse:

"And so in the strife of the battle of life  
It's easy to fight when you're winning;  
It's easy to slave, and starve, and be brave,  
When the dawn of success is beginning.  
But the man who can meet despair and defeat  
With a cheer, there's the man of God's choosing;  
The man who can fight to Heaven's own height  
Is the man who can fight when he's losing."

3. Patience with God's plan involves remembering that God has been patient with sinners (v. 16b, "the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete"). Joshua's attack on Canaan was not a war of man's aggression, it was a war of God's just judgment, justice that finally fell after four centuries of grace and mercy.

God has been very patient with us as he was with the Canaanites. Should we not then be patient with His plan for us? Something may be taking longer because God is being merciful to someone else. One thing is always the case -

Exodus was the idea of the God who requires patience of those who will love and serve Him.

III. Exodus was the idea of the God who promises (vv. 17-21).

Application: When the Hebrews wanted to say, “make a covenant,” they actually said, “cut a covenant.” *Making a covenant* was called *cutting a covenant* because of the ceremony we see in this passage. When two parties made a covenant, they would split animals and pass through the parts of those animals. The idea evidently was that should either party break the covenant, then he would be deserving of the fate of these animals.

Here God uses that ceremony, but only His torch passes through the animals. He is the only one being bound by the terms of this agreement that He is making. God’s covenant here is unconditional because God’s covenant love is unilateral. Our faith becomes strong when we remember that it is not we who have chosen God, but God who has chosen us. He has bound himself to our well-being, and He will not fail us even though we may fail Him (2 Tim. 3:13 assures us, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”) Over and again, we will read in Exodus that God was remembering the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is faithful and His promises are sure because they are promises of His matchless and unchanging grace.

Conclusion: How shall we respond to the God whose idea was the Exodus? He has spoken; do we listen in faith? He requires patience; do we wait in faithful obedience, courage, and forgiveness? He has bound Himself to a covenant of love for us; do we trust that love in faith?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*