

Genesis 15:1-12, 13-16, 17-18, 19-21

After these things
the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision,

'Do not be afraid, Abram,
I am your shield;
your reward shall be very great.'

²But Abram said,

'O Lord GOD,
what will you give me,
for I continue childless,
and the heir of my house
is Eliezer of Damascus?'

³And Abram said,
'You have given me no offspring,
and so a slave born in my house
is to be my heir.'

⁴But the word of the LORD came to him,

'This man
shall not be your heir;
no one but your very own issue
shall be your heir.'

⁵He brought him outside and said,
'Look towards heaven and count the stars,
if you are able to count them.'

Then he said to him,

'So shall your descendants be.'

⁶And he believed the LORD;
and the LORD reckoned it to him
as righteousness.

⁷ Then he said to him,
'I am the LORD
who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans,
to give you this land to possess.'

⁸But he said,
'O Lord GOD,
how am I to know
that I shall possess it?'

⁹He said to him,

'Bring me a heifer three years old,
a female goat three years old,
a ram three years old,
a turtle-dove,
and a young pigeon.'

¹⁰He 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.

¹¹And when birds of prey
came down on the carcasses,
Abram drove them away.

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

¹³Then 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;

¹⁴but I will bring judgement
on the nation that they serve,
 and afterwards
 they shall come out
with great possessions.

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

¹⁶And they shall come back here
in the fourth generation;
for the iniquity of the Amorites
is not yet complete.'

17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark,
a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch
passed between these pieces.

¹⁸On 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,

¹⁹the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,

²⁰the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,

²¹the Amorites, the Canaanites,
the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.'

Reading the Torah This Week

Here's amid *toledot* of Avram, Genesis c.12-25,
3 chapters out of *lech lecha*, get up and go
and he's losing patience with delayed gratification
without offspring, land, or blessings

So the covenant is renewed in a vision
Descendants as numerous as the stars
animal sacrifices and overnight vigil
sealing the deal: from Nile to Euphrates?

The italicized omission from the lectionary
predict 400 years of Egyptian captivity,
descendants re-entering in 4th generation
a rhythm of exile and return

The italicized next verses, after the lection,
enumerate 10 indigenous nations in that land
adding Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites
to the recital of 7 nations in Deuteronomy 7, reordered:
Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites,
Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites

The extra 3 tribes carry southern associations,
Midian, toward Egypt,
Correlating with the land claim to the Nile

Some of the 7 nations in the Deuteronomic list
Lack clear correlations to known historic nations
But Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites are known enemies

In the echoes of TRC,
current contention over Gaza and West Bank,
is omission good enough,
or a liberal 'historical critical' analysis?

What's your operating theology of this covenant,
Abraham's claim to descendants, land, blessings,
Jewish, Christian, Islamic appropriation of that claim?
How do you hear current slogans and chants:
'from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free'?

How do you relate to the Christian Zionism it opposes,
the claim to mandatory Palestine it implies
the threat experienced by Jewish hearers?

You may have notice I'm 'Re-reading Romans' in Lent
Saturday of this week, it's c.4
Paul's reconstruction of Abraham's covenant
And of our appropriation of it as Christians...

Study notes and links from 2022:

<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2022/01/cutting-covenant-genes-is-15.html>

Lent 2, 2013:

<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2013/02/worrying.html>

Lent 2, 2004

<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2004/03/great-expectations.html>

Philippians 3:17-4:1

¹⁷ Brothers and sisters,
join in imitating me,
and observe those who live
according to the example
you have in us.

¹⁸ For many live
as enemies
of the cross of Christ;
I have often told you
of them,

and now I tell you
even with tears.

¹⁹ Their end is destruction;
their god is the belly;
and their glory is in their shame;
their minds are set on earthly things.

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven,
and it is from there
that we are expecting a Saviour,
the Lord Jesus Christ.

²¹ He will transform
the body of our humiliation
so that it may be conformed
to the body of his glory,

by the power
that also enables him
to make all things subject
to himself.

¹Therefore,
my brothers and sisters,
whom I love and long for,
my joy and crown,
stand firm
in the Lord
in this way,
my beloved.

*2 I urge Euodia
and I urge Syntyche
to be of the same mind
in the Lord.*

³Yes,
*and I ask you also,
my loyal companion,
help these women,
for they have struggled
beside me
in the work
of the gospel,*

*together
with Clement
and the rest
of my co-workers,
whose names are in
the book of life.*

Reading the Epistle This Week

Philippians appears here in Lent 2,

Again in Lent 4 and Passion readings,
A sort of 'reverse seriatim' selection

My guess is that we'll overlook the epistle
I've avoided this as a preaching text –
But try Lent last year, replaying 2019,
As my overview of Paul's voice in your head
(nearly 8 minutes of audio, if you can bear it):

<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2024/04/tuesday-week-paul-app-ealing-or.html?q=Philippians>

Who do you imagine
as Paul's opponents and allies
in Philippi, in 50's CE?
Mostly, it'll be a projection of your own
In our churches, these days!

I added a couple of italicized verses,
c.4:1-2
to try to ground the general allusions,
reminders that conflict was early,
and women leaders prominent,
in the church from the beginning

Luke 13:31-35

31 At that very hour
some Pharisees came

and said to him,

'Get away
from here,
for Herod
wants to kill you.'

³²He said to them,

'Go
and tell that fox
for me,

"Listen,
I am casting out demons
and performing cures
today and tomorrow,
and on the third day
I finish my work.

³³Yet
today,
tomorrow,
and the next day
I must be on my way,
because it is impossible
for a prophet to be killed
away from Jerusalem."

³⁴Jerusalem,
Jerusalem,
the city
that kills the prophets
and stones those
who are sent to it!

How often have I desired

to gather your children together
as a hen gathers her brood
under her wings,
and you were not willing!

³⁵See,
your house
is left to you.

And I tell you,
you will not see me
until the time comes
when you say,

"Blessed
is the one
who comes
in the name
of the Lord." '

Reading the Gospel This Week

The first half of the lection, vv31-33, is unique to Luke
(sharing tone with 13:1-9, also unique to third gospel)

The second half, vv34-35, is paralleled in Matthew
(placed later, in the passion, preaching in Jerusalem)

Luke's Jesus, in a prophetic identity,
Is voiced as antagonizing Herod,
(presumably Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, who killed John)
As part of leaving Galilee, en route to Jerusalem

The bridge between the two halves is the city,
And the generalization that it kills prophets –
And stones those sent to it
(though give me examples – it's not that easy!)

The UCC has overused the feminine image
of Jesus as hen sheltering chicks
The wider tradition focuses on Psalm118:26
Echoed at the entry to Jerusalem,
And as every sacrament for many centuries

2004

<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2004/03/great-expectations.html>

2007

<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2007/03/alert-unafraid-lent2-luke13.html>

2019

<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2019/03/threats-and-promises.html>