



STEP 5: PRESS ON – THROUGH THE DOUBTS

Today we're going to tackle a subject that is relevant to us all: the subject of doubt. And let me just say this, from the outset: contrary to what we might think, doubts, questions, uncertainty, these are all a natural, understandable, even necessary part of a journey of faith – because it's not the absence of doubt that counts, it's what we do with it.

And God isn't as scared to talk about that as we might be.

Genesis 15

OK, so Abram has been blessed with a miraculous victory against a coalition of Mesopotamian kings, which has seen him rescue his nephew Lot, his family, and a whole bunch of other captives. And he's glorified God in the process. Now you'd expect Abram to be riding high from such a victory. But ... he isn't. Instead, he seems to be scared that his enemies might return, in greater numbers.

Which is why, when God appears, He says to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." I.e. "I've got your back, Abram. And I'm going to bless you for being willing to lose out, so that I would be glorified."

But He also helps him to voice his doubts. And it works.

Now, doubts and uncertainties fall into 1 of 3 categories:

- **We doubt if God is.**
- **We doubt what God says.**
- **We doubt who we are, in Him.**

And in this vision, God addresses those doubts.

With these 3 'faith-boosters':

1) "My Power Is Greater Than Yours Is" (vs2-6). In response to God's promise, Abram asks a question that shows what is most on his heart. "O *Adonai Yahveh*, what can you give me when I have no child to leave it to?"

Now apart from the fact that Abram's name means 'exalted father' – which must have been a bit of a bummer – in the ancient world children were regarded as the biggest sign of divine approval you could have. And Abram, at 75, has none. Apart from his closest servant, Eliezer of Damascus.

How does God respond? "Woe to you, Abram! Because of your lack of faith, I will retract My promise – and strike your camels with a thousand boils for good measure"? No. He gives Abram a Brian Cox moment, takes him outside, and says, "Look at all those stars – can you count them all? Well, that's how many descendants I'm going to give you."

And 4000 years later, we can prove it. Because we're here!

God is confident in His ability to deliver – because He knows that for Him, nothing is impossible. Or as *Adidas* like to put it, 'Impossible is nothing!' So when our faith is weak, we need to remember:

God's power is greater than ours is!

2) "My Knowledge Is Greater Than Yours Is" (vs7-16). God reiterates His promise that Abram's descendants will inherit this land. And again, it sparks a question from Abram: "O *Adonai Yahveh*, how can I be certain of that?"

In response, God gives Abram a shopping list – a whole bunch of animals to sacrifice. And He commands him to cut them in 2, and arrange the halves opposite each other, creating a path in the middle (I'll explain why in a minute). But it's what God says next that I want us to concentrate on. Because in the midst of vultures and darkness (symbols of doubt and fear, perhaps?), God reveals what is going to happen to Abram's descendants over the next few centuries: sojourn, slavery, exodus, wandering, conquest.

Oh, and Abram would die peacefully (reassuring to know).

What's the point? That God is sovereign over past, present – and future. It's not just that He knows it all – He plans it. As it says in Isaiah 46: "I make known the end from the beginning, and from ancient times what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'"

I.e. God is aware of everything that's going to happen – and again, 4000 years later, we can prove it! And if that's the case, *we* can trust Him, too – with the big stuff, and the small.

Because God's knowledge is greater than ours is!

3) "My Faithfulness Is Greater Than Yours Is" (vs17-20). In the midst of the darkness, a furnace appears – the fire of God's presence. A ball of flame makes its way through the path between the bits of animal, and God promises to give this land to Abram's descendants.

What is going on here? In Hittite culture, when 2 kings made an agreement, they would slaughter a bunch of animals, then split the halves either side of a path that ran through the middle. And they called this agreement a 'covenant' or *b'rit* – meaning 'to cut.' The 2 kings would then walk that path, the implication being: if one of them broke the agreement, the same fate would befall them.

But there's one difference here. Who walks the path? God and Abram? No, just God. Why? Because this agreement is more reliant on God's commitment than on Abram's.

Now that doesn't mean faithfulness to God is unimportant – as we'll see, God is going to ask an awful lot of Abram. But where we stand with God, both now and for eternity, is down to His faithfulness to us, more than our faithfulness to Him.

Because God's faithfulness is greater than ours is!

Get Ready To Fly

What does Abram do with all this? Look at vs6: "Abram believed / trusted the LORD," or literally, 'Abram amened *Yahveh*!' And that makes him a man God can work with. Not only that, but God declares Abram righteous in response. Which is why Paul refers to Abram as the father of all those who put their faith in Jesus, as the only way to be saved (Galatians 3:6-9). Ultimately, it all boils down to faith.

It reminds me of this *Science Humor* meme I read a couple of weeks back – an encouragement to all aerophobes!

"Nervous of flying? Don't be. As long as the 2 million parts in a plane work perfectly while travelling at close to the speed of sound as sharp metal blades rotate at supersonic speeds in temperatures of -65 degrees 7 miles above the Earth's surface, you'll be absolutely fine."

Now in spite of all that, most of us would be willing to get on a plane. Why? Because our faith in the science, in the engineers, in the pilots, wins out. And God asks the same of us.

God has been dealing with doubts on the part of His people for thousands of years. And as I said, doubts are both natural, and understandable. The trick, for followers of Jesus, is to get on that plane, in spite of them.

Because that's what a journey of faith is all about.