

“The God of Glory Appeared”  
 Sermon for 18 August 2019  
 Texts: Genesis 15:1-6 & Acts 7:1-10

**Acts 7:1 Then the high priest said, “Are these things so?”**

**2 And he said, “Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Harran, 3 and said to him, ‘Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.’ 4 Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Harran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. 5 And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. 6 But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years. 7 ‘And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.’ 8 Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs. 9 “And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him 10 and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. (NKJV)**

So begins the address of Stephen before the Sanhedrin. He was brought there by accusations made by the synagogue of the Freedmen—who were as jealous of Stephen as the Jewish leadership had been of Jesus, as Joseph’s brothers had been of Joseph. Jealousy is as old as temptation. (We need only look back to Acts 6:8-15 to catch the drift of this antagonism.) Now, as we are considering the story of Abram in Genesis, we are blessed by the Holy Spirit’s revelation: **The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham** as part of Abraham’s call out of Ur in the land of the Chaldeans in Mesopotamia. The glory appearing is not in the Genesis account! But Stephen, most probably a Hellenist Jew (or Gentile convert to Christianity) is accused by Gentile proselytes before the Jewish court on charges of blasphemy against Moses and God. (6:11) which increases the irony of the situation! We remember that blasphemy is the same charge that was brought against Jesus—the arrest is familiar, the false witnesses—they resurface the spurious charge against Jesus about **destroying this place** (the temple) in three days rebuilding it, but not with human hands(!) and, they added, **change the customs that Moses delivered to us** (6:14). They didn’t say that Jesus urged the authentic observation of the Law versus a perfunctory, customary practice—for Jesus was surely advocating a genuine religious life for the Jews of his day! When the high priest says, **“Are these things so?”** he is speaking out of a desire to put this Jesus of Nazareth thing behind them—“Can’t we just move

on?”—and he is referencing the great slew of false accusations brought against our accused brother Stephen.

Therefore, to the words of Genesis 12:1-3, ***divine words spoken***, we may now add: **out of the brightness of the glory of God**—the “seen” added to what Abram “heard” is added pointing to what he saw, a manifestation of the glory. This same glory appears and reappears in scripture: on the face of Moses (Exodus 34:29-30), on the person of Jesus both on the mountain of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2)—both Moses and Jesus appear to have carried some residual effects of the manifest glory of God, and we find it also in Acts 6:15: **And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel—with *the brightness of the glory of God*?!**

Here’s another astounding thing:

Romans 3:21 **But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (NKJV)**

This “glory reference” aligns with Genesis 15:5-7 (which, we are told, unfolds in a vision):

**5 Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” 6 And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. 7 Then He said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.” (NKJV)**

I would suggest that *the brightness of the glory of God attended these visions* and surely it did the initial call of Abraham. Are the stars themselves not like the brightness of the glory of God on the natural plane?

However, that brightness is not actually my chief focus here.

Rather I am drawing our attention to the doctrine of justification by faith as *it exists from the beginning* (beginning with Abram’s faith) up through salvation history and *including the age of the church*.

We are still, always justified by faith in the Lord Jesus—it is required in order for us to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

This truth, the righteous are justified by faith has been with us from the initiation of our faith in the call of Abraham, all the way down the long chain of revelatory history, and all of the miraculous events from that call to the incarnation and on to the resurrection age!

Now, a third matter: have we generally taken account of *how Job-like Abram is?*

The book of Job gives us a fuller, more wholesome picture of the life of an ancient Arabian sheik—their fortunes are comparable, their life-styles similar, they inhabit the same epoch of biblical history—with Job holding historical primacy.

So, there is an astonishing amount of information about this **perfect and upright man** which enlightens us about the kind of man Abram was! Gen. 11:27—Gen. 25 is a very large swath of Genesis. I am suggesting that Job is supplemental material to this material. For example, the “questioning,” insecurity and apparent doubting of Abram is enormous present in Job—alongside human suffering, a major themes in Job.

We can get into the mindset of a man like Abram through the revelation truth we have regarding Job! We learn, for instance, that the justifying faith of Abram was hardly perfect. Skepticism has been around for a long, long time! The exchanges have the feel of an extensive dorm room discussion. Similarly, while we know that the moral character of Job was less than perfect (**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God** -Romans 3:23), his character was sufficiently fine for God to exult in him: **Have you considered my servant Job?!** (Job 1:8)

The “real” story that unfolds deals with the insinuator in chief (aka **accuser of the brethren**); **Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side?** Is Satan not depicted bringing false accusations? Satan insinuates first that Job is insincere. There is no love in his fear of God? He is in it for his wealth, health and prosperity. He is a God-user, a toady. Religion is merely his drug of choice. He is a schemer and a scoundrel. *There is no end to the un-nice things Satan suggests about God’s called-out one, Job or Christians—their spirituality, or their character!*

About ministers, even today, it is sometimes unkindly said, “Is he zealous for nothing? He’s in it for himself.” “Look at his private jets, lavish salary and luxurious homes. There sure to be some carnal motive there—he is just as worldly and selfish **as the rest of us.**” Sadly, it would appear, some are. Not very many, I venture to say, perhaps the top of the heap-er’s in professional clergy fit this description.

Base insinuations were also uttered about Jesus, about Stephen, about Paul . . . why wouldn't they be spoken against any Christian? They are. Slander is what sinners excel in.

But here's the deal, the world **as it is** is perfect for the trial/**testing** of our faith, and for the **sanctification** of the saints. What Job loses, what he suffers may well combine pieces of chastisement, with punishment for sinning alongside the perfection of his moral/spiritual being. Job overcomes adversity by faith, never curses God and vindicates the ways of the Lord thoroughly—it is hard to imagine a different world in which such accomplishments could similarly prevail. If Job is the oldest book of the bible, as some credit it to be, it contains some of the richest, deepest and most profound theological insights into the nature of God, truth and spiritual reality found anywhere in scripture—or the known world for that matter. BUT it is found in the genesis of our faith and not in the later days! Revelation appears not to be subject to evolution in this regard and that in itself is worth the weight of its inclusion in scripture. If we want to understand the doubting's of Abram, the doubting's of Job will suffice for amplification. The long dialogues, debates and discourse fill us in on what a fuller version of Abram's doubting might have been like—and in a contemporary source. How perfect, and apt.

Yes, we learn about resurrection from the case of Christ. But the word expounds *resurrection* long, long before the first Easter. The truth that we are justified by faith was not the innovation of first century Christianity either—no, it was there from the beginning, from the first call. The glory (of God) is a constant feature. Revelation and prophecy are also original features of our faith. Genesis 15 is about the promotion and defense of Abram as a prophetic figure. We see that in the elevated language (**the word of the Lord came to him**) and we see it in Abram's foretelling of distant events—which unfold as prophesied in the Pentateuch (and beyond).

Now the question before us is this: we know that Abram trusted God, and that he feared and believed God—he had faith in God. But Genesis 15 and what goes before does not indicate whether or not Abram loved God. How can we make a determination on that matter? We must look to scripture—so let's do that.

I believe we can know that he loved God because of a much later incident, caught up in the sacrifice of Isaac (the subject of Genesis 22). The sacrifice of Isaac, unbearable on some levels to even consider, brings the matter of love up directly (**your son whom you love** (v.2)—**because you have done this an not withheld your son** (v.16) and God takes it as an indication that *Abraham loves God above Isaac—or more than his son*. This demand is not unique to Abram, every Christian is under like demand. This demand (for priority) is in full accordance with the words of Jesus (Matthew 10:37): "**He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.**" This fleshes out, so to speak, the **Abram believed God**, his faith, is expanded from mere intellectual assent in a helpful manner. I wonder what you think?

**Amen.**