

Worship Material
Now and not yet
Material from Roots Bible Study
Sunday 16th March

Begin with an opening prayer

Loving God, we gather today
to explore your promise to always
have our best interests at heart.
Help us as we think about the promises we make too.

Amen.

Read Genesis 15:1-12,17-18

Bible notes

This part of Abram's (later Abraham) life comes early on in the 'big story' of the people of God. The story begins when Abram, Joseph's great-grandfather, is called by God to leave his home and set off on a journey, destination unknown, with the promise that he will become a great nation. When he reaches Canaan, God promises Abram that this land will belong to his descendants. The events of this passage occur sometime later, after further journeying, some hazardous encounters and reiteration of God's promise. Up to this point Abram has trusted God, including (in the preceding passage) choosing God rather than the creating of a new ally. However, his doubts are rising and, when God tells him not to be afraid, they come to the fore as Abram admits he cannot see a way for God's promises to come true.

The ritual with the animals is part of a common commitment-making ceremony in the ancient Near East, a way of sealing a solemn agreement. Passing between the two halves of the slaughtered animal was a declaration of the seriousness of intention, inviting God to do to the promiser what had been done to the animal if the commitment was broken. God's timing may not be what Abram would wish, but Abram is asked to trust that God will keep the promise of innumerable descendants.

In the verses missing from the lectionary reading, verses 13-16, God goes further, foretelling to Abram the time when his descendants will be slaves in another land, and when God will rescue them and return them to this land that has been promised to Abram. We look back knowing the rest of this story – of

Joseph, slavery, Moses and the Exodus and wilderness wandering – but for Abram this is all part of the ‘not yet’.

Prayer

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we praise you for this day.
We thank you for the many ways you speak to us:
through your Word, visions, dreams and other people.
Thank you that you see the bigger picture –
you see the whole story from start to finish.
Each day for us is a new page in life’s book,
revealing ups and downs,
promises for now and for what is yet to come.
Thank you that unwavering trust in you banishes
all dark shadows and uncertainties.
Help us to walk in faith.

All praise to you Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

A prayer to conclude

Lord, you have kept your promises to your people throughout the ages.
Send us out with renewed confidence
that you are faithful to your Word.
Help us to see signs that you are at work in our lives
and the wider world this week.
In Jesus’ name.

Amen.