

Genesis Chapter 15

Genesis 15:1 "After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I [am] thy shield, [and] thy exceeding great reward."

"After these things": The battle of the kings, the captivity of Lot, the rescue of him and his goods, and of those of Sodom and Gomorrah by Abram, and the conversation that passed between him, and the kings of Sodom and Salem.

"The word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision": Christ, the essential Word, appeared to Abram in a human form, visible to him, and with an articulate voice spoke unto him: saying, "fear not, Abram", calling him by his name.

Not only to encourage him, but to dissipate his fears to which might be, the nations that belonged to the four kings he had conquered and slain should recruit their armies, and come against him with greater force; and the brethren and relations of those he had slain should avenge themselves on him.

"I am thy shield" to protect him against all his enemies, be they ever so strong and numerous; as Christ is the shield of his people against all their spiritual enemies, sin, Satan, and the world. Which being held up in the hand of faith, called therefore the shield of faith, is a security against them. "I am thy shield": God served Abram as his divine protector (Psalms 7:10; 84:9).

"And thy exceeding great reward"; though he had generously refused taking any reward for the service he had done in pursuing the kings, and slaughtering them, and bringing back the persons and goods they had took away. Yet he should be no loser by it, the Lord would reward him in a way of grace with greater and better things.

God himself would be his reward, and which must be a great one, an exceeding great one; as Christ is to his people in his person, offices, and grace.

God came and spoke to Abram in this vision, because Abram had about given up on having a family and the promises of God coming true. God's first statement to Abram, as it is to us today, is "fear not." Fear is not faith. It is the opposite of faith.

He told Abram, here, (I didn't say that you could do this by yourself). God said, I am your protector, and this thing that I will give you is not of your own doing. It is a reward to you, because you believe me, for no other reason.

Genesis 15:2 "And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house [is] this Eliezer of Damascus?"

"I go Childless": In response to God's encouragement and admonition (verse 1), Abram showed what nagged at him. How could God's promise of many descendants (13:16), and of being a great nation (12:2), come about when he had no children?

“Eliezer of Damascus”: To Abram, God’s promise had stalled; so adoption of a servant as the male heir, a well-known contemporary Mesopotamian custom, was the best officially recognizable arrangement to make it come to pass, humanly speaking.

Ten years have passed and Abram is still without an heir. Following the custom of the day, he suggests that perhaps he ought to adopt his “Steward ... Eliezer of Damascus” as his legal “heir.”

However, God refuses this offer and clearly promises that Abram will have a child “out of thine own bowels” (i.e., physically procreated).

Verses 3-5: The question, “What will You give me?” (Verse 2) became an accusation, “You have given no offspring to me!” (verse 3). The Lord’s rejection of Abram’s solution (verse 4), preceded God’s reiterated promise of innumerable descendants (verse 5; Romans 4:18).

Genesis 15:3 "And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir."

Notwithstanding the unbounded grandeur and preciousness of the promise, or rather assurance, now given, Abram is still childless and landless; and the Lord has made as yet no sign of action in regard to these objects of special promise.

"To me thou hast given no seed." This was the present shield mentioned also in former words of promise. There is something strikingly human in all this. Abram is no enthusiast or fanatic. He fastens on the substantive blessings which the Lord had expressly named.

Abram was telling God: I don't have any children for these promises to be carried out through, what good will it do to give me anything? It will die with me, and this servant will inherit my goods for lack of a son to leave it to. Abram was really feeling sorry for himself.

Genesis 15:4 "And, behold, the word of the LORD [came] unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir."

Though we must never complain of God, yet we have leave to complain to him; and to state all our grievances. It is ease to a burdened spirit, to open its case to a faithful and compassionate friend. Abram's complaint is that he had no child; that he was never likely to have any; that the want of a son was so great a trouble to him, that it took away all his comfort.

If we suppose that Abram looked no further than outward comfort, this complaint was to be blamed. But if we suppose that Abram herein had reference to the promised Seed, his desire was very commendable.

Till we have evidence of our interest in Christ, we should not rest satisfied; what will all avail me, if I go Christless? If we continue instant in prayer, yet pray with humble submission to the Divine will, we shall not seek in vain. God gave Abram an express promise of a son.

God sees our broken hearts and encourages us. He corrected this gloominess in Abram. He re-issued His promises to Abram.

Genesis 15:5 "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be."

The Lord reiterates the promise concerning the seed. As he had commanded him to view the land, and see in its dust the emblem of the multitude that would spring from him, so now, with a sublime simplicity of practical illustration, he brings him forth to contemplate the stars, and challenges him to tell their number, if he can; adding, "So shall thy seed be."

He that made all these out of nothing, by the word of his power, is able to fulfill his promise, and multiply the seed of Abram and Sarai. Here, we perceive, the vision does not interfere with the notice of the sensible world, so far as is necessary (Daniel 10:7; John 12:29).

"Tell" means "count."

He had already promised Abram about the numerous seed, but now He showed him visually the promise. Abram spiritually saw all the stars of heaven, and truly they are innumerable.

Genesis 15:6 "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

"Believed ... counted ... for righteousness": The Apostle Paul quoted these words as an illustration of faith over and against works (Rom. 4:3, 9, 22; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23). Abram was justified by faith! (see notes on Rom. 4 and Gal. 3), for a fuller discussion of justification by faith.

"He believed in the Lord": This was not his original act of faith, but a further evidence of his confidence in God. In light of (Hebrews 11:8-10), clearly Abram had already experienced saving faith at the time of his original call.

(Romans 4:6 and 22), cite instances of God imputing righteousness to the account of those who were already believers. (Romans 4:18), refers to Abram's believing God's promise that he would have a posterity. Thus, the doctrine of imputation is based upon man's faith.

The fact that Abram was justified by God 14 years before he was circumcised is the basis for Paul's argument (in Romans 4:9-12), that faith, not works (e.g., circumcision), is the means of our justification. Therefore, the Old Testament as well as the New Testament teaches salvation by faith, not works.

Isn't this an interesting statement? The Scripture above did not say that Abram believed what God said, it says Abram believed in the LORD. LORD is capitalized meaning Lord Jesus Christ.

To be the father of the believers in Christ, Abraham had to believe also. I believe the encounter of Abram with Melchizedec was recognition of the Lord Jesus Christ. His belief in the Lord made him righteous.

Genesis 15:7 "And he said unto him, I [am] the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it."

“To give thee this land to inherit it”: That a specifically identifiable land (see verses 18-21), was intimately linked with Abram’s having many descendants in God’s purpose and in the Abrahamic Covenant was clearly revealed and, in a formal ceremony (verses 9-21), would be placed irrevocably beyond dispute.

He said to Abram here, you didn't leave Ur just to find a better place to make a living. I brought you out so that I might give you this land as an inheritance.

Genesis 15:8 "And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"

Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?” A question, not of veiled accusation at the delayed fulfillment, but of genuine request for information and assurance. In response, God affirmed His covenant with Abram in a remarkable ceremony (verses 9-21).

Just like so many in our day, which hear God's voice and want to know for sure that this is God, so did Abram.

Genesis 15:9-10 "And he said unto him, Take me a heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." "And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not."

“Divided them in the midst”: The sign of ancient covenants often involved the cutting in half of animals, so that the pledging parties could walk between them, affirming that the same should happen to them if they broke the covenant (see Jer. 34:18-19).

“Cutting” Ancient covenants were sometimes confirmed by the halving of the sacrificial victims and the two parties to the covenant passing between them (Mari Tablets and Jer. 34:18-19).

In this case, however, God alone passes between the animal pieces, in the form of a smoking furnace from which torch-like flames shoot out (Exodus19:18), because this covenant with Abram is unconditional, and can be carried out only by God Himself.

In other words, I will make a covenant with you. The animals being 3 years old could be symbolic of the three years of Jesus' ministry here on the earth, or it could mean that these animals had grown to maturity and were something of value to sacrifice.

The fact that the pigeon and turtledove were not separated could, possibly, mean the unity that the Holy Ghost (dove), brings to believers. Most of these animals and birds would become sacrifice for sins in later ceremonies. A covenant of lasting value includes shed blood. It seals the covenant.

Genesis 15:11 "And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away."

And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses": (birds of prey), to devour them, Abram, who stood by his sacrifice waiting for the manifestation of God, who had ordered him to prepare for the ratification of the covenant, drove them away. That they might neither pollute nor devour what had been thus consecrated to God.

Upon the birds, as Aben Ezra and Ben Melech interpret it, whose carcasses were whole or rather upon the divided carcasses of the animals, and indeed on both. This is to be understood of birds of prey, as eagles, vultures, kites, crows, etc.

Who are an emblem of the Egyptians chiefly, and other enemies of Israel, who came upon them to devour them; so, the Targum of Jonathan, "and the idolatrous nations descended, who were like to an unclean fowl, to spoil the goods of the Israelites;" and likewise the Targum of Jerusalem, "this unclean fowl are the idolatrous kingdoms of the earth."

Here, the symbolism really takes over; vultures were descending on these offerings to God. The devil descends on the Jews and on believers in Christ today, but the covenant with Abram still wards off the enemy. Our faith, as Abram's faith, puts the old devil to flight even now.

Genesis 15:12 "And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him."

"Sleep": God put him to sleep, because the covenant did not involve any promise on his part. He would not walk through the pieces as a pledge (see verse 17).

Darkness is an absence of the light. This darkness that fell meant that there would be a falling away of the descendants of Abram, and a curse would fall. Similar to what happened in the dark ages. Faith in God was very weak at this time.

Verses 13-14: The words of God in the covenant ceremony assured Abram that his descendants would definitely be in the land, although a painful detour into Egypt would delay fulfillment until long after his demise (Acts 7:6-7).

Genesis 15:13 "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land [that is] not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;"

"Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs": This is a prophecy of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, predicted to take place some three hundred years later and lasting about "four hundred years" (Exodus 12:40; and 430 to be exact).

Genesis 15:14 "And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance."

Then God would judge “that nation” (Egypt in Exodus 15), and bring Israel out “with great substance” (Exodus 12:34-36), and use them as a means of judgment upon the inhabitants of Canaan, when “the iniquity of the Amorites” would be “full”.

God was telling Abram, here, what God's foreknowledge told Him about the descendants of Abram in Egypt. They would be servants of the Pharaoh for 400 years.

God told Abram, but there would come a day when He would punish Egypt for mistreating His people, and they would spoil the Egyptians, and bring out great wealth. We will learn in a later lesson that 70 go into Egypt, and nearly 3 million came out of Egypt.

Genesis 15:15 "And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age."

"Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace": This verse strongly implies the immortality of the soul, and a state of separate existence. He was gathered to his fathers, introduced into the place where separate spirits are kept, waiting for the general resurrection. Two things seem to be distinctly marked here:

- (1) The soul of Abram should be introduced among the assembly of the first-born; Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace;
- (2) His body should be buried after a long life, one hundred and seventy-five years (Genesis 25:7). The body was buried; the soul went to the spiritual world, to dwell among the fathers, the patriarchs, who had lived and died in the Lord (see note on Genesis 25:8).

This Scripture, above, pretty well defines what happens when we die. There is a separation between the spirit and the body, here. He first said you will be at peace with your ancestors. The spirit leaves the body and goes to heaven, if you are a Christian. God told him that his body would rest in the grave, until it is resurrected and reunited with the spirit.

Genesis 15:16 "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites [is] not yet full."

“The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full”: A delay in judgment occasioned the delay in covenant fulfillment. Judgment on Egypt (verse 14), would mark the departure of Abram’s descendants for their Land, and judgment on the Canaanites (broadly defined ethnically as Amorites), would mark their entrance to the Land.

God gave these Amorites an opportunity to repent (they did not). A generation here, was 100 years.

Genesis 15:17 "And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces."

“Smoking furnace ... burning lamp” (Exodus 13:21). These items symbolized the presence of God, who solemnly promised by divine oath to fulfill His promises to Abram by alone passing through the animal pieces (verses 9-11).

Genesis 15:18 "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:"

“River of Egypt unto ... Euphrates”: Scripture records both general (Exodus 23:31; Num. 13:21; Deut. 11:24; 1 Kings 8:65; 2 Kings 14:25; Isa. 27:12), and specific (Num. 34:1-12; Jos. 15:1-2; Ezek. 47:15-20; 48:1, 28), descriptions of the Promised Land. Centering on the ancient land of Canaan.

Such precise geographic demarcation will not allow for any redefinitions which would emasculate God’s promise of its specificity. The river of Egypt was most probably what became known as the Wadi El Arish, the southern border of Judah.

The Bible says that God is a consuming fire. This presence of the smoke and fire here, was some form of a Godly appearance to make covenant with Abram. There had to be shed blood to seal the covenant. Abram's part of the covenant was to believe that God would truly keep covenant with him.

Even though this land did not belong to Abram's descendants until much later, God drew off the lines right then what would belong to Abram's descendants. They are still fighting about this very thing even today in Israel.

Verses 19-21: Kenites ... Jebusites”: The various peoples who inhabited the land are named. Such precise detailing of the nations in the land of Canaan attests again to the specificity of the Promised Land in God’s promises.

Genesis 15:19 "The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites,"

“The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites”: In this and the following verses ten nations are reckoned as occupying the land of Canaan at this time, whereas only seven are mentioned in the times of Moses and Joshua; and these three are not among them.

Aben Ezra thinks these people had two names, and Jarchi interprets them of the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites, who shall be the inheritance of the children of Israel in future times, according to (Isaiah 11:14).

Some are of opinion that the Midianites are meant by the Kenites, since Jethro, Moses's father in law, who was of Midian, is called the Kenite, as was also Heber, who was of the same race (Judges 1:16).

There were Kenites near to the Amalekites in the times of Balaam, and who dwelt among them in the times of Saul (Numbers 24:20).

Genesis 15:20 "And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims,"

"And the Hittites": Who had their name from Heth, a son of Canaan (see Genesis 10:15); they dwelt about Hebron, in the south of the land of Canaan.

"And the Perizzites": these dwelt in the wood country of the land (Joshua 17:15); and seem to have their name from dwelling in villages, and at a distance from towns and cities, and were a boorish and uncivilized people (see Genesis 13:7).

"And the Rephaims": or "giants", as the Targums of Onkelos, and Jonathan; they dwelt near the Perizzites (Joshua 17:15); of these see (Genesis 14:5).

Genesis 15:21 "And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

"And the Amorites": The same with the Amorite (Genesis 10:16); they inhabited both on this and the other side Jordan.

"And the Canaanites": Which were a particular tribe or nation that bore the name of their great ancestor Canaan (see Genesis 13:7).

"And the Girgashites": The same with the Gergesenes (in Matthew 8:28); of these (see Genesis 10:16).

"And the Jebusites": Who inhabited Jerusalem and about it, which was first called Jebus, from the founder of this nation (see Genesis 10:16).

There were 10 peoples mentioned here. This was God dealing against world government. These people did not follow after God. Their land would be taken from them, and given to the descendants of Abram, when Moses led them to the Promised Land.

Genesis Chapter 15 Questions

1. What was God's first statement to Abram?
2. What was Abram complaining about?
3. What was the name of Abram's steward?
4. What did God show Abram to show him the number of descendants he would have?
5. In verse 6, what was counted as righteousness?

6. Why did God bring Abram out of Ur?
7. Just as we do, Abram asked God for what?
8. What 3 things did Abram bring for sacrifice that was 3 years old?
9. What 2 other things did he bring?
10. What did Abram do with them?
11. What 2 things could the 3 years old mean?
12. Why were the turtledove and pigeon not separated?
13. A lasting covenant involves what?
14. What were the vultures symbolic of?
15. What warded off the vultures?
16. What was the darkness in verse 12 symbolic of?
17. How long would Abram's descendants be afflicted?
18. What does 430 mean?
19. What would happen to the nation that persecuted them?
20. Would God's people come out empty handed?
21. What 2 things does verse 15 tell us about death?
22. In verse 16, how long is a generation?
23. What 2 things, in verse 17, symbolized God?
24. Where were the boundaries set for Israel that day?
25. What did the Bible call God that we see here, and in the burning bush?
26. What did the fact that there were 10 peoples that would be overthrown mean?