

Genesis 15 - God's Covenant with Abram

THEME: God's revelation of Himself as shield and reward; Abraham's faith; God's covenant with Abraham.

Gen 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

This now is the fourth time that God has appeared to Abram. God is developing this man and bringing him farther along. God does well to appear to him now because Abram has taken a tremendous step of faith in going out and rescuing Lot and in turning down the booty which the king of Sodom offered him.

"Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield." My friend, this is lovely; this is wonderful. The record does not tell us this, but let me suggest to you that perhaps during the battle, Abram got in real danger and wondered whether he would come out of it alive. God simply reminds him, "I'm your shield, Abram. I'm your shield."

"And thy exceeding great reward." In other words, God says, "You did well to turn down the booty. I am your reward; I intend to reward you." Oh, what God can do with a man today when he is willing just to believe God and look to Him!

If you think Abram is one of these pious boys who gets his halo shined every morning, you are wrong. Abram is very practical, and he is going to get right down to the nitty-gritty now. I think that God likes us to do that. I wish that we could get rid of this false piety and the hypocritical attitude that so many fundamentalists assume today. – McGee

Is the Lord your shield and great reward? Do you really act and behave as if that is true in your life?

Gen 15:2-3 But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

What Abram is saying to God is this: "I don't want more riches; I don't need that. The thing that's on my heart is that I'm childless and I want a son. You have promised to make me a father of nations and that my offspring will be as numberless as the sand on the seashore. But I don't even have one child!" According to the law of the day, the Code of Hammurabi, Eliezer, his steward, his head servant, who had an offspring, would in time inherit if Abram did not have a child. – McGee

Are you ever impatient with God answering His promises? Do you ever just try to solve it yourself instead of waiting?

Gen 15:4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir."

God is very practical when a man will be practical with Him. He says, "I am going to give you a son, Abraham. I am going to give you a son." Now God took Abram by the hand and brought him forth into the night. - McGee

Gen 15:5 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."

This is remarkable. First God said to him that his offspring would be as numberless as the sand on the seashore, and now He says they will be as numberless as the stars in heaven. Abram could not number the stars. He could see approximately four thousand, but there were probably over fifty thousand in that area where he was looking. Abram couldn't number his offspring, and you couldn't do it today.

This man Abram actually has two seeds. He has a physical seed, the nation Israel, and he has a spiritual seed, the church. How does the church become Abraham's spiritual seed? By faith. Paul told the Galatians that they were the sons of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ—not in a natural line, but a spiritual seed (see Gal_3:29).

I had the privilege of speaking to a group of very fine young Jewish men many years ago in Nashville, Tennessee. I had known some of them before I was saved and had been a very close friend of theirs. I spoke on the glories of the Mosaic Law and told them that the fulfillment of it was in Christ. I began by telling them I was glad to speak to them because I knew that they were sons of Abraham. But when I told them I was a son of Abraham also, they looked in amazement one to another. And then I told them how I was a son of Abraham. Included in God's promise were these two seeds of Abraham, and this is a very wonderful truth. – McGee

Do see the difference and how amazing the blessings can be for waiting on God? Do you see you are also a child of Abraham?

Gen 15:6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Humanly speaking this was impossible, since Sarai had passed the time when she could bear a child. But Abram believed God's promise, and God declared him to be righteous. The truth of justification by faith enunciated here is repeated in Rom_4:3, Gal_3:6, and Jas_2:23. In Gen_13:16 God had promised descendants as numerous as the dust, and here in 15:5 as numerous as the stars. The dust pictures Abram's natural posterity—those who are Jews by birth. The stars depict his spiritual seed—those who are justified by faith (see Gal_3:7). – Believers Bible Commentary

How's your faith? Would we pass this Abraham test?

Gen 15:7-8 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." And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

Again, Abram is a very practical man. He believes in dealing with reality, and I think we need to do that. We need reality today in our Christian lives. If reality is not in your life, there is nothing there. A great many people just play church today. Abram is very practical. He wants to know something, and he would like to have something in writing.

Do you know what God is probably going to tell him? God is going to say, "Abram, I'm glad you asked Me, because I am going to meet you down at the courthouse; I will go before a notary public, and I will make real this contract which I am making with you. You are going to have a son. Meet Me down there, and I will sign on the dotted line." Now, before you write me a letter and protest, let me say that you are right, that the Bible says nothing about God meeting Abram at the courthouse, and it says nothing about going to a notary public, but in the terms of the law of our day, that is exactly what God said to Abram.

Have you ever asked God for a confirmation or a sign?

Gen 15:9-10 So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

God told Abram to prepare a sacrifice. He was to get a heifer, a she goat, and a ram and divide or split them down the middle and put one half on one side and one half on the other. The turtledove and the pigeon he did not divide, but put one over here and one over there.

When men made a contract in that day, this is the way they made it. Suppose one man agreed to buy sheep from another one. They would prepare a sacrifice in this manner. The party of the first part joined hands with the party of the second part, they stated their contract, and then they walked through the sacrifice. In that day this corresponded to going down to the courthouse and signing before a notary public in our day. So we see that God is using with Abram the legal procedure of his day.

In Jer_34:18 we have a reference to this custom that was prevalent in that land, not just among these people, but among all peoples in the day: "And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the

parts thereof." The method in that day was to take the sacrifice and divide it, and the men would then make the contract.

Notice Abram got everything ready according to God's instructions.- McGee

A true contract or covenant has consideration, real value. God expects Abram to come to the plate with the offerings before He executes the contract. How about you are you giving the Lord real consideration of your time, talents, or money?

Gen 15:11-12 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.

David Baron explains:

According to the ancient Eastern manner of making a covenant, both the contracting parties passed through the divided pieces of the slain animals, thus symbolically attesting that they pledged their very lives to the fulfillment of the engagement they made (see Jer_34:18-19). Now in Genesis 15, God alone, whose presence was symbolized by the smoking furnace and lamp of fire, passed through the midst of the pieces of the slain animals, while Abram was simply a spectator of this wonderful exhibition of God's free grace.

This signified that it was an unconditional covenant, dependent for fulfillment on God alone.

According to another view of this passage, the sacrificial pieces represent the nation of Israel. The vultures speak of the Gentile nations. The land that is not theirs, of course, is Egypt. Israel would be delivered from Egyptian bondage and return to Canaan in the fourth generation. The smoking oven and the burning torch describe the national destiny of Israel—suffering and witness-bearing.

Israel's deliverance would not come until the iniquity of the Amorites was complete. These pagan inhabitants of Canaan must eventually be exterminated. But God often allows evil to run its course, sometimes to the seeming detriment of His people, before He judges it. He is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish—even the depraved Amorites (2Pe_3:9). He also allows evil to come to fruition so that the awful consequences of wickedness can be clear to all. Thus His wrath is demonstrated to be completely righteous. – Believers Bible Commentary

Are you always on the lookout for the enemy who wants to steal and prevent our agreements with God from Thriving as the Lord designed?

Gen 15:13-14 Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

Verses 13 and 14 pose a chronological problem. They predict that Abram's people would be in harsh servitude in a foreign land for 400 years, and that they would leave at the end of that time, carrying great wealth with them. In Act_7:6 this figure of 400 years is repeated.

In Exo_12:40-41 we read that the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, were sojourners for 430 years, to the very day.

Then in Gal_3:17 Paul says that the period from the confirming of the Abrahamic Covenant until the giving of the Law was 430 years.

How can these figures be reconciled?

The 400 years mentioned in Gen_15:13-14 and in Act_7:6 refer to the time of Israel's harsh affliction in Egypt. Jacob and his family were not in bondage when they first came to Egypt. On the contrary, they were treated quite royally.

The 430 years in Exo_12:40-41 refer to the total time the people of Israel spent in Egypt—to the very day. This is an exact figure.

The 430 years in Gal_3:17 cover approximately the same period as Exo_12:40-41. They are reckoned from the time that God confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob, just as Jacob was preparing to enter Egypt (Gen_46:14), and they extend to the giving of the Law, about three months after the Exodus. – Believers Bible Commentary

Gen 15:15-17 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.

Both of these speak of Christ. The furnace, of course, speaks of judgment. The lamp speaks of Him as the light of the world. – McGee (Compare to Alternative interpretation presented in BBC notes v.11-12.

The four generations of Gen_15:16 can be seen in Exo_6:16-20 : Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses.-BBC

Gen 15:18-21 On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

Israel has not yet occupied the land promised in verses 18-21. Solomon had dominion over it (1Ki_4:21, 1Ki_4:24), as over vassal states, but his people did not occupy it. The covenant will be fulfilled when Christ returns to reign. Nothing can stop its fulfillment. What God has promised is as sure as if it had already occurred!

The river of Egypt (v. 18) is generally believed to be a small stream south of Gaza now known as Wadi el Arish, and not the Nile. – BBC