

# GENESIS 15:1-17

## LESSON: ABRAM'S EXEMPLARY FAITH — June 23, 2019

### HISTORY:

**14:17-20** Abram received visits from two kings upon his return after his victory. The king of Sodom came out to meet Abram after his victory. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought bread and wine: and he was the priest of the Most High God. He blessed Abram and Abram in turn gave Melchizedek tithe, for God had delivered his enemies into his hands.

**14:21-24** The king of Sodom wanted the captives Abram had rescued, and told him to keep the goods for himself. But Abram told the king of Sodom as he raised his hand that he had sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth and that he will accept nothing belonging to the king of Sodom, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that the king will never be able to say that he made Abram rich. Abram accepted nothing except what his men had eaten and the share that belonged to the men who went with him—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. It was only right that they have their share

### LESSON: I. A TEST OF ABRAM'S FAITH GENESIS 15:1-6

**15:1** **After these things...** The previous chapter focused on Abram's actions, but this chapter deals with his emotions. "*After these things...*" What things? - After the battle and all other things that had occurred. **...the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.** This presents one of the four ways which God spoke to individuals in Old Testament times (Num.12:6-8).

1. He spoke in visions (2 Sam.7:17).
2. He spoke in dreams (Gen.41:1; Dan.2:1; 3).
3. He revealed Himself by speaking directly to the Prophets mouth to mouth (Jer.1:9).
4. And He spoke through His Word (the time of the Gospels was still under Old Testament authority—under the Law).

In this vision Abram has, he hears God call his name. God knew Abram's heart, his fears, and disappointments. The tenderness of this act really brought Abram prostrate before God and encouraged him beyond all measure. When God called Abram's name, Abram knew above all else that he truly belonged to God. In this vision; in this mental picture, God gave a threefold message:

1. "*Abram do not fear.*" It seems that along the way fear came into the picture. Why? He had just come out of a war and perhaps he feared retaliation of the kings he had just defeated.
2. "*Abram I am your shield.*" God wanted to reassure him that He is his protector and defender; his shield. Sometimes people have highs and lows after a great victory.

#### **God shielded Abram...**

- a. From strife with Lot.
- b. By being strategic when war broke out.
- c. From being defeated by the enemies.
- d. From losing any goods or captives.

#### **And God can shield him in the Future...**

- a. From being hopelessly discouraged and giving up.
- b. From denying the faith and the promises of God.
- c. From losing his soul to the spiritual enemies of God.
- d. From losing heart in the face of weakness,

3. "*Abram I am your exceeding great reward.*" God would continue to fight for him as He had just demonstrated in chapter 14. And He would continue to reward Abram, especially since Abram had returned all the goods; valuables and gold, livestock and possessions, to all the people he had rescued. All the wealth was rightfully his by the law of conquest, but he had returned all and kept nothing for himself. God had truly made a

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Covenant with Abram, and Abram would have greater rewards because *"I Am"* had spoken. Abram was to be rewarded by God Himself. It's in His very nature, and it would be beyond and above anything Abram could ever guess.

Just like Abram's experience, emotions can fall apart; darkness can sweep over our souls; trials can sap our strength; temptation can cause us to question and doubt God's promises. In fact, times do arise when we need a fresh experience with God, a *"brokenness experience"*, a deep sense of His presence, a special reassurance from His Word. It is in such moments of need that God always comes to us to meet our need, and the depth of the experience with God, always matches our need. The experience of His presence and the power of His Word and assurance, are always just what we need. This was the case with Abram, and it is always the case with the genuine follower of God.

**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?**— Now we see, something else that Abrams feared: having no child. He was too old; too many years had passed since the promise had been given. Remembering the last time God spoke to Abram was about his descendants— God had promised him he would make his descendants like the dust of the earth (Gen.13:16). His nephew Lot whom he had reared and loved like a son had chosen to follow after the world instead of God. So, the question to the Lord was, *"what will you give me?"* Abram comes up with the idea of the steward, Eliezer of Damascus, his most trusted servant in his household to inherit his **WEALTH**.

**15:3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.** Abram is wondering what happened to the promise. He's saying Look now; I still don't have a seed. So, he brings up a Mesopotamian custom—if Abram died without a son of his own, then his eldest servant would become his heir. So, to get this ball rolling, the male carries the seed for the baby, and as of yet, Abram has not seed for the baby to be born, or that Abram's seed or heir has not been born, so why not consider his servant Eliezer of Damascus who was born in the house to be his heir. How much longer would he wait? That's why God told him to fear not—I AM your shield—and his reward. He needs that shield to keep his mind stayed on what God has said and can do.

**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.** There is a regular dialog between him and God. After God hears him, God says a firm **"No"**, Eliezer will not be his heir. God gives us the right answers in desperate times if we listen! This is what he is to listen to: your heir will come forth out of thine own bowels. The promised seed was sure to come and he will come from their body.

**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.** Remember, God was giving Abram a vision of all this. God took Abram outside, which means that Abram had been inside his tent. Now He tells Abram to look up and if he is able to count the stars, so will his seed (descendants) be. This is what he is to listen to. Everytime Abram looked up at the stars he would think of the great promise of God and be encouraged and strengthened in his faith. <sup>1</sup>No one knows how many stars there are. That's precisely God's point. Abraham will have so many descendants that he will never be able to count them all. What a glorious

GJW encouragement!



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1996-04-28-How-to-Overcome-Fear/>

**15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.** Let's say that again: And he believed in the LORD! To "*believe*" means to rest upon, to lean upon, to be sure of, to have complete and full confidence in. There are essentially two types of righteousness: righteousness we think we accomplished it by our own efforts, and righteousness accounted to us by the work of Christ when we first believe. God took Abram's faith and counted or credited it to him for righteousness. No person is righteous before God. Our righteousness is always seen in Christ Jesus, for we are in Christ! The key word is "in." Our faith is in the Person of...; our belief is in the Person of... When a person deposits his money in a bank, the bank credits the money to his account. When Abram deposited his faith in God; laid his life into the hands of God; God credited his faith as righteousness because Abram deposited his faith in God. What did Abram believe? He believed the LORD! And he believed the Lord's promise to give the promised seed.

## II. A PROMISE AND UNCERTAINTY GENESIS 15:7-11

**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.** God identifies Himself, "*I am the Lord*" (Jehovah, Yahweh), the God of redemption and salvation; the God who establishes a personal relationship with people, and enters the covenant of redemption with them. God's character rests at the basis of any covenant He makes, therefore, God refers to His Name. He is reminding Abram that, "I AM" brought him out of the place he lived (*Ur of the Chaldees*). There was a reason to come out of Ur; it was not only to give Abram the Promised Seed but also the Promised Land as an inheritance.

**15:8 And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?**— Although Abram had been demonstrating his faith, here comes a question. But Abram still needs to know '*whereby; how am I to know this inheritance will all be mine*', thereby asking God for more and more assurance in strengthening his faith.

**15:9 And he said unto him, Take me an 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.** God heard Abram's request and God moved to give Abram a visible sign that would establish the covenant forever in Abram's mind. Remember all this was taking place in a vision that God was giving Abram. God said, Take a heifer, a she goat, and a ram—all were three years old, which meant they were grown or mature; also the timing of Jesus' public ministry. Take a turtledove and a young pigeon which are gentle and full of grace were kept whole. Jesus is both gentle and full of grace and none of His bones were broken! There were a total of five animals to be sacrificed. Five is the number for "Grace." One commentator expresses it as the fullness of the great sacrifice of Calvary:

1. The heifer symbolized the Priestly Office of Christ.
2. The she goat symbolized His Prophetic Office.
3. The ram symbolized His Kingly Office.

Jesus was Priest, Prophet, and King.

4. The turtledove symbolized Him being led and guided strictly by the Holy Spirit, while
5. The pigeon symbolized Him obeying the Spirit in every capacity.

I do know Abram asked God how would he know that he would get this inheritance, and God is about to show him once and for all. This was the kind of sacrifice Abram was familiar with. God dealt with Abram on the level of using a human relationship covenant to seal the deal.

**15:10 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.** God leads Abram through this vision. The division of the animals refers to the covenant God is making.

**Note:** The covenant ceremony involved cutting the larger animals into halves and laying each piece against the other with a walking path between them. The turtledove and pigeon were to be kept whole; not to be divided; one laid at the end of one row and the other at the end of the other row. The idea is for *each party entering the covenant (contract) to walk down the path between the pieces of sacrificed animals. While walking, they were to declare this promise. If they failed to keep the covenant then they deserved the same fate as the animals (Jer.34:18-19).*]

In this case God would not become like the dead animals because He keeps His Word! He alone is making this covenant and God is not a man that He should lie... Numbers 23:19a.

**15:11 And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.** So God had not appeared just yet to complete the covenant ceremony, thus Abram had to drive off the vultures that kept sweeping down to consume the carcasses. Sometimes there is a waiting period or process before the manifestation of the blessing. And when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of God's Word puts a standard before him, saying it won't work! In order to keep the promise fresh, and in order to not be robbed of the promise, he had to ward off the fowls.

### III. A LOOK FAR AHEAD GENESIS 15:12-17

**15:12 And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.** Again, remember Abram was receiving a vision from God. The revelation comes to Abram in a trance of deep sleep. And lying there, deep in sleep, a thick darkness moved in upon him and some sense of horror and dread began to strike his heart. What was the message?

**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;—** This message represented the sufferings which would come to God's people. Abram's descendants would possess the land of Canaan, (a surety), but not until after a considerable delay and many difficulties (a surety). The highs and lows of victory of the triumphant future of the seed!

a. The promised seed shall enter a foreign land to be oppressed and enslaved for a period of 400 years (15:13). God tells Abram that Israel must remain in a land (Egypt) for four hundred years (their entire stay). <sup>2</sup>Four hundred years are to elapse before the seed of Abram shall actually proceed to take possession of the land. This interval can only commence when the seed is born; that is, at the birth of Isaac, when Abram was a hundred years of age and therefore thirty years after the call. During this interval they are to be, "first, strangers in a land not theirs" for one hundred and ninety years; and then for the remaining two hundred and ten years in Egypt: at first, servants, with considerable privilege and position; and at last, afflicted serfs, under a hard and cruel bondage. This is a certainty! And God heard their cry after 430 yrs (Exo.12:40-41).

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

b. The promised seed shall be delivered from the oppressing nation (Egypt), and when they are delivered they will have great possessions (15:14).

At the end of this period Pharaoh and his nation were visited with a succession of tremendous judgments, and Israel went out free from bondage "with great wealth." This passage teaches us that we will go through difficult seasons, which sometimes last for generations. Nevertheless, God knows the end from the beginning and causes trials to work for the benefit of those who trust him.

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

c. The believer (Abram) will join his fathers in peace (15:15).

*"Going to his fathers"* meant joining them in heaven. After hearing what will happen to his seed, and that their enemies will be punished, and that they will come out with wealth, Abram now knows that he will be alright because he will die a happy old age (he was 175 years old when he died in Gen 25:7-8). Abram would have peace and eternal life because the fulfillment of all God promised did come to pass.

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

d. The promised seed shall return to the Promised Land after 400 years (15:16).

The Amorites were one of the nation's living in Canaan. In Deuteronomy 20:17 God commanded Israel to utterly destroy all their enemies occupying the Promised Land and that included the Amorites. The iniquity of the Amorite tribes living in the land of Canaan was not yet fully dealt with. God waited more than 400 years before Abram's descendants would return again to Canaan before He would deal with their iniquity. God gave the Amorites more time to repent, for He knew the people would grow exceedingly wicked in their iniquity, but they would be punished. According to the generations in Exodus 6:16-20 there was—(1) Levi-137yrs, (2) Kohath-133yrs, (3) Amram-137yrs, and (4) Moses. Moses, who led the Israelites to the border of Canaan after their 400 years in Egypt, was in the fourth generation from Levi. They weren't completely demolished. And Joshua was in the fourth generation from Judah to lead them back to Canaan. The Amorites were wicked and judgment was coming. This prophecy was literally fulfilled (Joshua 24:8).

**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.** God gave Abram a deep experience of His holy presence. We have to remember that in our darkest hour, God is there! He was there in Jesus' darkest hour on the cross. But note how God appeared to Abram: God's presence was symbolized in a smoking firepot with a blazing torch. God's presence is in the smoke and in the fire. We will see this in Exodus 19:18 when God wants to make Himself known to His people at Mount Sinai.

Ancient covenants were sometimes confirmed by the halving of sacrificial animals and the passing between them of the two parties to the covenant (Jere.34:18). However, this time there was only one to pass through the carcasses and that was **God**. This indicated that Yahweh alone was undertaking the fulfillment of all the conditions attached to the covenant. Just as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ when He went to the cross for us undertook the burden of our sins upon Himself! This sign was to be the visible assurance to Abram that the covenant God had made was real and He could not back out of it. Therefore, if the covenant of the promised seed and the Promised Land was ever to be established and fulfilled, it had to be established by God and by God alone; by grace and by grace alone. There had to be shed blood to seal the covenant. A person is saved—receives the promised seed (Christ) and the Promised Land (heaven)— by God alone, sending His Son Jesus alone— by grace and grace alone. To confirm His promise:—the smoking firepot and flaming torch passes between the parts of the sacrificed animals displaying God's covenant relationship with Abram.

## SUMMARY:

Abram<sup>3</sup> was struggling with the delay in God's promises being fulfilled. God began to encourage him to not fear because He would be his shield and exceeding great reward. God answered with a promise of a son, and He

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promised to provide abundantly. Abram's concern about dying without an heir led him to think that his servant Eliezer would be his heir. The Lord readily answers to clarify it by declaring "*this man shall not be your heir.*" God does not even consider him as an option but says his son shall come forth out of his own bowels. At this point, Abram still looking at it in his vision, God takes Abram to the outside of his tent to look up at the stars; if he's able to count them, so shall his seed be. When Abram responds in belief to God's promise, God credited this belief to Abram's account as righteousness. In other words, Abram wasn't righteous in and of himself; however, because he had faith in the Word of the Lord, the Lord's righteousness was credited to him. (15:1-6).

In this vision from God, God reminds Abram where he comes from and who brought him out. God brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees. Why? It is for God's purpose to give him the Promised Land as an inheritance. Abram wants proof that he would inherit it, so God says take these five animals as a sacrifice. The heifer, the she goat, and the ram were to be three years old; split them in half and lay them against the other. The other two animals were a turtledove and a pigeon. They were to be left whole; not to be cut in half. And when the vultures came to eat of the carcasses, Abram was to drive them away (15:7-11).

Abram falls into a "deep sleep" and God speaks that Abram's descendants will be "strangers in a land not their own." They will be "enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years". However, their oppressors (the Egyptians) will be punished in the end and God's people will come forth with great wealth that would bring them to the Promised Land. Abram now knows that he will be able to go with his fathers and die in peace at a good old age. The iniquity of the Amorite tribes living in the land of Canaan was not yet fully dealt with. God waited more than 400yrs before Abram's descendants would return again to Canaan before He would deal with their iniquity. That was more than enough time. In Abram's vision, it had gotten dark, and he saw a smoking firepot (furnace) and a flaming torch (burning lamp) passing between the split animal carcasses representing the manifestation of God's divine presence passing through the sacrifice alone; showing that He was and would be their God of covenant and light of His people; in the completion of this covenant. We would see in Exodus that God would be their pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. His very presence would be more than enough! (15:12-17).

## APPLICATION:

Whatever we have on earth is only temporary: homes, cars, money, etc; and whatever we leave for our children is only temporary. But the inheritance God leaves is eternal; forever and ever. Which will you choose; something temporary or something eternal which can never be lost? There is a reward in faith!

