

## Genesis 15 – The Abrahamic Covenant is Cut

### I. God Credits Abram's Faith As Righteousness (1-6)

#### A. God Encourages Abram (1)

1. God's Word Comes To Abram
2. God Tells Abram Not To Fear
  - a. Is Abram having doubts and fears?
  - b. Is this just a standard statement to those who receive a vision from God?
3. God Himself is Abram's Protection and Reward
  - a. I am your shield
    - i. God is Abram's protection
    - ii. We have seen this already in Abram's battle with the kings
    - iii. Abram has probably not made the king of Sodom very happy in the last chapter
    - iv. Abram also has a host of new enemies in the kings he just defeated as well as the king of Sodom who he just rejected
  - b. I am your exceedingly great reward
    - i. Abram has also given up all the spoils of the war he just fought rather than keeping them from the hands of the king of Sodom
    - ii. Abram is to look to God as his treasure and his reward
    - iii. We will see that Abram is probably wavering a little bit. He is about to question the Lord's timing in fulfilling his promise.

#### B. God Assures Abram (2-5)

1. God's Promise of Seed is Questioned (2-3)
  - a. Abram Complains That He is Still Childless (2)
    - i. Notice that this is the first time on record that Abram speaks to God – He refers to him as Lord God (Adonai Elohim)
    - ii. Abram has gone through a lot. He has grown in his faith in Egypt and God has blessed him in his war against the kings. But he is still no closer to having a son.
    - iii. If Abram dies without a son, his household servant would become his heir – He would pass on his inheritance but his line would not continue
  - b. Abram Complains that God Has Given No Seed (3)
    - i. Almost sounds like he is growing impatient
    - ii. He says, "you haven't given me a seed" – as if he is accusing God (but without directly saying so)

- iii. A son is necessary for all the promises God has given to Abram – until that happens nothing else can be fulfilled (no nation from him, no seed to have the land, etc.)
  - 2. God Affirms A Seed From Abram's Body (4-5)
    - a. God Promises Abram A Natural Heir (4)
      - i. Notice how gentle God deals with Abram after Abram speaks to Him impatiently and possibly doubting
      - ii. "The word of the Lord" came to Abram – this is repeated for emphasis – God again promises an heir for Abram, but qualifies that it will be a natural son from his own body
      - iii. God says "this one" speaking of Elieazar will not be your heir
    - b. God Promises Abram An Innumerable Seed (5)
      - i. Abram is given a sign to view regarding the promise
      - ii. Abram is told to go outside and number the stars if he is able. – This is how numerous his descendants will be (repeated from 13:16 – where God says his descendents will be as the dust of the earth)
- C. Abram's Faith is Credited As Righteousness (6)
  - 1. The word "believe" here is אָמֵן (aman) – where we get the word "amen"
  - 2. "Trust" would be a better way to describe the meaning of this word
    - a. Our modern concept of "believe" can be used various ways – "I believe it will be a good day," "I believe I will have pizza for supper," "I believe George Washington crossed the Delaware"
    - b. The idea here is that Abram trust himself to God's promise. He trusted that God would fulfill His word to Abram
    - c. Notice also that Abram didn't just trust the promise – He trusted "in the Lord" – this was trusting in God who made the promise (it is personal)
  - 3. Abram is Credited as Righteous Because of His Faith
    - a. God imputes righteousness to Abram because of faith alone
      - i. Notice that Abram's faith is not what is counted as righteousness – Abram himself is counted as righteous by faith

- ii. Abram is declared righteous the same way that we are today – by Grace through faith
- b. The New Testament writers see the gospel exemplified in this verse
  - i. Romans 4:3 - For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.
  - ii. Galatians 3:6 - Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.
  - iii. James 2:23 - And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness:
- c. Though Abram may have began to get impatient and worried about the promise fulfilled – He believed God when the promise is reaffirmed

## II. God Cuts A Covenant With Abram (7-21)

### A. Abram Seeks A Sign Of The Promise (7-8)

#### 1. God Repeats the Promise of The Land (7)

- a. God reminds Abram of the reason he chose him and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees – to give him the land
- b. God is about to make a covenant with Abram and the covenant begins with a declaration of God's past acts –
  - i. God begins the covenant with Moses in the same way - I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (Exodus 20:2)
- c. God repeats his purpose – He intends to give the promise land to Abram's seed – but right at the moment, it doesn't look like it is going to happen

#### 2. Abram Asks For Assurance Of The Promise (8)

- a. Abram believes God but he desires confirmation
- b. Abram has run into one obstacle after another and the land itself has not proven to be very cooperative (famine, unsustainability, war, hostile nations living there, etc.)

### B. God Commands The Preparation of Covenant Ceremony (9-11)

#### 1. God Commands Animals Be Brought (9)

- a. Rather than answer Abram directly with assuring words, God commands animals to be brought
- b. This seems strange to us but Abram would immediately know what is about to happen
- c. The Covenant Ceremony –
  - i. In the ancient near east, people and nations made covenants of protection and provision with each other

ii. Two parties would come together and each party would define the nature of the covenant – the terms

- One party may offer protection and support while the other pledges loyalty and obedience (just an example)
- The terms of the covenant involved both parties clearly stating what they are promising and if either party fails to keep the covenant it is void
- Then the two parties would cut an animal in half and together they would walk through the pieces to seal the covenant
- This was like placing a curse on oneself, saying if I fail to keep this covenant let me be like these animals
- You can see this played out in Jeremiah 34:17-19 - *Therefore thus saith the Lord; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. 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 princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf;*

2. Abram Divided and Placed The Animals (10)

- a. Notice that Abram knew exactly what was about to take place
- b. God told him to gather these animals and Abram immediately divided them and placed them where they needed to be for the ceremony – God is about to make a covenant
- c. Also notice that these particular animals would later become standard sacrificial animals that the people would bring into the tabernacle / temple

3. Abram Protected the Pieces (11)

- a. Now the ceremony is ready, but God does not come immediately
- b. Imagine what Moses is thinking – He has prepared the animals and he is now waiting for the Lord to come and dictate His terms – but where is He?
- c. Abram waits so long that he has to fend off the birds that come to scavenge the animals
- d. Abram expects God to come and tell Abram what He will do for Him, and tell Abram what he must do as his part of the covenant – and then they will walk through the pieces together.

C. God Binds Himself With the Covenant (12-21)

1. God Foretells the Purpose of the Seed (12-16)

- a. Abram Falls Into a Deep Sleep (12)
  - i. A horror (dreadful) darkness comes over Abram as he slept (the presence of God is coming)
  - ii. God comes as Abram sleeps and dictates the stipulations of the covenant
- b. God Foretells How The Promise Will Come About (13-16)
  - i. Abram's Seed Will Be Slaves in a Foreign Nation (13)
    - We know this foretells Israel's captivity in Egypt
    - Israel will remain in Egypt for 400 (technically 430) years
  - ii. God Will Judge That Nation (14a)
    - God will bring Israel out of Egypt with plagues judging the Egyptians
  - iii. Abram's Seed Will Come Out With Plunder (14b)
    - The Egyptians will give great wealth to Israel just so they will leave
    - *And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians.* – Exodus 12:36
  - iv. Abram Will Live Long and Die in Peace (15)
    - Abram will come to grips with the fact that he himself will not possess the land
    - The writer of Hebrews tells us that this land promise was a foreshadow of the true land (the new heavens and earth) that Abraham's seed (those in Christ) will inherit.

- *By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. – Hebrews 11:9-10*

v. Abram's Seed Will Return To This Land (16)

- There is a purpose for Israel going to Egypt and remaining there for 400 years
- The sin of the Amorites is not yet full
- God gives the people of the land 400 years to repent and turn from their idolatry (they also have Melchizedek, a priest king of God to presumably show them the true God)
- Remember this when people say God is cruel to tell Joshua to kill everyone in the land of Canaan – God gave them 400 years to repent

2. God Passes Through The Pieces Alone (17)

- a. God has laid out his promise in the covenant – he has told Abram what he will do
- b. Next should come Abram's part – God should now tell Abram what is required of him in the covenant and then they will walk through the pieces together
  - i. Instead God appears as a smoking furnace and burning lamp
    - God appears repeatedly in Scripture with fire and smoke
    - The burning bush, fire on Mt. Sinai, the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud (smoke), The smoke descends on the tabernacle when God's presence is there, Smoke fills the temple when Solomon dedicates it, etc.
  - ii. God shows up and walks through the pieces alone
    - God alone ratifies the covenant promises
    - Abram is given no work to do to ensure the covenant
    - Abram is not invited to walk through the pieces – the promise is based on God alone
    - The covenant does not depend on Abram

- iii. Notice that the NT writers make much of Abraham's promise being linked with the Gospel.
- 3. God covenants To Give Abram's Seed The Land (18-21)
  - a. God promises the land to Abram's seed and sets its boundaries
  - b. This blessing of Abram is given to us in Christ –
    - i. Galatians 3:13-14 - *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*
  - c. And the land promised to Israel was fully given to them at the time of Joshua's death
    - i. Joshua 21:43-45 - ***Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.***
    - ii. Joshua 23:14-15 - *And, behold, this day I [Joshua] am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, **that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.** Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the Lord your God promised you; so shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you.*