

The Book of Genesis

Chapter Fifteen

God's Covenant With Abraham

Lesson Verse: Romans 4:17-25

I. Lesson Introduction

- A. In this chapter we study more in depth the covenant that God made with Abram. Abram also received prophecy of what takes place to his descendants, the nation of Israel, in the land of Egypt. Here also the boundaries of the land of Israel are identified.

II. Lesson

A. His Covenant (15:1-21).

1. The Lord Comes To Abram In A _____, *Gen.15:1-6*.

- a. God spoke to Abram in a vision, saying, "*Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceedingly great reward*" (15:1). Here we read for the first time those two wonderful little words, "_____." Abram needed this reassurance at this time, for he had made some powerful enemies as a result of his actions in Genesis 14.
- b. God Told Abram To Fear Not.
 - 1) Even though we may have faith, God recognizes that we may still have some fears. Ridding self of fears is a growth process that takes place in steps of faith by the believer. Abram is making these steps. Each trial he has endured has increased his faith.
 - 2) Christians must be aware that that which is not of faith is sin, *Rom 14:23*. We should not give in to our fears, but let God take care of them, *Ps 23:4*. God has already promised us He would never leave nor forsake us. It takes faith for us to rest there. We increase our faith based on past facts emanating from faith manifested in our lives.
- c. "I am thy shield"
 - 1) Here Abram received blessed assurance that God would protect him. Abram was familiar with a shield and how effective a weapon it was. He just returned from battle, for we are told "*After these things...*" referred back to the events in *Gen. 14*. Probably he reflected on the battle and how the shield saved his life and protected him. God used a physical object, the shield; something to which Abram could relate, in order to teach him a spiritual lesson pertaining to something he could not see. God wanted to take Abram to another level in his walk by faith. However, He must allow man enough time to learn the lessons from the previous experience.
 - 2) At this point in Abram's life, the only great miracle God has done for him was defeating the armies in *Gen. 14*. Abram has walked by faith, stumbling ever now and then, but generally, the outstanding miracles have been few.
 - 3) God wants His children of faith to realize there are some things we take by faith, minus miracles. He illustrates this fact to Abram in this chapter. Abram asked for a sign. God gave him a vision.
- d. "I am thy great reward"
 - 1) Abram just refused an earthly reward from the sinful king of Sodom. Here again we see that God is using physical characteristics to teach spiritual values. God congratulates Abram for not receiving the rewards from the sodomite. In so doing, Abram is assured that he will not miss anything. God will provide greater rewards. That is why God said: *exceeding great reward*. God's reward (singular) exceed the rewards (plural) of the world.
- e. What is the Lord to us?
 - 1) Each of us must ask ourselves just what it is the Lord means to us. He told Abram to fear not and to have confidence. In asking ourselves what God is to us, each should consider some of the following:
 - 2) Is the Lord my shield? *Eph 6:16 Above all, taking the shield of faith...* Just what is the shield of faith? Is it a round disc we carry around to ward off attacks? Is it something we carry

around just in case we need it? Neither of the twain. What is it then? It is nothing more than the faith of Christ applied to the heart of the believer, **Gal 2:16, Phil 3:9**.

- a) What is the faith of Christ? The faith of Christ is the faith He had in God the Father, that God would not leave His soul in hell, **Psa 16:10, Acts 2:27**, but would raise Him from the dead, **Acts 3:15** *And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.* (Remember, Jesus was the Second Adam). This same faith is give to us by the Spirit once we believe that Jesus is the Son of God: **Rom. 8:11** *But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.* We believe God will raise us also.
 - b) This is the shield of faith. This shield protects us from anything the world and Satan can throw at us. No matter what happens, we have a lively hope that can not be taken from us, **1 Pet 1:3** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*
 - c) It is salvation by faith, for if we had to work our way to heaven, our works would have to be equal to those of Jesus. Salvation by works alone would be impossible. The reason is man being the competitive creature that he is, would constantly be trying to out perform his fellow man, not for salvation sake, but for self-glory. Furthermore, everyone will not desire to work their way to heaven. It would be impossible for us to perform a miracle on someone who had no desire to receive it. Even Jesus did not force anyone to accept His miracles. What is more, if all were trying to work their way to heaven, to whom would be the recipient of such love and devotion? This is why God told Abram “I am thy shield.” He wanted Abram to have faith in Him and not in armies or men. He wanted Abram to have faith in God’s words, not in God’s works.
- 3) Is the Lord my reward?
- a) **1 Cor 2:9** reveals that we have no idea what God has prepared for us. John caught a glimpse of it and could not describe it. Man has dreamed about what God has in store for him in heaven, and about the best we can understand is streets of gold; even that is not correct for the text says **Rev 21:21** *And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. One street; not streets.*
 - b) One of the biggest problems we must contend with is we are so focus on what God has for us in the future, that we sometime loose sight of what He wants done TODAY! Each of us should seriously consider whether God is our reward today or do we look for the world to reward us. Where our hearts are, there are our treasures.
 - c) Abram deals with this same problem when he goes into Hagar to raise up a seed. He had no problem turning down the riches of the world, but when it came to strange flesh, he had some problems.
 - d) God already cursed Pharaoh for wanting Sarai, **Gen. 12**. How quickly Abram forgot God’s intervention in yesterday’s conflict just so he could satisfy some fleshly passion today. Taking matters into his own bosom to bring about a prophetic event through means of his devising, he forgot that the Lord was his reward and sold out to Hagar, **Gen. 16**.
 - e) Abram and Sarai forgot that the God that gave life again to Abram’s body, could do the same to the body of Sarai, **Rom. 4:19**. Sarai saw new life come upon her husband. However, it had not been given to her at this time. Where was her faith? She also was a protected vessel, for this same Lord must honor His command: they two shall be one flesh.
 - f) Is God our reward today? Tomorrow? Sometimes we get so busy looking at God as our eternal reward that we close our eyes to the fact that He is also our reward today. We ought to cease looking at the world for daily rewards, and look to the Father. Give us this day our daily bread...

2. Abram Reminds God That He Has No Children.

- a. Abram "reminded" God that he and Sarai were still childless and suggested that a servant named Eliezer of Damascus become his adopted heir. But this request was refused. Eliezer would later be used to aid Abram in another way. (See Gen. 24:1-4.)
- b. God once again promised his old servant a child, this time adding the words, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (15:5). Here is another little proof of the Bible as God's Word. Today we know there are probably as many stars in the heavens as there are grains of sand on the seashores of the world. But in Abram's time men believed the total number of stars to be less than twelve hundred.
- c. Abram asked a good question. He believed he would receive a reward. He just wanted to know who would inherit the reward. As was the custom of the times' one of his servants would be his heir for Abram had no children.
- d. The Lord's reply.
 - 1) The heir would come from the loins of Abram, was the Lord's reply.
 - 2) Even though the body of Abram was dead, it would be resurrected and life would come forth from the dead, *Heb 11:11*
- e. Behold the stars.
 - 1) God instructed Abram to look to the stars and number them. If he could, then he would be able to number the descendants from his loins.
 - 2) God previously told Abram that his seed would be as numerous as the dust of the earth. Here is a spiritual promise in that they would be as numerous as the stars of heaven.
 - 3) In these two promises we find God the Father providing for all our needs, earthly and heavenly.
- f. Abram _____, v 6.
 - 1) It is very important to understand what Abram believed. Thus the question: What did Abram believe? Abram placed his faith in the promises made by God that Abram would have a literal, physical, visible, flesh and blood son. There is nothing in this context that reveals anything less or more regarding what Abram believed.
 - 2) Abram believed God would bring life back to his dead body and that he would have a son from a sexual union, even though it was physically impossible for him to do so at the time God made the promise. Because of Abram's faith in the words of God, God counted it to him for righteousness.
 - 3) Why is it so important to understand what Abram believed? Because many misguided souls run to this text to prove that Abram was a blood bought born again Christian. If we allow the Bible to speak, and us remain silent, we come to understand that was not communicated to Abram. There is nothing in these chapters or the ones that follow that reveal anything other than Abram would have a live son from his dead body.
 - 4) The same thing is explained to the church in Rome by the apostle Paul, *Rom. 4*. It is there that Paul points out that Abram is the father of all that believe. Here Paul points out what Abraham believed, *Rom 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Rom 4:22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness..* What did God promise? He promise Abram that Abram and Sarai would have a son from a union of their flesh. God would give life back to their dead bodies, so that their old bodies would bring forth life. God did not tell Abram: by grace through faith are ye saved...
 - 5) We now must ask: What do we believers believe? We believe that God will do the impossible.

_____ At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. Jer 32:17, Jer 32:27.
- g. God is our great assurance.
 - 1) Those who trust in Christ as Lord and Saviour believe the same thing on a spiritual realm that Abram believed on the physical. Once the Holy Ghost begins to convict lost people, they realize they are dead, (Just like Abram's body) in trespasses and sins. However, the wise do not remain that way, *Eph 2:1 And you hath he quickened, (made alive) who were dead (alive in sin and dead unto God) in trespasses and sins.*

- 2) The wise folk accept the Lord as Saviour and our belief is that of the father of believers, (Abraham) we believe the impossible, *1 Th 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*
 - 3) Abram believed God would give him a literal, visible, and physical son. This he did and Abraham named him Isaac. Even so we that believe with faithful Abraham, believe that we are now the sons of God. We also believe that even though our bodies die and go into the grave, at some future time God will bring life back, and we will arise, *1 John 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*
- h. Righteous.
- 1) The word righteous simply mean right with God. How do we get right with God? We believe He will do what He said He would do. Abram did not impute righteousness on himself. Righteousness was accounted on him by God the Father, *Rom 4:3.* In like manner, we receive the righteousness of Christ. *Rom 8:10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.* We are right with God not because of what we accomplish, but because of what Jesus accomplished.
 - 2) God accounted Abram's belief as righteousness. God does the same thing to and for the believer today. The only difference between us and faithful Abram is believers in the church age are born again in the spirit and have the Holy Spirit indwelling with us. Abram did not have the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.
 - 3) Abram, base on his faith in the words of God, got busy with his wife, brought the words of God into reality. Believers today, based on the authority of God's word, accept it as fact that He can raise those from the dead that believe.

B. God's righteousness – _____ by Faith.

1. When God had finished, we are told that Abram "*believed in the Lord; and he counted it unto him for righteousness*" (15:6).
2. Examples of Salvation in the Old Testament:
 - a. Adam and Eve – by trusting the substitution of lambs in their place
 - b. Noah – by seeking grace from God
 - c. Shem – by making the Lord God HIS God
 - d. Abraham – by believing God's character, and His words
 - e. David – by receiving mercy from God (Isa 55:1-3)
3. God Tells of the Land Abram Will Inherit (*Gen.15:7-8*)
 - a. God Tells Abram That He is Jehovah And Has The Power.
 - b. Is anything too hard for the Lord. He can do in heaven and on earth as he pleases. Who has the authority or power to ask Him, "What doest thou?"
 - c. God Does Not Lie. He keeps His promises. *Num 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?*

C. Abram Asked For A _____.

1. How shall I know? Give me a sign.
2. NOTE: Abram desires a sign: Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? v. 8. This did not proceed from distrust of God's power or promise, as that of Zacharias; but he desired this, For the strengthening and confirming of his own faith; he believed (v. 6), but here he prays, Lord, help me against my unbelief. Now he believed, but he desired a sign to be treasured up against an hour of temptation, not knowing how his faith might, by some event or other, be shocked and tried. Note, We all need, and should desire, helps from heaven for the confirming of our faith, and should improve sacraments, which are instituted signs, for that purpose. (from Matthew Henry's Commentary)
3. When Abram asked how he could be sure all these things were true, especially the promise concerning the land, God ordered him to gather some animals and birds.
4. Abram gathered the creatures as ordered. In our culture today, whenever two parties determine to enter an agreement, a contract is drawn up and signed by both parties. But in Abram's time it was different. Back then the two parties would slaughter some animals, carve them up, and arrange the pieces in two lines. Then both parties would join hands and solemnly walk together down the middle

path. By so doing they would pledge in the presence of blood and suffering and death, their intention to keep the terms of the contract. This is the first of three kinds of legal covenants in the Bible. These are:

- a. The covenant of blood (Gen. 15: 10; Jer. 34:18, 19).
- b. The covenant of a shoe (Ruth 4:7, 8).
- c. The covenant of salt (Num. 18:19; 2 Chron. 13:5).

5. Just prior to God's physical presence upon this scene (in the form of a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch), Abram was put into a deep sleep. As he slept God's presence passed through these bloody pieces alone thus indicating that the promises of Jehovah concerning Abram's salvation and his possession of Palestine were both unconditional, with no heavenly strings attached whatsoever. Thus, the Abrahamic Covenant which was announced in Genesis 12:14, and confirmed in 13:14-17; 15:1-7, is now officially and legally ratified here in 15:8-18.

D. God's Directions For A _____ (Gen.15:9-17)

1. One of the most mysterious and theologically significant events is recorded here. In this vision God tells Abram to take a heifer, a ram, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon, cut all except the birds in half. Then he was told to place each piece opposite the other. "And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and, lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him."
2. Then God predicted the 400 years of bondage of Abram's descendants in a foreign land and of their return to Canaan. At the end of four generations. "*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 the pieces. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram*" (Gen. 15:18). Then followed the prediction of the extent of the land to be given to Abram's descendants.
3. The Hebrew idiom 'cutting a covenant' was based on the custom of cutting up an animal and those who were making the covenant walking in the pieces. In this case, only God (visualized as "a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp") went through the two pieces.
4. This was an unconditional covenant on God's part, no matter what Abram did or did not do.
5. God made the vow (covenant). It was up to Him to bring what He covenanted to pass. It was up to Abram to believe that God would bring to pass what He vowed.
6. Did Abram work for the righteousness that was accounted to him? No.

E. In Genesis 15:13-16 God utters a sevenfold prophecy to Abram. All seven have eventually come to pass.

1. That Abram's descendants would be strangers in a foreign land. (See Gen. 46:24.)
2. That they would be servants in that land. (See Ex. 7-14.)
3. That this servitude would last some 400 years. (See Ex. 12:40.)
4. That God himself would later judge that nation which enslaved Israel. (See Ex. 9-12.)
5. That Abram would be spared all of this. (See Gen. 25:7, 8.)
6. That after spending four long generations in Egypt, Israel would return to Canaan. (See Ex. 6:16-20. Here we learn that Levi, Abram's great-grandson, was the first generation. Levi's son Kohath, was the second; Kohath's son, Amram, was the third; and Amram's son, Moses, was the fourth.)
7. That Israel would come out of Egypt with great substance. (See Ex. 12:35, 36; Ps. 105:37.)

F. God would take a long time to accomplish this, however, "For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (15:16).

1. Here we have another expression of that important principle first discussed in Genesis 6:1. Sin accumulates until the time when God's anger and judgment explode down upon it. In this case the Amorites were those wicked descendants of Canaan (Gen. 10: 16) who had been dwelling in Palestine for some 400 years at the time of Abraham. But God would allow them yet another four or five hundred years before destroying them. (See Josh. 10.) (This truth is brought out by Paul in Rom. 2:5. See also 2 Pet. 3:1-9; 2 Chron. 36:15, 16.)
2. Thus while God's patience and forgiveness have no depth limit (Rom. 5:20), they do have a length limit (Prov. 27: 1).

G. God Foretold of Abram's Seed Being in _____ in Egypt.

1. He forewarned of judgment on Egypt. Also of their coming away from Egypt after 400 years with great substance. God also told him that he would die in peace at a ripe old age.
2. THE COVENANT REPEATED AND CONFIRMED, Gen.15:18-21.

3. God gave Abram And His Seed The Land From The Great River In Egypt, Nile To The River Euphrates, (see note)
4. God Also Told The names Of The Ten Nations Of Tribes That Occupy The Land And Must Be Cast Out.
 - a. NOTE: A rehearsal of the grant. He had said before, To thy seed will I give this land, <Gen 12:7; 13:15. But here he says, I have given it; that is, I have given the promise of it, the charter is sealed and delivered, and cannot be disannulled. Note, God's promises are God's gifts, and are so to be accounted. the possession is as sure, in due time, as if it were now actually delivered to them. What God has promised is as sure as if it were already done; hence, it is said, He that believes hath everlasting life for he shall as surely go to heaven as if he were there already. A recital of the particulars granted, such as is usual in the grants of lands. He specifies the boundaries of the land intended hereby to be granted, v. 18. And then, for the greater certainty, as is usual in such cases, he mentions in whose tenure and occupation these lands now were. Ten several nations, or tribes, are here spoken of (v. 19-21) that must be cast out, to make room for the seed of Abram. They were not possessed of all these countries when God brought them into Canaan. The bounds are fixed much narrower, etc. But, in David's time, and Solomon's, their jurisdiction extended to the utmost of these limits, it was their own fault that they were not sooner and longer in possession of all these territories. They forfeited their right by their sins, and by their own sloth and cowardice kept themselves out of possession. The land granted is here described in its utmost extent because it was to be a type of the heavenly inheritance, where there is room enough: in our father's house are many mansions. The present occupants are named, because their number, and strength, and long prescription, should be no hindrance to the accomplishment of this promise in its season, and to magnify God's love to Abram and his seed, in giving to that one nation the possessions of many nations, so precious were they in his sight, and so honourable, (from Matthew Henry's Commentary)

III. Conclusion

IV. Study Questions