

Genesis 15:
The Covenant

I. Call -

- A. **15:1** *After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."*
- B. Is Abram being rewarded for his respect of Melchizedek and saving of Lot? The word reward does appear here. However, faith and salvation are unmerited gifts are they not? Here we must recall that Abram has already been promised a land, God is about to reiterate that promise. Abram's reward remains God's free gift, but notice it is contingent on faith. Faith is not merely an abstract intellectual acceptance of God's existence and promises. It is a stepping out on that faith and living according to God's word. Hence, Abram's blessings come now that he is back where he needs to be. Here the words of St. James make a great deal of sense: James 2:20 *Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.* That is to say, faith and works are inseparable just as breathing is an inseparable quality of a living body. Abram by his obedience is now in a place where God can bless (reward) him with the promises he has already made.

II. Concerns -

- A. **2** *But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"* **3** *And Abram said, "Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir."*
- B. Here again is an honest portrait of Abram. He struggles to accept what God tells him. This also is the first time we have recorded that Abram spoke to God. He speaks honestly to him about his fears and disappointment for which God does not rebuke him. Abram will not be satisfied merely with land. He seeks children to fill that land. Here is set forth an important truth. Land and possessions are not enough. Relationships are what ultimately matter. Abram also shows that he took God's word seriously. Namely, that God would give him not only land but, descendants (13:15; 12:2; 12:7). In effect Abram's reasoning is, "What good will these blessings be if I have no descendants with which to share them".
- C. True enough Abram does have a slave he has "adopted". The customs of the ancient near east allowed for the fact that a slave could become heir when there were no blood descendants. Eliezer "of Damascus"¹

¹The Hebrew text is corrupt, nobody knows what is really said here. "Of Damascus" is a guest.

III. Confirmation -

- A. **4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir." 5 And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be."**
- B. If Abram was trying to let God off the hook by suggesting that Eliezer would be the heir, he failed. God is firm in asserting that Abram's own son shall be heir and that his descendants will be numerous indeed. What about us? Do we not sometimes underestimate what God can do and do we not sometimes fail to ask because we doubt that God can or will do something. *Ye have not because ye ask not.* (James 4:2). God is not kidding around, he means what he says.

IV. Confession -

- A. **6 And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. 7**
- B. Note here a solid affirmation, it is Abram's faith that gives him access to God's promises. His "account" is credited due to his faith. The blessings come because of his trust.
- C. Examples
1. Alley Cats
 2. Following the directions
 3. Wheel Barrel
 4. Letting Go
- D. Scriptural allusions
1. Romans 4:3
 - a. *4:1 What then shall we say about Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.*
 2. James 2:23
 - a. *2:20 Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

V. Concerns II

- A. *And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." 8 But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"*
- B. Abram is still struggling. He has made an act of faith but now he wonders how firm this word is. This is bold! Not only that but Abram seems to have forgotten that God has brought him this far. He didn't bring him this far to leave him, surely. But, God is patient. He is about to swear an oath to Abram in the covenant.

VI. Covenant -

- A. *9 He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; 14 but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. 16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." 17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."*
- B. Outline:
1. Preliminaries - vv. 9-12
 2. Predictions - vv. 13-16
 3. Performance - vv. 17-21
- C. God in effect says to Abram, "Trust me, I swear by my word that I will do what I have promised". He swears this oath by entering into a covenant. The process of covenant making appears bizarre but was a common ancient near east practice. Animals were cut in half (for every covenant was ratified in blood). And the parties pass through the center. This action symbolized a similar readiness of the parties to be cut to pieces if they do not fulfill the terms of the covenant.
- D. Here is the first description of God's appearance since the Garden of Eden. He is like fire and passes through like a flaming torch. This description of God is fire is common in the Bible.
1. Ex. 3:2 - Burning bush
 2. Ex. 13:21 - Pillar of fire
 3. Ex. 19:18 - Fire on the Mountaintop
- E. Note the fear and dread that also comes upon Abram. (V.12) This too is a

common experience when encountering God in a theophany. Even in the new testament a holy dread comes upon John when the glorified Christ appears to him (Rev. 1:17) We must never trivialize God. *It is an awesome thing to fall into the hands of a living God.* (Heb 10:31)

- F. Note too, God does not fail to tell Abram the whole story. His descendants will be blessed but only after great trials. God is also truthful with us. The glory of heaven can be ours but for now we must also accept the cross.
- G. God tells Abram again of the land he will inherit by describing not only His boundaries but also His current inhabitants who will be dispossessed when Israel inherits. God also says why they will be dispossessed: due to their iniquity (V.16)