

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 16

Chapter 15

Abram's Shield

Genesis 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."

From Abram's encounter with Melchizedek, king and priest of Salem, and Bera, king of Sodom, in the valley of the Shaveh, Abram returned to Hebron where the LORD spoke to him in a vision. Through the Old Testament, we see the LORD speaking to His people through visions, dreams and oracles. In dreams, the person is asleep; during his sleep he sees the full message of the LORD dramatized as if it has happened or the person hears the LORD speaking a message directly to him. The LORD then allows the person to report the dramatization in his own words or repeat the exact words spoken by the LORD during his dream. A vision is the same as a dream, except the person is awake; think of it as daydreaming. The vision can be a dramatization or a direct communication from the LORD while the person is in the daydream mindset. An oracle does not come in a vision or a dream, it is the direct audible word of the LORD; at Mount Sinai, Moses heard the oracles of the LORD as he recorded His words in the book of Genesis for our use; in other words, the LORD guided Moses as he wrote the book. Moses would be able to write the books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy because they record his life as the earthly leader of the Israelites and he has been told what, when, where and how to lead the people by the LORD directly in oracles. The book of Leviticus is like Genesis; with Leviticus, the LORD directed each word specifically in His oracle to Moses.

In this passage, Abram experienced a daydream and heard the LORD say, "**Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great.**" Interpretation mistakes have been made in this passage as some have honed in on the English words "I am" and superimposed those words to be the same as the LORD's words to Moses, "I am that I am," an English translation for the name "Jehovah." The "am" should not be in this verse. It should read, "**Fear not, I shield thee, your reward exceedingly great.**" Here, the LORD promised to be Abram's protector, his "shield" and from that time on, Abram should not be afraid. Furthermore, the LORD promised to make Abram exceedingly great. According to the last chapter, Abram was already exceedingly rich; how now will the LORD make him exceedingly great? Evidently the LORD was thinking about Abram's life and influence, but Abram was thinking about the wealth the LORD had already bestowed on him.

Abram's Current Heir

Genesis 15:2 **And Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"**³ **And Abram said, "Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir."**

Abram did not understand the meaning behind the LORD's words in Genesis 15:1. Verse 2 indicates that Abram did not think he needed anything else; the LORD had already bestowed on him all the wealth he needed and that he could ever use. That thought led to Abram's response to the LORD that his only male heir lived in Damascus and his name was Eliezer. Who was Eliezer? We do not know! Somehow or some way, this Eliezer was the closest relative to Abram and at that time, he lived in Damascus. Therefore, Eliezer was the next in line to inherit Abram's wealth if Abram died. Eliezer would be responsible for Sarai and all of Abram's house. That meant that Eliezer was a closer relative to Abram than his nephew Lot. How could Eliezer be a closer relative than Lot? If Eliezer was a full blood brother of Terah, Abram's father, he would have been a closer relative than Lot. However, the Scripture does not answer this question. Nevertheless, Abram was concerned about who would inherit all the wealth he already owned.

Abram's Future Heirs

Genesis 15:4 **Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir."**⁵ **And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them."** **And He said to him, " So shall your descendants be."**

Abram had inadvertently touched on the right topic despite his misunderstanding. The Lord was promising to make Abram exceedingly great in his heritage and descendants; Abram thought He meant in his material wealth.

The LORD answered Abram's concern and promised that Eliezer would not be Abram's closest heir and that he would have a son from his own body. At this point, we must interject that wives and daughters never inherited the estate of husbands and fathers and neither did the sons other than the oldest living son. The fathers could grant a portion to the other living sons, but the oldest inherited the majority of the assets and all of the liability at the same time. The oldest then became the new patriarch responsible with those assets for the care and feeding of the family.

The LORD had already promised to Abram that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust in Genesis 13:14-17, but evidently, Abram had not truly internalized the meaning of the LORD's words. In this passage, in Hebron, by the oaks of Mamre, the LORD used the stars as an example for Abram to understand how many heirs he would eventually have.

Abram's Belief

Genesis 15:6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Two things occurred in this verse; Abram believed, the LORD reckoned. Belief and reckoning represent the core elements of a major doctrine of the Bible, justification! Abram put his trust in the words of Yehovah; he believed; Yehovah considered that belief to be righteous/real! Up to this point, Abram knew about the LORD, worshipped the LORD, followed the LORD, called upon the name of the LORD, but now, he believed in the LORD. Taking Abram out of Ur was Terah's decision and showed no need for Abram to believe; directing Abram to leave Haran and journey south to a land was just a trip like all the other trips Abram had made before; building an altar to worship the LORD was nothing new. However, trusting the LORD to give him a male heir when Sarai was barren took true belief in the power of the Almighty God. Abram was not trusting God for something he had personally wished for and proclaimed that the LORD would rubber stamp and cause to happen. Abram did not say, "I'm trusting God for...." "I'm believing God for" Rather, Abram was trusting the audible words of the LORD and he believed those words. The LORD, Who knows all, knew that Abram's belief was the real thing and proclaimed Abram righteous!

Abram's Land

Genesis 15:7 And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it."

Here, the words "**I am the LORD**" are correct because they are the same words that were spoken to Moses from the burning bush on Sinai. The "am" belongs because the Hebrew says, *Adonai Yehovah/Jehovah*. Yehovah means "**I am that I am.**" The phrase means, "**I am LORD.**" The Jews substituted the word *Adonai* for the word *Yehovah* later in their history because they felt the name *Yehovah* was too sacred to speak. This change caused a problem when Hebrews made new copies from those that were tattered and torn. However, in places where "I am" was used, the ancient Hebrew was preserved. Our new English translations have made the adjustment by placing the word "LORD" in all caps where the word *Yehovah/Jehovah* occurs.

Finally, in this passage, the LORD revealed that He was behind the move of Abram and his family from the Ur of Chaldee to Haran and ultimately into Canaan Land. Previously, the Scripture indicated that it was Terah's idea to move the family out of Ur after the death of Haran. Here, the LORD reveals that He was the Source behind that move. After the death of Terah, the LORD then called to Abram in Haran and instructed him to enter the land that He would give to Abram and his heirs. This passage was not intended to indicate that Abram's call occurred in Ur, rather, it was the LORD's will to move Abram to Haran where He would present the call to him

when Terah had died. For application, this passage shows the believers that God works all things for good to those who love Him. The LORD was directing Abram's path even before he knew it!

Abram's Question

Genesis 15:8 **And he said, "O Lord GOD, how may I know that I shall possess it?"**

Abram fully knew that when the LORD said in Genesis 15:1, "**Your reward shall be very great**", it did not mean physical wealth, but flesh and blood heirs. The LORD knew Abram's heart in spite of Abram's question in verse 8. "**How may I know that I shall possess it?**" A literal Hebrew translation says, "Lord Yehovah, whereby do I know that I possess it?" Abram was not asking the LORD "**How can I believe that I shall possess it?**" but rather, "**Where does this belief come from that causes me to trust that I shall possess it?**" By this time, Abram had trusted the LORD in many small things; now he could finally trust the LORD in a big thing.

Abram's Offering

Genesis 15:9 **So He said to him, " Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon."**

10 **Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds.**

The LORD showed Abram the source of the belief by putting Abram in a position to trust Him again. We, too, must be ready for the LORD to teach us where our belief in Him comes from when He puts us in positions where we must trust Him again and again. The LORD's request did not seem like a challenge to prove Abram's trust initially, but it will. At first, an offering was like a simple grocery list from the LORD, it was an item to check off at the appropriate time. Abram was already accustomed to making an offering to the LORD; it was easy to comply with the LORD's request.

Abram's Struggle

Genesis 15:11 **And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.** **12** **Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.**

With the offering in place, the trouble soon began, vultures! When we think we are in the good graces of the LORD, when we have done everything right, when we have followed the letter of God's law, the vultures will show up to feed on our gift to the LORD. What took the LORD so long to respond to Abram's offering? This offering was different from his regular offerings to the LORD. Usually, Abram presented his offerings on a fire and the flame kept the vultures away. That was not the case with this offering. The LORD did not instruct Abram to build a fire; his

responsibly was to bring the offerings to the LORD; the LORD would do with them as He wished.

Abram could not leave the offerings unattended until the LORD showed up; for the rest of the day he guarded and protected the dead animals from the vultures that would drag them away and consume what rightfully belonged to the LORD. As night arrived, Abram was still guarding the offering. Tired, Abram was alone in the darkness, sleepy and terrified; he had no one to help him except the LORD. In that time, the LORD saw the heart of Abram and knew he trusted Him even in the dark of the night.

Abram's Heirs – 400 Years

Genesis 15:13 *And God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. ¹⁴ "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions.*

In the dark of the night, Abram heard the words of the LORD. At face value, they were not totally positive although the words were prophetic. **"Know for certain,"** in other words, **"be assured Abram that you will have descendants, however, your descendants will be slaves in another country for 400 years only to see the LORD judge the nation and send your descendants out of that country exceedingly wealthy."**

We have the opportunity to look through the pages of the Bible to see the fulfillment of this passage in the book of Exodus. However, we must not think that the LORD was not correct in this prophecy. The record in the Bible shows that Abram's heirs were in Egypt 430 years. Why the difference? The first 30 years Abram's descendants were guests of Pharaoh in Egypt and under Joseph's protection. Only after the death of Joseph did a Pharaoh arise who did not know Joseph and began to enslave Abram's descendants.

Abram's Life

Genesis 15:15 *"And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.*

In this prophecy, the Lord interjected a personal promise to Abram that as his Protector, He would allow Abram to live a long life and die in peace.

Abram's Heirs – Fourth Generation

Genesis 15:16 "Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."

Returning to the promise of enslavement in the foreign land, which we know to be Egypt, the LORD indicated to Abram that during the fourth generation his heirs would leave Egypt.

Can we verify that four generations lived in slavery before being free? Absolutely. The priestly line of Levi, Jacob's son, is the foremost example with a factual record in the Bible. Jacob, born in Canaan, was the father of Levi, born in Mesopotamia, who was the father of Kohath, born in Canaan, who was the father of Amram, born in Egypt, who was the father of Aaron, born in Egypt, who was the father of Eleazar, born in Egypt, the father of Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel, all born in Egypt.

Example of Four Generations of Abram Born in Egypt and Wilderness Before returning to the Promised Land

First	Second	Third	Fourth
Amram	Aaron	Eleazar	Amram
			Izhar
			Hebron
			Uzziel

Why did the LORD say, "for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." What sin did the Amorites need to commit before the descendants of Abram would return to the land after the 400 years in slavery? Lest we forget, Abram's dear friend, Mamre was an Amorite. Was Mamre guilty of this sin? No. The Amorites who were alive at the time of the returning committed sins against Moses and his people as they tried to take the Promised Land.

Abram's Offering Received

Genesis 15:17 And it came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.

It was time for Abram to see the miracle of the LORD's acceptance of Abram's offering. The LORD provided the fire for the burnt offering and released Abram from his duty to guard the sacrifices.

The "flaming torch which passed between these pieces" was extremely important in this passage. The next verse will help explain why.

Abram's Received Covenant of Land

Genesis 15:18 **On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: ¹⁹ the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite ²⁰ and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim ²¹ and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."**

The Hebrew actually says *Jehovah carath berith*, which means the “LORD cut a covenant sacrifice.” From that day on, covenants were made in the same way. An animal’s body was divided and the party or parties making the covenant would pass between the separated pieces to seal the covenant. In this case, it was the LORD Who made the covenant with Abram. The flame of the LORD passed between the pieces of the divided animals and not Abram. It was the LORD’s covenant, not Abram’s.

The boundaries of the LORD’s land covenant to Abram were set within the first year of leaving Haran. Abram left Haran shortly after the death of his father in the 2068th year after the creation of Adam and made his way to Shechem, then Bethel/Ai, then to Egypt. His feet had walked from the Euphrates River to the Nile to establish the boundaries of the Promised Land that would develop from this covenant. The Euphrates begins in the mountains of Mesopotamia and ends in the Persian Gulf. The Nile River begins in the Great Lakes of the mountains of central Africa and ends in the Mediterranean Sea. Later in the Bible, these same boundaries comprise the totality of this covenant which will be controlled by Abram’s heir during the Millennial Kingdom of the LORD on earth. The descendants of Abram, through the tribal heirs of his grandson Jacob, will finally inhabit this land at that time when the LORD has returned to earth.



Map 21: The Nile to the Euphrates, boundaries of the Covenant of the LORD to Abram

The covenant ends with the LORD mentioning ten Canaanite tribal nations living in and around Abram. These tribal nations control only 10% of the land promised in the covenant from the LORD. Here the Canaanite tribes were ten; by the time the Israelites conquered the Promised Land after leaving Egypt, the ranks would have shrunk to seven. Nevertheless, Abram was well aware of these ten tribes at the time of this covenant.