

## The Book of Genesis

### Chapter 15

**15:1 After this the word of the LORD came to Abram** [called a prophet in 20:7] **in a vision. He said, 'Do not be afraid, Abram; I am your shield. Your reward will be very great.'** (REB)

#### Promise of God

God promised Abram that He would be his protector.

**15:2-3 Abram replied, 'Lord GOD, what can you give me, seeing that I am childless** [TAN: "I shall die childless"]? **The heir to my household is Eliezer of Damascus. You have given me no children, and so my heir must be a slave born in my house.'** (REB)

This is the first recorded time that Abram spoke to God, and involves questioning how God's promise would be fulfilled.

#### Heir Presumption

According to the custom in that time, a slave born in the household was considered a closer relative than a blood relative who was not born in the household. Since Abram mentions Eliezer, it is clear he had already chosen him as his heir over the other servants born in his house.

**15:4-6 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness. (NIV)**

#### Count the Stars

It was clearly night time when Abram went outside to view the stars. His discussion with God would continue after the night was over.

#### Belief and Righteousness

This is the definition of justification by faith, the pivotal text used by Paul in ROM 4.

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

#### God Initiated the Inheritance

Just as God brought Abram out before confirming his inheritance by a covenant, so God later brought Israel out of Egypt before confirming the covenant with them at Sinai (EXO 20:2) which guaranteed their inheritance of the promised land.

**15:8 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"** (NIV)

### Questioning God

The second recorded time that Abram speaks to God, he again questions God. Abram's words give evidence of doubt, but his actions demonstrate faith.

**15:9-10 So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." Abram brought all these to Him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. (NIV)**

### Covenantal Sacrifice

Before a covenant can be pronounced binding it must be sealed by blood. The animals were all killed, their blood shed and their carcasses cut in two.

**15:11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. (NIV)**

### Birds of Prey

This event reveals that Abram's conversation with God was continued during the daylight portion of the day which began at sunset the prior evening. Abram here symbolizes faith which will overcome all interferences and disruptions [symbolized by the birds of prey] to the fulfillment of the covenant.

**15:12-13 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own (and they will be enslaved and mistreated) four hundred years. (NIV)**

### Sunset

The day when Abram killed the animals for sacrifice was ending and a new day beginning.

### Prophecy of Israel

This verse says that after Abram died [1801 B.C. at 175 years of age], his descendants would not have their own land until 400 years had passed; and that at some point during those 400 years, they would be enslaved and mistreated. It was only after the division of the land by Joshua (1402-1401 B.C.) that Abram's descendants finally inherited their own land.

**15:14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. (NIV)**

In order for Moses to write these intimate details about Israel's departure from Egypt, it is reasonable to conclude that Abram probably recorded these prophecies and passed them on to his descendants.

**15:15 You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. (NIV)**

### Death of Abram

God now tells Abram that he will not live to see his descendants become great.

**15:16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." (NIV)**

### Fourth Generation

The "fourth generation" is a reference to the number of generations that lived away from Abram's location at that time, and which generation would return. Isaac and Jacob dwelt in that area, making **Levi** the **1st generation** to live most of his life [137 yrs] and die outside the area. His son **Kohath**, the **2nd generation**, lived most, if not all, of his life [133 yrs] and died in Egypt. Kohath's son **Amram**, the **3rd generation**, lived all of his life [137 yrs] and died in Egypt (EX 6:16-20). Amram's son **Moses**, the **4th generation**, died in the land promised to Gad and Reuben on the east side of the Jordan.

***15:17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.*** (NIV)

### Making a Covenant

God put His presence in the covenant with Abram as well as in the covenant made with Israel at Sinai: "*Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace...*" (EXO 19:18).

***15:18-19 On that day the LORD made*** [Hebrew: "kawrath" = "to cut"] ***a covenant*** [Hebrew: "berith" = "pieces"] ***with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites,*** (NIV)

"Kawrath" is used in the same context in 21:27 and EXO 24:8. "Made a covenant" literally means "cut pieces," referring to an agreement having separate parts, or pieces that each party is responsible to fulfill.

### Expansion of Territory

God now expands the territory both to the west and to the east.