

Genesis 15:7-21

(4/1/15)

Genesis 15:1-6 (NKJV)

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. *I am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward." ² But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" ⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." ⁵ Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶ And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Last week we got as far as verse 6—a verse we said is one of the most—if not the most important verse in the Bible.

And I don't say that lightly but only because Genesis 15:6 lays the foundation for the greatest doctrine of the Christian faith—justification by faith apart from works. (Refer to last week's study)

Genesis 15:7 (NKJV)

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."

It's interesting how God seems to introduce Himself again to Abram—as if God was a stranger to him.

Unfortunately, sometimes we treat God like we've never met Him when we go through various trials which causes Him to have to 'introduce Himself to us all over again'.

Where He says to us, “*Remember Me the Lord God Almighty? Haven’t I promised to take care of you and provide your needs ...*”

It’s reminiscent of when the disciples were told by Jesus to get into a boat and cross over the Sea of Galilee while Jesus went up on top of the mount to pray... (Finish)

Matthew 14:25-27 (NKJV)

²⁵ Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I [‘I AM’]; do not be afraid."

And so here in our text God reminds Abram of Who He is and that when He makes a promise He will fulfill it—guaranteed!

Something very important is about to take place in our passage tonight—let’s get a head of it by looking at something written in Hebrews 6 that comments on this passage in Genesis 15—

Hebrews 6:13-19 (NKJV)

¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, ¹⁴ saying, "*Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.*" ¹⁵ And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. ¹⁶ For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation *is* for them an end of all dispute. ¹⁷ Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, ¹⁸ that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*. ¹⁹ This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast...

Just how God’s promise to Abram has brought hope to us as Christians who are members of the New Covenant—

Hope that for us is sure and steadfast as an anchor of the soul—we’ll see in a moment.

Genesis 15:7 (NKJV)

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."

Part of the covenant God made with Abram (Abrahamic Covenant) was that God would give him *a people*—

Genesis 12:2 (NKJV)

² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.

Genesis 13:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, *then* your descendants also could be numbered.

Secondly that God would give Abram and his descendants *a land*—

Genesis 12:1 (NKJV)

¹ Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.

Genesis 12:7 (NKJV)

⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 13:14, 17 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are--northward, southward, eastward, and westward... ¹⁷ Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you."

So now in chapter 15 God is reaffirming His promise to Abram concerning the land—

Genesis 15:7-10 (NKJV)

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."⁸ And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"⁹ So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

God had already made a verbal promise to Abram to give him and his descendants the land of Canaan—but now He enters into an official, legal covenant or contract with him.

There are those that say Abram sinned against God by asking Him to enter into a formal covenant with him instead of just taking Him, the LORD, at His Word.

But notice that God doesn't rebuke Abram for this—why?

Because God wanted His promise to Abram reaffirmed or 'seconded' to add force to it—to make it absolutely sure—

Hebrews 6:13, 17-18 (NKJV)

¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham [verbal promise], because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself...¹⁷ Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath [official covenant],¹⁸ that by two immutable things, in which *it is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation...

And so here we see in Genesis 15 God entered into a formal covenant with Abram by cutting animals in two—which is how they did it back then.

The word 'covenant' comes from a Hebrew word that means "to cut"—which meant it was a covenant of blood or as we would say a 'blood covenant'.

The idea was that once the animal(s) were killed and cut in two—to ratify the covenant both parties would walk through those animal parts.

It was a serious commitment that brought with it a self-imposed curse should either of the covenanting parties break their pledge.

In essence they were saying, *“If I break my word, may I become like this severed animal!”*

The nearest scriptural parallel to this would come later from the time of Jeremiah, when the leaders of Jerusalem made a covenant with the Lord to free their slaves and then went back on their word.

This brought the wrath of God upon them as God sent the prophet Jeremiah to pronounce this judgment to them—

Jeremiah 34:18-20 (NKJV)

¹⁸ And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it-- ¹⁹ the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf-- ²⁰ I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. Their dead bodies shall be for meat for the birds of the heaven and the beasts of the earth.

Genesis 15:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ **And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.**

In Scripture vultures are often used to represent Satan and his demons.

I believe that the vultures that tried to devour the animals before the covenant could be ratified represent the attacks of the enemy against the covenant God made with Abram and the children of Israel to keep them from possessing the land He had promised to them.

We see these attacks going on even to the present day—that Israel is ‘occupying’ the Palestinian’s land.

And that the promises that God made to Abram and his descendants were made void when the Jews rejected Jesus and had Him crucified...and so on.

That Israel forfeited the promises God made with Abraham because they were unfaithful is impossible and we’ll see why in a moment.

Genesis 15:12 (NKJV)

¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram...

The Hebrew word for ‘sleep’ is the same one used for the sleep God put Adam into when He took from Adam’s side a ‘rib’ from which God made a partner for him (Eve).

So here the Lord causes Abram to fall into a deep sleep—

Genesis 15:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; **and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.** ¹³ **Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is not theirs*, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.**

The word “**afflict**” is the same Hebrew word used in Exodus to describe the oppression that the Israelites experienced in Egypt.

One author said,

“This was the historical outworking of Abram’s vision of birds of prey descending on the slain animals. And it is possible that the carrion birds directly referenced his descendants’ abuse at the hands of the Egyptians because the Egyptian falcon god Horus was a carrion-eating bird”.

Arthur W. Pink—

“A profound truth is here taught us in type. Abram now learns that the inheritance can be reached only through suffering! His heirs would have to pass through the furnace before they entered into that which God had prepared for them. In the “deep sleep” and the “horror of great darkness” Abram, as it were, entered in spirit into death, as that through which all his seed would have to pass ere they experienced God’s deliverance after the death of the Passover lamb...

How this reminds us again of Romans 8:17 and Acts 14:22—

Romans 8:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

Acts 14:22 (NKJV)

²² ..."We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Now there are those critics of Scripture that ‘pounce’ on Genesis 15:13 where God told Abram—

"Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is not theirs*, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years."

They point out that this number was repeated in Acts 7:6—

Acts 7:6 (NKJV)

⁶ But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years.

However they say that number is contradicted in Exodus 12:40-41—

Exodus 12:40-41 (NKJV)

⁴⁰ Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt *was* four hundred and thirty years. ⁴¹ And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years--on that very same day--it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

How can these figures be reconciled?

The 400 years mentioned in Genesis 15 and Acts 7 refer to the time of Israel's *affliction* in Egypt—the time after Joseph died and a new Pharaoh came to power and began to treat the Jewish people harshly.

The first 30 years that Jacob and his family were in Egypt, while Joseph was prime minister, they were treated like royalty—so there's no contradiction here.

Genesis 15:13-16 (NKJV)

¹³ Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is not theirs*, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. ¹⁴ And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is not yet complete*."

A generation in the Bible is roughly 40 years—but here, possibly due to the fact that people were still living well over a hundred years (Abraham lived to be 175), a generation seems to have been 100 years.

The most important piece of information in these verses is not the length of a generation—but the duration of God's patience towards sinners.

God is saying that He was withholding His judgment upon the Amorites (generic for the peoples living in Canaan) for 400 years until they had "filled up" their iniquity or in other words until they had "exhausted God's grace" so that He had no choice left but to judge them.

Romans 2:4 (NLT)

⁴ Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

According to W. F. Albright, the eminent archaeologist, the three principal goddesses of the Canaanite pantheon—Astarte (Ashtaroth), Anath, and Asherah—were primarily concerned with sex and war—but “sex was their primary function.”

Canaanite culture was an extremely sexually perverted culture where pretty much everything revolved around sex.

In fact in Leviticus 18:1–24 it lists twelve forms of sexual sins that were endemic to Canaan along with adultery, child sacrifice, sexual perversion, and bestiality, concluding with this warning: “*Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you.*” (v.24).

“God is patient and long-suffering not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”—but at one point His patience and grace come to an end and then His judgment will fall.

For the Amorites their cup would be full in 400 years—which was the time the Israeli invasion of Canaan started under Joshua—an act of justice not aggression.

The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it—those nations that refuse to obey Him, that flaunt their sin in the face of a holy God will eventually be judged and replaced.

I wonder how much time America has before our iniquity is full and God’s judgment falls?

Donald Grey Barnhouse said, “*If the iniquity of the world had been full a hundred years ago, none of us would have been born to be born again.*”

Praise God for his patience—the real lesson we can take from v.16!

Genesis 15:17-21 (NKJV)

¹⁷ And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. ¹⁸ On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates-- ¹⁹ the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

The **smoking oven** reminds us of the pillar of cloud representing the presence of God (Exodus 13:21–22), the smoke on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18), and the cloud of God’s Shekinah glory (1 Kings 8:10–12).

The **burning torch** reminds us of the pillar of fire representing the presence of God (Exodus 13:21–22), of the burning bush displaying the presence of God before Moses (Exodus 3:4), and of the fire from heaven that sometimes consumed sacrifices God was well pleased with (1 Kings 18:38, 1 Chronicles 21:26, 2 Chronicles 7:1).

So the smoking oven and burning torch represented the presence of God—His Shekinah Glory.

The important thing to understand is that v.18 tells us that God made a covenant with Abram—not that God and Abram made a covenant with each other.

This was a unilateral (one party), unconditional covenant that God made with Abram.

Only God passed through those animal parts while Abram was asleep.

Abram (and his descendants) didn’t have any terms to fulfill, they didn’t have any promises to keep—it was a promise that God basically made with Himself to give the land of Canaan to the Jewish people.

The covenant couldn't be voided or annulled because of unfaithfulness on the part of Abraham or his descendants because this wasn't a bilateral (two party) contract it was a unilateral and therefore an unconditional contract.

One author put it well when he said,

“This was an unconditional, unilateral covenant. God (with astounding condescension) was symbolizing that if He were to break his word, He would be sundered (cut in two) like the butchered animals. It was an acted-out curse, a divine self-imprecation guaranteeing that Abram's descendants would get the land or God would die. And God cannot die!”

Or as another author said,

“This covenant God signed alone; Abram did not haggle with God over the terms. God established and Abram accepted. Abram could not break a contract he has never signed!”

What about the question we brought up earlier from Hebrews 6 when it says that the covenant God made with Abram has brought hope to us who are Christians?

A hope for us in the New Covenant that is to us an *“anchor for the soul both sure and steadfast”*?

Well the New Covenant is connected with the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants—*“in what way?”*—

Galatians 3:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

So by our faith in Jesus we are now spiritual descendants of Abraham and heirs of the promise God gave to him and his children.

The ultimate ‘land’ God promised to all Abraham’s children (who believe in the promises of God)—is the land of heaven—the ultimate ‘Promised Land’.

Although during the Millennial Kingdom they will inherit and possess all the land that God promised them—roughly 300 thousand square miles.

The important thing for us as Christians to understand is that just as the covenant God made with Abram was unilateral and unconditional—so is the New Covenant He made with us through Jesus. (Explain)

If the New Covenant was a bilateral covenant dependent upon God to keep His part (give us eternal life) if we keep our part of the covenant (keep the law perfectly)—none of us would be saved.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Romans 4:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all

The point is that in the New Covenant we receive God’s promise of eternal life by believing in and receiving Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

If the promise of salvation was based on our keeping the law the promise would be worthless because it would be based on conditions that no one would be able to meet.

If God said, “*I promise to give you eternal life—if you jump across the Grand Canyon*” that promise would be worthless because no one could meet that condition.

The same would be true if God promised to give a person eternal life if they lived a sinless life—again that would be a worthless promise because no one could meet that condition.

But if God said (which He did) to you and me, *“I promise to give you eternal life—if you believe in My Son, based on what He did and not on what you do.”*—then the promise is attainable by everyone because everyone can believe.

That’s why God could promise us eternal life the moment we put our faith in Jesus (1John 5:13)—because it’s based on what He did for us and not on what we do for Him (which is why Jesus said, *“It is finished”* from the cross right before He died).

If it was by our works He couldn’t have promised us eternal life (uninterrupted life for all eternity) from the moment we put our faith in Jesus—

All He could have done was to say *“we’ll see if you live a good enough life to earn the eternal life I’m offering—and if you’re good enough and work hard enough when you die you’ll receive it”*.

You see the fact that God promised it to us instantly and forever the moment we put our faith in Jesus testifies to the fact it was by grace and not by our works.