

Chapter 15. What a gracious, sympathetic, merciful God Jehovah is. Not like the frightful, vengeful, demanding demonic gods of the heathen. He knew Abram's thoughts and his uneasiness and came to calm his fears and allay his doubts. FEAR NOT! Easy to say, but sometimes hard to take to heart, even if God says it. He says "fear not" over and over throughout scripture. And He has never let down anyone who dared trust His word. Abram trusted and relaxed. "I am thy shield." Any fears he had had about the invaders returning were relieved and he went on to the a question that apparently had been bothering him for some time. He had trusted God and God had preserved and protected him. He had believed God, but where was the promised son? He was casting about for a contingency plan. "Plan B!" He didn't really want the steward of his house to inherit the land and his wealth. Yet without a son he was the heir apparent. This Eliezar of Damascus (who, fifty+ years later, was to be the bride seeker for the son).

But graciously, the word of the LORD (Jehovah) came to him in a vision and reassured him. The trusted steward, though faithful and competent, would not be his heir. Abram would have a real flesh and blood son of his own. The son would grow and have progeny of his own. Jehovah then gave him a further revelation on top of those already given. His seed would be as the stars of the heavens. The word heavens in the Hebrew is in the dual tense, denoting the starry heavens seen though the atmospheric heavens above the earth. On a clear night away from city lights the sky is full of stars, a grand and magnificent sight. The previous promise had been that his seed would be as the dust of the earth. The same clay Adam's body and the animals had been made from. Dirt. Stars now, that is something else. A glorious heavenly multitude. Not just multitudes of earthy people but a glorious, heavenly multitude of light bearers. Not angels, but humans living on earth characterized as the light of the world, Matthew 5:14. Humans who later would have spiritually glorious bodies far beyond mere flesh and blood. Paul speaks of this as the prospect of these who die in the Lord or are raptured without dying.

1Corinthians 15:49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. 50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

2Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of [this] tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

And we are told Abram looked for a city whose architect and builder is God. He believed God's promises.

Hebrews 11:10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

We who have trusted Christ (Abram's Seed) as Saviour will be there too.

How much of this Abram grasped at first we don't know.

We do know we have been given much more information than he had. He acted upon the light given him. Have we?

(At first we might think the number of stars visible to Abram's eyes was relatively small, in the thousands, compared to the number of particles in the dust of the earth. But telescopes have now revealed truly huge numbers of stars and galaxies, billions of galaxies each holding billions of stars.)

Obviously Abram didn't doubt God's promise. He believed God, and, grace upon grace, God counted his believing for righteousness. This is a pivotal statement referred to repeatedly though out scripture as an example for all. By grace are ye saved through faith.

But if Abram truly believed God, why did he ask for confirmation? He didn't ask for confirmation of the promise he would have many generations of descendants. He asked for information about how they would inherit the land God had promised him. It was currently possessed and occupied by at least ten tribes descended from Canaan. Though they at least tolerated him and his large herds and flocks and respected his small armed force of trained servants and accepted him as a neighbor they weren't about to give up their homeland so he could have it. He would never be able to drive them out. Nor could he expect they would stand by and let his descendants live there unmolested long enough to become numerous and strong enough to drive them out. How indeed would he gain possession of their land?

(This is similar to Mary's question when told by the angel of her selection to be the woman through whom the promised Seed of the Woman would finally be born. She didn't question that it was to happen but inquired how.)

Though God could have just said "wait and see," He chose to show him the future. (Abram would need extraordinary faith to hold and value this promise after he learned God's plan and timetable.) So God chose to respond to Abram's fair question by "**cutting a covenant**" with him. The procedure was to ritually seal a promise on penalty of one's life. "Cutting an covenant" was enacted symbolically by the parties to a treaty or an agreement or other binding transaction by each passing between the divided (cut in two) carcasses of sacrificial animals. In this case Abram provided the animals specified by Jehovah and slaughtered them. He stood by waiting, driving off the birds that live off carrion. But he fell into a deep sleep as darkness descended at the end of the day. A terrible horror of a great darkness fell upon Abram. (This was a supernatural darkness, for the sun is said to have gone down after this.) God then gave him the first part of the revelation. Abram's descendants would not have a land of their own for another four hundred years. Meanwhile they would be foreigners in a land not theirs, (that is, not in Canaan). And they would be enslaved, working under hard masters, four hundred years. But God would judge the nation enslaving them and they would leave there with great substance and return to the land of Canaan as promised. (The rest of the Pentateuch and the book of

Joshua tell the story as it happened. All was fulfilled.)

Next Abram learned he would die without seeing his son or grandson actually take possession of the land that God had given him. He would die in peace, of a good old age, not at the hand of some Canaanite, or invading force. So then Abram learned perhaps more than he really wanted to hear. Sometimes we wish we knew the future in more detail. But God's promise "I will never leave you nor forsake you" is enough. We might not be able to bear the future if we knew it. The just shall live by faith.

After the sun had fully set and it was dark the covenant between God and Abram was sealed. A burning torch and a smoking fire pot passed between the divided carcasses. The pieces of the nine divided animals were laid touching one another so one passing between them would come away with the blood of the covenant on his clothes. Jehovah passed between them, but Abram never did. He didn't have to. This covenant was UNILATERAL. The sovereign God made some extraordinary promises to one man of his choice and then pledged Himself, on penalty of death, to carry out His promises. Abram had nothing to do to ratify it. The future and the outcome was all in God's hands. Abram only believed and trusted, then sought to live consistently with what he knew about God and what he had been promised by God. And he passed it on to his son. That is all we are asked to do.

God then named the specific tribes that would be destroyed by Abram's returning descendants some four hundred years future. Indeed they left Egypt exactly four hundred thirty years after this, Exodus 12:____. Abram might have wondered "Why the delay?" "Why not now?" He was given the answer before he could ask. "The iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full." A strange and profound reason for human minds to grasp, both then and now. God knew the future and was enduring the deepening sinfulness of the Canaanites giving them ample opportunity to repent and be spared. He knew they would not but yet He called them. The lives and faith of Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and Joseph were part of the testimony God gave in that land. Later the burial there of Jacob by the Egyptians spoke to them as well. We have a striking picture of a huge container labeled "INQUITIES," "Amorites." It gradually fills until it reaches the top. Then it is picked up and carried away and emptied. The Amorites would then no longer have any natural protection against invasion, judgement and destruction.

The Egyptians were also a nation existing on borrowed time, so to speak, because of their godless idolatry and refusal to honor God. Pharaoh had exalted himself as god and refused the idea that there was a Supreme God greater than he. He would not bow though God gave him ample time, testimony and incentive to repent. God's rejected appeals to these lost rebellious peoples delayed the return of

the Israelites to Abram's promised land for four hundred years.

On the other hand, Joseph and his brothers, and later their descendants in Egypt, had much to learn as well. And, as a people, the forced labor while slaves in Egypt was beneficial discipline strengthening them physically and emotionally for the strenuous migration back to the Promised Land. But only a few such as Moses' parents, and later Caleb and Joshua, seemed to have faith. The most seem to have left Egypt without faith and soon turned to idols, despite the might power of God they had witnessed in their release and exodus. All but two men perished in their forty year stint in the wilderness. All of these lessons had to be learned and hearts tested and exposed under God's faithful discipline before He could use them to displace the people dwelling in Canaan. Hence the over four hundred years "delay." We will remark again:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.
2Peter 3:9

If there seem to be undue delays in God's ways, accept them, endure them, and embrace His sovereign will. He waited for me and for you. And He is waiting for others. Soon the door will indeed be shut. Don't delay your repentance.

There would be more stumbles before Abram and Sarai were to see and hold the promised son in their arm, but they did. But first chapter 16 must be told.

Notes to chew on:

When speaking to the king of Sodom after meeting Melchisedec, Abram referred to God by the title, "Most High God." But in chapter 15 upon God's next appearance he addresses God as Jehovah God again.

What an extraordinary example of the sovereign masculinity of God we see in Him in these events.

Was the Cross of Christ envisioned or prophesied in any way by God unilaterally cutting a covenant in blood with Abram?

The steward, Eliezer, was a type of the Holy Spirit who later would be Abram's "bride seeker" for his son, as the Spirit is now delightedly content to honor and serve the Father and the Son. His present work is to guard, sustain us, the Bride He has called, and acquaint her with her Bridegroom on her way across the desert to meet Him

By Ronald Canner, June 9, 2010