
GENESIS 15:1 After these things the LORD's word came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Don't be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

God appears to Abram in a vision, and gives him great encouragement, Gen 15:1. Abram's request and complaint, Gen 15:2, Gen 15:3. God promises him a son, Gen 15:4; and an exceedingly numerous posterity, Gen 15:5. Abram credits the promise, and his faith is counted unto him for righteousness, Gen 15:6. Jehovah proclaims himself, and renews the promise of Canaan to his posterity, Gen 15:7. Abram requires a sign of its fulfillment, Gen 15:8. Jehovah directs him to offer a sacrifice of five different animals, Gen 15:9; which he accordingly does, Gen 15:10, Gen 15:11. God reveals to him the affliction of his posterity in Egypt, and the duration of that affliction, Gen 15:12, Gen 15:13. Promises to bring them back to the land of Canaan with great affluence, Gen 15:14-16. Renews the covenant with Abram, and mentions the possessions which should be given to his posterity, Gen 15:18-21.

Verse 1

The word of the Lord came unto Abram - This is the first place where God is represented as revealing himself by his word. Some learned men suppose that the דבר יהוה *debar Yehovah*, translated here word of the Lord, means the same with the λογος του Θεου of St. John, Joh 1:1, and, by the Chaldee paraphrases in the next clause, called מימרי *meimeri*, "my word," and in other places מימרא דיי *meimera daiya*, the word of Yeya, a contraction for Jehovah, which they appear always to consider as a person; and which they distinguish from פתגמא *pithgama*, which signifies merely a word spoken, or any part of speech. There have been various conjectures concerning the manner in which God revealed his will, not only to the patriarchs, but also to the prophets, evangelists, and apostles. It seems to have been done in different ways. 1. By a personal appearance of him who was afterwards incarnated for the salvation of mankind. 2. By an audible voice, sometimes accompanied with emblematical appearances. 3. By visions which took place either in the night in ordinary sleep, or when the persons were cast into a temporary trance by daylight, or when about their ordinary business, 4. By the ministry of angels appearing in human bodies, and performing certain miracles to accredit their mission. 5. By the powerful agency of the Spirit of God upon the mind, giving it a strong conception and supernatural persuasion of the truth of the things perceived by the understanding. We shall see all these exemplified in the course of the work. It was probably in the third sense that the revelation in the text was given; for it is said, God appeared to Abram in a vision, מחזה *machazeh*, from חזה *chazah*, to see, or according to others, to fix, fasten, settle; hence *chozeh*, a Seer, the person who sees Divine things, to whom alone they are revealed, on whose mind they are fastened, and in whose memory and judgment they are fixed and settled. Hence the vision which was mentally perceived, and, by the evidence to the soul of its Divine origin, fixed and settled in the mind.

Fear not - The late Dr. Dodd has a good thought on this passage; "I would read, says he, "the second verse in a parenthesis, thus: For Abram Had said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, etc. Abram had said this in the fear of his heart, upon which the Lord vouchsafed to him this prophetic view, and this strong renovation of the covenant. In this light all follows very properly. Abram had said so and so in Gen 15:2, upon which God appears and says, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. The patriarch then, Gen 15:3, freely opens the anxious

apprehension of his heart, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, etc., upon which God proceeds to assure him of posterity."

I am thy shield, etc. - Can it be supposed that Abram understood these words as promising him temporal advantages at all corresponding to the magnificence of these promises? If he did he was disappointed through the whole course of his life, for he never enjoyed such a state of worldly prosperity as could justify the strong language in the text. Shall we lose sight of Abram, and say that his posterity was intended, and Abram understood the promises as relating to them, and not to himself or immediately to his own family? Then the question recurs, Did the Israelites ever enjoy such a state of temporal affluence as seems to be intended by the above promise? To this every man acquainted with their history will, without hesitation, say, No. What then is intended? Just what the words state. God was Abram's portion, and he is the portion of every righteous soul; for to Abram, and the children of his faith, he gives not a portion in this life. Nothing, says Father Calmet, proves more invincibly the immortality of the soul, the truth of religion, and the eternity of another life, than to see that in this life the righteous seldom receive the reward of their virtue, and that in temporal things they are often less happy than the workers of iniquity.

I am, says the Almighty, thy shield - thy constant covering and protector, and thy exceeding great reward, מאד שכרך הרבה מאד sekarcha harbeh meod, "That superlatively multiplied reward of thine." It is not the Canaan I promise, but the salvation that is to come through the promised seed. Hence it was that Abram rejoiced to see his day. And hence the Chaldee Targum translates this place, My Word shall be thy strength, etc.

GENESIS 15:2 Abram said, "Lord the LORD, what will you give me, since I go childless, and he who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"

Verse 2

What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless - The anxiety of the Asiatics to have offspring is intense and universal. Among the Hindoos the want of children renders all other blessings of no esteem. See Ward.

And the steward of my house - Abram, understanding the promise as relating to that person who was to spring from his family, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed, expresses his surprise that there should be such a promise, and yet he is about to die childless! How then can the promise be fulfilled, when, far from a spiritual seed, he has not even a person in his family that has a natural right to his property, and that a stranger is likely to be his heir? This seems to be the general sense of the passage; but who this steward of his house, this Eliezer of Damascus, was, commentators are not agreed. The translation of the Septuagint is at least curious: Ὁδε υἱος Μασεκ της οικολενους μου, οὔτος Δαμασκος Ελιεζερ. The son of Masek my homeborn maid, this Eliezer of Damascus, is my heir; which intimates that they supposed מֶשֶׁק meshek, which we translate steward, to have been the name of a female slave, born in the family of Abram, of whom was born this Eliezer, who on account of the country either of his father or mother, was called a Damascene or one of Damascus. It is extremely probable that our Lord has this passage in view in his parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Luk 16:19. From the name Eliezer, by leaving out the first letter, Liezer is formed, which makes Lazarus in the New Testament, the person who, from an abject and distressed state, was raised to lie in the bosom of Abraham in paradise.

GENESIS 15:3 Abram said, "Behold, to me you have given no seed: and, behold, one born in my house is my heir."

GENESIS 15:4 Behold, the LORD's word came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir, but he who will come out of your own body will be your heir."

GENESIS 15:5 The LORD brought him outside, and said, "Look now toward the sky, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." He said to Abram, "So will your seed be."

Verse 5

Look now toward heaven - It appears that this whole transaction took place in the evening; see on Gen 13:14 (note). Abram had either two visions, that recorded in Gen 15:1, and that in Gen 15:12, etc.; or what is mentioned in the beginning of this chapter is a part of the occurrences which took place after the sacrifice mentioned Gen 15:9, etc.: but it is more likely that there was a vision of that kind already described, and afterwards a second, in which he received the revelation mentioned Gen 15:13-16. After the first vision he is brought forth abroad to see if he can number the stars; and as he finds this impossible, he is assured that as they are to him innumerable, so shall his posterity be; and that all should spring from one who should proceed from his own bowels - one who should be his own legitimate child.

GENESIS 15:6 He believed in the LORD; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness.

Verse 6

And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness - This I conceive to be one of the most important passages in the whole Old Testament. It properly contains and specifies that doctrine of justification by faith which engrosses so considerable a share of the epistles of St. Paul, and at the foundation of which is the atonement made by the Son of God: And he (Abram) believed האמן heemin, he put faith) in Jehovah, ויחשבה לו vaiyachshebeita lo, and he counted it - the faith he put in Jehovah, to Him for righteousness, צדקה tsedakah, or justification; though there was no act in the case but that of the mind and heart, no work of any kind. Hence the doctrine of justification by faith, without any merit of works; for in this case there could be none - no works of Abram which could merit the salvation of the whole human race. It was the promise of God which he credited, and in the blessedness of which he became a partaker through faith. See at Gen 15:19 (note); see also on Romans 4 (note).

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

Verse 7

Ur of the Chaldees - See on Genesis 40 (note).

GENESIS 15:8 He said, "Lord GOD, how will I know that I will inherit it?"

Verse 8

And he said, Lord God - יהוה אדני Adonai Yehovah, my Lord Jehovah. Adonai is the word which the Jews in reading always substitute for Jehovah, as they count it impious to pronounce this name. Adonai signifies my director, basis, supporter, prop, or stay; and scarcely a more appropriate name can be given to that God who is the framer and director of every righteous word and action; the basis or foundation on which every rational hope rests; the supporter of the souls and bodies of men, as well as of the universe in general; the prop and stay of the weak and fainting, and the buttress that shores up the building, which otherwise must necessarily fall. This word often occurs in the Hebrew Bible, and is rendered in our translation Lord; the same term by which the word Jehovah is expressed: but to distinguish between the two, and to show the reader when the original is יהוה Yehovah, and when אדני Adonai, the first is always put in capitals, Lord, the latter in plain Roman characters, Lord. For the word Jehovah see on Gen 2:4 (note), and on Exo 34:6 (note).

Whereby shall I know - By what sign shall I be assured, that I shall inherit this land? It appears that he expected some sign, and that on such occasions one was ordinarily given.

GENESIS 15:9 He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."

Verse 9

Take me a heifer - עגלה eglah, a she-calf; a she-goat, עז ez, a goat, male or female, but distinguished here by the feminine adjective; משלשת meshulsheth, a three-yearling; a ram, איל ayil; a turtle-dove, תר tor, from which come turtur and turtle; young pigeon, גוזל gozal, a word signifying the young of pigeons and eagles. See Deu 32:11. It is worthy of remark, that every animal allowed or commanded to be sacrificed under the Mosaic law is to be found in this list. And is it not a proof that God was now giving to Abram an epitome of that law and its sacrifices which he intended more fully to reveal to Moses; the essence of which consisted in its sacrifices, which typified the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world?

On the several animals which God ordered Abram to take, Jarchi remarks: "The idolatrous nations are compared in the Scriptures to bulls, rams, and goats; for it is written, Psa 22:12 : Many bulls have compassed me about. Dan 8:20 : The ram which thou hast seen is the king of Persia. The rough goat is the king of Greece. Dan 8:21. But the Israelites are compared to doves, etc.; Sol 2:14 : "O my dove, that art in the cleft of the rock. The division of the above carcasses denotes the division and extermination of the idolatrous nations; but the birds not being divided, shows that the Israelites are to abide for ever." See Jarchi on the place.

GENESIS 15:10 He brought him all of these, and divided them in the middle, and laid each half opposite the other; but he didn't divide the birds.

Verse 10

Divided them in the midst - The ancient method of making covenants as well as the original word, have been already alluded to, and in a general way explained. See Gen 6:18. The word covenant from con, together, and venio, I come, signifies an agreement, association, or meeting between two or more parties; for it is impossible that a covenant can be made between an individual and himself, whether God or man. This is a theological absurdity into which many have run; there must be at least two parties to contract with each other. And often there was a third party to mediate the agreement, and to witness it when made. Rabbi Solomon Jarchi says, "It was a custom with those who entered into covenant with each other to take a heifer and cut it in two, and then the contracting parties passed between the pieces." See this and the scriptures to which it refers particularly explained, Gen 6:18. A covenant always supposed one of these four things:

1. That the contracting parties had been hitherto unknown to each other, and were brought by the covenant into a state of acquaintance.
2. That they had been previously in a state of hostility or enmity, and were brought by the covenant into a state of pacification and friendship.
3. Or that, being known to each other, they now agree to unite their counsels, strength, property, etc., for the accomplishment of a particular purpose, mutually subservient to the interests of both.
Or,
4. It implies an agreement to succor and defend a third party in cases of oppression and distress.

For whatever purpose a covenant was made, it was ever ratified by a sacrifice offered to God; and the passing between the divided parts of the victim appears to have signified that each agreed, if they broke their engagements, to submit to the punishment of being cut asunder; which we find from Mat 24:51; Luk 12:46, was an ancient mode of punishment. This is farther confirmed by Herodotus, who says that Sabacus, king of Ethiopia, had a vision, in which he was ordered *μεσουσ διατεμειν*, to cut in two, all the Egyptian priests; lib. ii. We find also from the same author, lib. vii., that Xerxes ordered one of the sons of Pythius *μεσον διατεμειν*, to be cut in two, and one half to be placed on each side of the way, that his army might pass through between them. That this kind of punishment was used among the Persians we have proof from Dan 2:5; Dan 3:29. Story of Susanna, verses 55, 59. See farther, 2Sam 12:31, and 1Chr 20:3. These authorities may be sufficient to show that the passing between the parts of the divided victims signified the punishment to which those exposed themselves who broke their covenant engagements. And that covenant sacrifices were thus divided, even from the remotest antiquity, we learn from Homer, Il. A., v. 460. *Μηρους τ' εξαταμον κατα τε κ ν ι σ ο η εκαλυψαν, Διπτυχα ποιησαντες, επ' αυτων δ' ωμοθετησαν.* "They cut the quarters, and cover them with the fat; dividing them into two, they place the raw flesh upon them."

But this place may be differently understood.

St. Cyril, in his work against Julian, shows that passing between the divided parts of a victim was used also among the Chaldeans and other people. As the sacrifice was required to make an atonement to God, so the death of the animal was necessary to signify to the contracting parties the punishment to which they exposed themselves, should they prove unfaithful.

Livy preserves the form of the imprecation used on such occasions, in the account he gives of the league made between the Romans and Albans. When the Romans were about to enter into some

solemn league or covenant, they sacrificed a hog; and, on the above occasion, the priest, or pater patratus, before he slew the animal, stood, and thus invoked Jupiter:

Audi, Jupiter! Si prior defecerit publico consilio dolo malo, tum illo die, Diespiter, Populum Romanum sic ferito, ut ego hunc porcum hic hodie feriam; tantoque magis ferito, quanto magis potes pollesque! - Livii Hist., lib. i., chap. 24. "Hear, O Jupiter! Should the Romans in public counsel, through any evil device, first transgress these laws, in that same day, O Jupiter, thus smite the Roman people, as I shall at this time smite this hog; and smite them with a severity proportioned to the greatness of thy power and might!"

But the birds divided he not - According to the law, Lev 1:17, fowls were not to be divided asunder but only cloven for the purpose of taking out the intestines.

GENESIS 15:11 The birds of prey came down on the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

Verse 11

And when the fowls - העיט haayit, birds of prey, came down upon the carcasses to devour them, Abram, who stood by his sacrifice waiting for the manifestation of God, who had ordered him to prepare for the ratification of the covenant, drove them away, that they might neither pollute nor devour what had been thus consecrated to God.

GENESIS 15:12 When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. Now terror and great darkness fell on him.

Verse 12

A deep sleep - תרדמה tardemah, the same word which is used to express the sleep into which Adam was cast, previous to the formation of Eve; Gen 2:21.

A horror of great darkness - Which God designed to be expressive of the affliction and misery into which his posterity should be brought during the four hundred years of their bondage in Egypt; as the next verse particularly states.

GENESIS 15:13 He said to Abram, "Know for sure that your seed will live as foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them. They will afflict them four hundred years.

Verse 13

Four hundred years - "Which began," says Mr. Ainsworth, "when Ishmael, son of Hagar, mocked and persecuted Isaac, Gen 21:9; Gal 4:29; which fell out thirty years after the promise, Gen 12:3; which promise was four hundred and thirty years before the law, Gal 3:17; and four hundred and thirty years after that promise came Israel out of Egypt, Exo 12:41."

GENESIS 15:14 I will also judge that nation, whom they will serve. Afterward they will come out with great wealth,

Verse 14

And also that nation, etc. - How remarkably was this promise fulfilled, in the redemption of Israel from its bondage, in the plagues and destruction of the Egyptians, and in the immense wealth which the Israelites brought out of Egypt! Not a more circumstantial or literally fulfilled promise is to be found in the sacred writings.

GENESIS 15:15 but you will go to your fathers in peace. You will be buried in a good old age.

Verse 15

Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace - This verse strongly implies the immortality of the soul, and a state of separate existence. He was gathered to his fathers - introduced into the place where separate spirits are kept, waiting for the general resurrection. Two things seem to be distinctly marked here:

1. The soul of Abram should be introduced among the assembly of the first-born; Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace.
 2. His body should be buried after a long life, one hundred and seventy-five years, Gen 25:7. The body was buried; the soul went to the spiritual world, to dwell among the fathers - the patriarchs, who had lived and died in the Lord. See note on Gen 25:8.
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GENESIS 15:16 In the fourth generation they will come here again, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full."

Verse 16

In the fourth generation - In former times most people counted by generations, to each of which was assigned a term of years amounting to 20, 25, 30, 33, 100, 108, or 110; for the generation was of various lengths among various people, at different times. It is probable that the fourth generation here means the same as the four hundred years in the preceding verse. Some think it refers to the time when Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the son of Amram, the son of Kohath, came out of Egypt, and divided the land of Canaan to Israel, Jos 14:1. Others think the fourth generation of the Amorites is intended, because it is immediately added, The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full; but in the fourth generation they should be expelled, and the descendants of Abram established in their place. From these words we learn that there is a certain pitch of iniquity to which nations may arrive before they are destroyed, and beyond which Divine justice does not permit them to pass.

GENESIS 15:17 It came to pass that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold, a smoking furnace, and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

Verse 17

Smoking furnace and a burning lamp - Probably the smoking furnace might be designed as an emblem of the sore afflictions of the Israelites in Egypt; but the burning lamp was certainly the symbol of the Divine presence, which, passing between the pieces, ratified the covenant with Abram, as the following verse immediately states.

GENESIS 15:18 In that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates:

Verse 18

The Lord made a covenant - כרת ברית *carath berith* signifies to cut a covenant, or rather the covenant sacrifice; for as no covenant was made without one, and the creature was cut in two that the contracting parties might pass between the pieces, hence cutting the covenant signified making the covenant. The same form of speech obtained among the Romans; and because, in making their covenants they always slew an animal, either by cutting its throat, or knocking it down with a stone or axe, after which they divided the parts as we have already seen, hence among the *percutere faedus*, to smite a covenant, and *scindere faedus*, to cleave a covenant, were terms which signified simply to make or enter into a covenant.

From the river of Egypt - Not the Nile, but the river called Sichor, which was before or on the border of Egypt, near to the isthmus of Suez; see Jos 13:3; though some think that by this a branch of the Nile is meant. This promise was fully accomplished in the days of David and Solomon. See 2Sam 8:3, etc., and 2Chr 9:26.

GENESIS 15:19 the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,

Verse 19

The Kenites, etc. - Here are ten nations mentioned, though afterwards reckoned but seven; see Deu 7:1; Act 13:19. Probably some of them which existed in Abram's time had been blended with others before the time of Moses, so that seven only out of the ten then remained; see part of these noticed Genesis 10.

In this chapter there are three subjects which must be particularly interesting to the pious reader. 1. The condescension of God in revealing himself to mankind in a variety of ways, so as to render it absolutely evident that he had spoken, that he loved mankind, and that he had made every provision for their eternal welfare. So unequivocal were the discoveries which God made of himself, that on the minds of those to whom they were made not one doubt was left, relative either to the truth of the subject, or that it was God himself who made the discovery. The subject of the discovery

also was such as sufficiently attested its truth to all future generations, for it concerned matters yet in futurity, so distinctly marked, so positively promised, and so highly interesting, as to make them objects of attention, memory, and desire, till they did come; and of gratitude, because of the permanent blessedness they communicated through all generations after the facts had taken place.

2. The way of salvation by faith in the promised Savior, which now began to be explicitly declared. God gives the promise of salvation, and by means in which it was impossible, humanly speaking, that it should take place; teaching us, 1. That the whole work was spiritual, supernatural, and Divine; and, 2. That no human power could suffice to produce it. This Abram believed while he was yet uncircumcised, and this faith was accounted to him for righteousness or justification; God thereby teaching that he would pardon, accept, and receive into favor all who should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And this very case has ever since been the standard of justification by faith; and the experience of millions of men, built on this foundation, has sufficiently attested the truth and solidity of the ground on which it was built.

3. The foundation of the doctrine itself is laid in the covenant made between God and Abram in behalf of all the families of the earth, and this covenant is ratified by a sacrifice. By this covenant man is bound to God, and God graciously binds himself to man. As this covenant referred to the incarnation of Christ; and Abram, both as to himself and posterity, was to partake of the benefits of it by faith; hence faith, not works, is the only condition on which God, through Christ, forgives sins, and brings to the promised spiritual inheritance. This covenant still stands open; all the successive generations of men are parties on the one side, and Jesus is at once the sacrifice and Mediator of it. As therefore the covenant still stands open, and Jesus is still the Lamb slain before the throne, every human soul must ratify the covenant for himself; and no man does so but he who, conscious of his guilt, accepts the sacrifice which God has provided for him. Reader, hast thou done so! And with a heart unto righteousness dost thou continue to believe on the Son of God? How merciful is God, who has found out such a way of salvation by providing a Savior every way suitable to miserable, fallen, sinful man! One who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; and who, being higher than the heavens, raises up his faithful followers to the throne of his own eternal glory! Reader, give God the praise, and avail thyself of the sin-offering which lieth at the door.

GENESIS 15:20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,

GENESIS 15:21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”
