

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
8-28-19

Genesis 15

The LORD's Covenant With Abram - Verses 1-11

¹After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." ²But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." ⁴Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." ⁵He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. ⁷He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." ⁸But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" ⁹So 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." ¹⁰Abram 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. ¹¹Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

15:1 Why would Abram be afraid? Perhaps he feared revenge from the kings he had just defeated (14:15). God gave him two good reasons for courage: (1) He promised to protect Abram ("I am your shield"), and (2) he promised to be Abram's "very great reward." When you fear what lies ahead, remember that God will stay with you through difficult times and that he has promised you great blessings.

15:2-3 Eliezer was Abram's most trusted servant, acting as household administrator or family steward. According to custom, if Abram were to die without a son, this eldest servant would become his heir. Although Abram loved his servant, he wanted a son to carry on the family line.

15:5 Abram wasn't promised wealth or fame; he already had that. Instead, God promised descendants like the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the seashore (22:17), too numerous to count. To appreciate the vast number of stars scattered through the sky, you need to be, like Abram, away from any distractions. Or pick up a handful of sand and try to count the grains—it can't be done! Just when Abram was despairing of ever having an heir, God promised descendants too numerous to imagine. God's blessings are beyond our imaginations!

15:6 Although Abram had been demonstrating his faith through his actions, it was his belief in the Lord, not his actions, that made Abram right with God (Romans 4:1-5). We, too, can have a right relationship with God by trusting him. Our outward actions—church attendance, prayer, good deeds—will not by themselves make us right with God. A right relationship is based on faith—the heartfelt inner confidence that God is who he says he is and does what he says he will do. Right actions will follow naturally as by-products.

15:8 Abram was looking for confirmation and assurance that he was doing God's will. We also want assurance when we ask for guidance. But we can know for sure that what we are doing is right if we do what the Bible says. Abram didn't have the Bible—but we do.

The LORD's Covenant With Abram - Verses 12-21

12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. **13** Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. **14** But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. **15** You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. **16** In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." **17** When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. **18** On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— **19** the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, **20** Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, **21** Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

15:13-14 The book of Exodus tells the story of the enslavement and miraculous deliverance of Abram's descendants.

15:16 The Amorites were one of the nations living in Canaan, the land God promised Abram. God knew the people would grow more wicked and would someday need to be punished. Part of that punishment would involve taking away their land and giving it to Abram's descendants. God in his mercy was giving the Amorites plenty of time to repent, but he already knew they would not. At the right time, they would have to be punished. Everything God does is true to his character. He is merciful, knows all, and acts justly—and his timing is perfect.

15:17 Why did God send this strange vision to Abram? God's covenant with Abram was serious business. It represented an incredible promise from God and a huge responsibility for Abram. To confirm his promise, God gave Abram a sign—the smoking firepot and a blazing torch. The fire and smoke suggest God's holiness, his zeal for righteousness, and his judgment on all the nations. God took the initiative, gave the confirmation, and followed through on his promises. God's passing through the pieces was a visible assurance to Abram that the covenant God had made was real.