

# Genesis 15-16: Abraham Justified by Faith

## GENESIS 15:1-6: ABRAM PROMISED A SEED

Abram is now 85 years old and has no child. In this chapter God promises he will have a son and a multitude of descendants. So often in Scripture we read of events appearing to be exactly the opposite to what God promised. This is a real test of faith. Abram believed God could do the impossible and he was justified by faith.

**v1 After these things:** A direct link with the events of **Gen 14**. Abram has just refused the King of Sodom's rewards. He also displayed real humility after such a great victory. Abram made a clear choice between the King of Righteousness and the King of Sodom. **The Word of Yahweh:** The first occurrence of this key phrase in Scripture, expressing God's will towards man. Faith comes by hearing the Word of Yahweh: **Rom 10:17; 1 Pet 1:23-25**. Significantly this great chapter on faith begins in this way. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, the living expression of God's Word: **Jn 1:1;14; Rev 19:13**. **Fear not:** Angels commonly reassure believers when they speak God's word: **Dan 10:12; Mt 10:28; Lk 1:13,30**. **Thy shield:** Abram needed encouragement because he just refused the King of Sodom. His life may have been at risk. **Psa 47:7-9** refers to this event. See **Psa 3:3; 28:7; 33:20; 59:11; 84:9-11; 115:9-11; 119:114; 144:2; Prov 30:5**. **Exceeding great reward:** Belief that God rewards believers with immortality who diligently seek Him: **Heb 11:6,39-40**.

**v2 Seeing I go childless:** The first thing that comes to his mind!

**v3 No seed:** Repeated once again! His prayer has not been answered from the previous question, yet he continues to pray. Here is the depth of his longing for the fulfilment of God's purpose!

**v4 Out of thine own bowels:** cp. **2 Sam 7:12**. God's reply is simple!

**v5 So shall thy seed be:** An extraordinary statement in the circumstances: **Rom 4:18-21**. See **Psa 147:4; Dan 12:3; Phil 2:15-16**. **v6 He believed in the LORD:** He was fully persuaded: **Rom 4:21-22; Heb 11:1**. **Counted for righteousness:** Cited in **Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23**. The apostle Paul points out that these events are before *both* circumcision and the law, so justification is not dependent on either.

## GENESIS 15:7-16: ABRAM'S SEED PROMISED THE LAND

**v7 I am the LORD:** The Divine Name is prophetic of God's purpose: **Ex 3:15; Num 14:21**. **v8 Whereby shall I know:** Desire for a sign to confirm he will inherit the land. Not inconsistent with faith: **Gen 24:13-14; Jud 6:17,27; Isa 7:1-14; Lk 1:18**.

**v9 Animals and birds under the Mosaic law pointing forward to Messiah..** **Heifer:** **Num 19:1-10; Deut 21:3**. **She goat:** **Num 15:27**. **Ram:** **Ex 29:15**. **Turtle dove, pigeon:** **Lev 1:14; Lk 2:24**.

## GENESIS 15

**5** And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and <sup>a</sup>tell the <sup>b</sup>stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, <sup>c</sup>So shall thy seed be.

**6** And he <sup>d</sup>believed in the LORD; and he <sup>e</sup>counted it to him for righteousness.

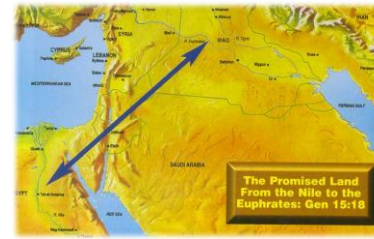
**7** And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of <sup>f</sup>Ur of the Chaldees, <sup>g</sup>to give thee this land to inherit it.

**8** And he said, Lord God, <sup>h</sup>whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?

**9** And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon.

**10** And he took unto him all these, and <sup>i</sup>divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but <sup>j</sup>the birds divided he not.

**18** In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, <sup>k</sup>Unto thy seed have I given this land, from <sup>l</sup>the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:



**v10 Divided in the midst:** The practice of cutting a sacrificial animal, emphasising that a covenant is binding until death and that if the covenant was broken, the party that reneges is worthy of death: **Jer 34:18-21**. Each person making the covenant would walk between the two halves of the animal. Christ is our covenant sacrifice, and our covenant with God is binding until death: **Heb 9:16-17**. Christ "confirmed the promises made unto the fathers": **Rom 15:8**.

**v12 Sun going down:** The end of Abram's "day". **A deep sleep fell upon Abram:** Figurative of death: **Gen 2:21; Dan 8:18; 10:9-11**.

**v13 Thy seed shall be a stranger:** These words were recorded by Stephen in **Acts 7:6-7**. **Serve and afflict them 400 years:** Moses gives a number of 430 years (215 of which were in Egypt), dating it from the entry of Abram into Caanan: **Ex 12:40**. The 400 years must therefore be dated from the events of Ishmael and Isaac in **Gen 21**.

**v14 That nation will I judge:** The plagues on Egypt. **Afterward shall they come out:** **Ex 12:36; Psa 105:36-38**.

## GENESIS 15:17-21: ABRAM PROMISED THE LAND

**v17 When the sun went down:** A similar phrase is used in relation to the overthrow of Judah following Christ's ministry: **Mic 3:6**. **Smoking furnace:** Heb. *fire-pot*. Translated *furnace* in **Isa 31:9**. This furnace is symbolic of purification through trial: **1 Pet 1:7; Heb 5:7-9; 12:3-8**. **Burning lamp:** Symbolic of the Spirit of God: **Rev 4:5**. An amazing theme through Scripture: **Jud 7:16,20; Isa 62:1**. Is used of the Cherubim in **Ezek 1:13** and the multitudinous Christ in **Dan 10:6**.

**Passed between those pieces:** Normally, the two people making a covenant would walk between the two parts of the covenant animal. However, God here takes the initiative to walk between the two pieces, therefore entering into a contractual relationship with Abram. This covenant is by grace, God being the initiator. The covenant with Abraham was confirmed in Christ: **Rom 15:8**. In **Gen 22:16** God swears by Himself, because there is none greater to swear by. God gives us an absolute guarantee: **Heb 6:11-20**. These promises are an "anchor to our soul", to our very innermost being: **Heb 6:19**. The certainty of God's promises is very personal and motivational.

**v18 Made a covenant with Abram:** Literally means *cut a covenant*. **Unto thy seed have I given this land:** Israel has never occupied the whole of this territory. The fulfilment of this promise is *future*. **The river of Egypt unto the Euphrates:** See the above map.

**v19-21** These nations symbolise the power of the flesh: **Ex 3:8,17; 13:5,11; 23:23**. The flesh must be subdued for the spiritual man to grow: **Rom 8:1-14; 13:14; Gal 5:16-24**. Israel were commanded to destroy the Canaanites, but their tolerance of them proved disastrous: **Num 14:43-45; Deut 20:15-17; Jud 1:28-29; 3:5-8**.

## GENESIS 16:1-6 ABRAM TAKES HAGAR AS A WIFE

Abram now tries to accomplish God's purpose by natural means. These events are described in **Gal 4:24** as an "allegory". Sarai represents the Abrahamic covenant, with faith required: **Gal 3:23**. See the final summary sheet on *Abraham in the New Testament*.

**v1 Sarai bare him no children:** A very difficult trial for them. All Abram's hopes rested on a promised seed: **Gen 15:2-4**. **Handmaid:** Represented the Mosaic covenant: **Rom 7:13**. **An Egyptian, Hagar:** Most likely from Egypt after events of **Gen 12**.

**v2 Yahweh hath restrained me from bearing:** Sarai is a faithful woman who recognised God working in her life. **Obtain children by her:** A natural fleshly response in desperation for a seemingly hopeless situation. God had not yet declared that the son would come from Sarai: **Gen 15:4**. **Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai:** A significant phrase: **Gen 3:17**. Eve had also taken over the leadership role, with devastating results.

**v3 After Abram dwelt 10 years:** A reason for such desperation. **Gave her to be his wife:** Agonising for Sarai. Her patience ran out. Waiting for God is difficult, and is a constant Scriptural theme: **Psa 25:3,5,21 27:14; 37:7,9; Lam 3:26; Rom 8:25; Jas 1:2-4**.

**v4 Her mistress was despised:** **Prov 30:21** "a *handmaid* when she driveth out her *mistress*" (Roth), identical 2 words in Hebrew. Barrenness among the Hebrews was considered a dishonour and reproach: **Gen 19:31; 30:1,23; Lev 20:20**. Hannah was similarly despised by Peninnah in **1 Sam 1:6**. **v5 Sarai said, My wrong be upon thee:** RSV "may the wrong done to me be on you". She blames Abram. **My maid into thy bosom:** An expression of the closest tenderness. **Yahweh judge between me and thee:** She now resorts to the strongest criticism she can think of. Unwise decisions can destroy trust, even in marriage. **v6 Thy maid is in thy hand:** He responds tactfully. He doesn't even call her Hagar. **Prov 15:1** "a soft answer turns away wrath". Also **Prov 19:11; Eccl 7:9; Eph 4:26**. **When Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled:** Hagar also fled in **Gen 21** and that event is cited in **Gal 4:21-31**.

## GENESIS 16:7-14 HAGAR FINDS HELP OF GOD

**v7 In the way to Shur:** On the way to Egypt: **1 Sam 15:7**. Hagar was going home. **v8 Sarai's maid:** The angel does not call her "Abram's wife" but makes it clear he knows her life, as Jesus did in **Jn 4:29**. **v9 Return to thy mistress:** LG Sargent says, "Facing the realities of life brings a deeper and more enduring gladness than the evasion of them." **v10 I will multiply thy seed:** This promise relates to Ishmael as father of the Arabs. They are now a multitude but some will find a place in God's kingdom: **Isa 60:6-7**.

**v11 Ishmael:** Means *Whom El hears*. **Yahweh hath heard thy affliction:** Hagar prays to God for her unborn child. **v12 Man's hand against him:** Characteristic of Arab nations. **Dwell in the presence of all his brethren:** In the Kingdom, Arabs will be removed east to Arabia, with Israel in the land of promise: **Isa 21:13-15; 49:19-21; 60:6-7**. **v16 Abram was 86 years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael:** Extraordinary patience and FAITH!

**Colour code:** Blue (God and Jesus Christ); Red (sin/devil/judgment of wicked); Green (Kingdom); Orange (important words & phrases); Purple (return of Jews to the land); Yellow (practical exhortation). Prepared for Study Week 2014 - Abraham, Searching for a City.

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