

Genesis

Creation, Covenants, All Grace – study 15



A CHAPTER of FIRSTS (15:1-6)

15:1-6 Our fondest hopes may be unrealized, but deepest disappointment and darkest moments find their answer here -- how? (Rom. 5:1,2)

(1) We have often read up to this point that "the Lord said"; in this new expression it would seem as if the "Word" and the "Lord" were separated, or that the "Word" came separately, as if a messenger or a person. This is all the more likely from what follows: the Word came in a vision; the Word spoke in its own name; the Word answered the doubts and fears of Abram. What this "word of the Lord" may be, we are not supposed to know up to this point. We must mark the expression very carefully, and, perhaps, as we pass through the pages, light may be shed upon it. Hitherto the *Lord* has come to men -- notably to Adam and to Noah; now his *word* has come, and come in a vision! -- **Joseph Parker**, *People's Bible: Genesis* p. 209

(2) What is transmitted from God to a mortal in such visions is not a visual image but a word from God. This is what distinguishes a vision from a dream. Accordingly, the emphasis in vv. 1-6 is that Abram had a vision of Yahweh in which the following action and dialogue took place. -- **V. Hamilton**, *Bk of Genesis* p. 418

JOSEPH PARKER
The first coming of 'the Word'
to men, one of several 'firsts'
in Genesis 15



(3) ... God declares, that he alone is sufficient for the perfection of a happy life to the faithful. For the word "reward" has the force of *inheritance*, or *felicity*. Were it deeply engraven on our minds, that in God alone we have the highest and complete perfection of all good things; we should easily fix bounds to those wicked desires by which we are miserably tormented. The meaning then of the passage is this, that we shall be truly happy when God is propitious to us; for he not only pours upon us the abundance of his kindness, but offers himself to us, that we may enjoy him. Now what is there more, which men can desire, when they really enjoy God? David knew the force of this promise, when he boasted that he had obtained a goodly lot, because the Lord was his inheritance, (Psalm xvi. 6). -- **John Calvin**, *The Book of Genesis* p. 400

15:2-6 Though he is beset by natural doubts, what prevents Abram's descent into unbelief? (Rom.5:3-5)

(4) Abraham's reply is pitiful. Despite all his outward success and the repeated promises from God, he lacks a son and heir. Childlessness was viewed as an unmitigated disaster in the ancient world. Without children there was no one to carry on your family line or preserve the family inheritance, no one to look after you in old age, no one to carry out the funerary rites and secure your soul's rest in the life to come. ... This prompts God to assure Abram that he will indeed have a child of his own, and that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars (vv. 4-5). "And he believed in the Lord." The verbal form implies continued repeated acts of faith. ... In the OT, faith involves both believing promises and obeying commands: it is the latter aspect that both Heb. 11:8-19 and James 2:18-24 emphasize in their comments on the life of Abraham; "By faith Abraham obeyed" (Heb. 11:8); "Faith was completed by works" (Jas. 2:22). That the two sides of faith -- belief and obedience -- are not incompatible is recognized by Hebrews, which repeatedly links faith with receiving the promises. -- **Gordon J. Wenham**, *Genesis 1-15* pp. 334-5

(5) This is one of the greatest verses in the Bible, one of its foundation stones, one of its seed plots, one of its fountain heads of fourteen words (A.V.), three occur for the first time in the Bible, and these pass into the warp and woof of theology. They are *believed*, *counted* and *righteousness*. This response of Abram is referred to three times in the New Testament, and in each instance one of the three words is prominent. In *Galatians*, it is *faith* (iii.6); in *Romans*, it is *counted* (iv. 3); and in *James*, it is *righteousness* (ii. 32). -- **W. Graham Scroggie**, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption* Vol. 1 p. 105

Genesis 15:6 – 'one of the greatest verses in the Bible' – and the first use of 3 of Scripture's most significant words

(6) Faith is the seed-germ of righteousness; and, when God sees us possessed of the seed, He counts us as also being in possession of the harvest which lies hidden in its heart. Faith is the tiny seed which contains all the rare perfumes and gorgeous hues of the Christian life, awaiting only the nurture and benediction of God. When a man believes, it is only a matter of education and

time to develop that which is already in embryo with him; and God, to whom the future is already present, accounts the man of faith as dowered with the fruits of righteousness, which are to the glory and praise of God. -- **F.B. Meyer**, *Abraham* p. 79

The QUEST for CERTAINTY (15:7-21)

15:7-8 Despite Yahweh's revelation, with which inheritance is Abraham still preoccupied?

(7) At the basis of the covenant was God's character and revelation to Abraham, and on this foundation everything else rested. The covenant was introduced by the solemn announcement of the Divine Name, 'I am Jehovah.' This was the bed-rock of all; God's unchanging and unchangeable presence and character. -- **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, *Genesis 1-25* p. 186

"I AM JEHOVAH"
How much is contained
in these 3 words??!!

15:9-11 What significance do we see in this sacrificial picture?

(8) When a covenant made by ritual was mutual, both parties passed between the severed pieces of that which was slain (Jer. xxxv. 18, ff.). But this Covenant was unconditional, and so, only 'a flaming torch', emblem of the Divine presence, 'passed between those pieces' (xv. 17). Had Abram been a contracting party the Covenant might never have been fulfilled; but God's purpose to send Christ, the promised Seed, was not dependent on the fidelity of man; the Covenant was established by God alone in blood and fire. -- **W. Graham Scroggie**, *op. cit.*, p. 104

15:12-16 How are Abraham's faith and patience further tested?

(9) The devil has no nice old people. Those who do not have the life of God within them grow meaner and more cantankerous as the years go by, and as they come nearer and nearer to eternal judgment. But "the trees of the Lord are watered abundantly" (Psalm 104:16, RSV), and the believer can grow old gracefully. ... Old age brings with it a thousand messengers that tell us that we are to leave our bodies. The wrinkles, the dimming eyesight, the creaking joints, the graying hair and all the rest of God's sweet messengers, call us from attachment to the flesh and help us turn our gaze upon the invisible and the eternal. -- **Donald G. Barnhouse**, *Genesis* pp. 117-18

(10) This commentary on the immorality of the indigenous population of Canaan also establishes Joshua's invasion as an act of justice rather than of aggression. -- **Victor Hamilton**, *op. cit.*, p. 436

(11) Since he had given that land to the Amorites, to be inhabited by them in perpetuity, he intimates, that he will not, without just cause, transfer the possession of it to others ... But the more graciously he waits for men, if, at length, instead of repenting they remain obstinate, the more severely does he avenge such great ingratitude. Therefore, Paul says, that they who indulge themselves in sin, while the goodness and clemency of God invite them to repentance, heap up for themselves a treasure of wrath, (Rom. ii. 4;) and thus they reap no advantage from delay, seeing that the severity of the punishment is doubled; just as it happened to the Amorites, whom, at length, the Lord commanded to be so entirely cut off, that not even infants were spared. Therefore, when we hear that God out of heaven is silently waiting until iniquities shall fill up their measure; let us know, that this is no time for torpor, but rather let every one of us stir himself up ... -- **John Calvin**, *op. cit.*, pp. 418-19

God's reprieve,
Calvin reminds us,
'is no time for torpor'

15:17-21 Yahweh does not give ALL the details of the future (v. 13); with what must Abraham be content? (2 Pet. 1:16-21)

(12) Remember that promise: made with the most solemn sanctions, never repealed since, and never perfectly fulfilled. For a few years during the reign of Solomon the dominions of Israel almost touched these limits, but only for a very brief period. The perfect fulfilment is yet in the future. Somehow the descendants of Abraham shall yet inherit their own land, secured to them by the covenant of God. ... A foreign power forbids their entrance yet; and Jerusalem is trodden down of the Gentiles. But we may be entering on a series of events, which shall shatter the decrepit empire of the unspeakable Turk, and release Egypt and Palestine from his blighting sway, so that the land which awaits the people, and the people which awaits the land, may be reunited beneath the blessing of Him who, by word and oath gave strong consolation to His much-tried servant Abraham. -- **F.B. Meyer**, *op. cit.*, p. 86

(13) ... for the first time in Scripture, **four striking phrases** occur; but each of them is destined to be frequently repeated ... first, we meet the phrase, "**the word of the Lord came**." Here, first, we are told that "**the Lord God is a shield**." For the first time ... that Divine assurance, "**Fear not!**" And now we first meet in human history that great, the mighty word, "**believed**." What higher glory is there for man than that he should reckon on the faithfulness of God? For this is the meaning of all true belief. -- **F.B. Meyer**, *op. cit.*, p. 72