

Genesis 15

A. God speaks to Abram's fears and doubts with a promise.

1. (1) The word of the LORD comes to Abram in a vision. After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram:

The word of the LORD came to the people of the Bible in many different ways. It might come by a personal appearance of God, by an audible voice, by visions or dreams, by the ministry of angels, by the working of the Spirit of God upon the mind, by the making alive of a passage of Scripture to the heart, or by the ministry of a prophet or preacher. Here, The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision.

I always think: What was the vision like? What is it like to have one of these visions. From what I can gather, it is different for each person. It was something that Abram could get his head around. God would communicate to us with something we can get how head around.

But let's not get carried away here, how does the word of the Lord come to you today? Let's be realistic, mostly through the Bible. Sure if God wants to he can still use a vision or a dream or a prophetic statement but the reality is God wants us to be in the bible looking for words from Him.

b. Do not be afraid... I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward: There was a good reason for God to say this. Abram had just defeated a much larger army made up of a partnership of four kings. He had reason to be afraid, expecting an attack of retribution.

c. Your shield... your reward: Abram needed a shield, because he expected to be attacked. He needed reward, because he had denied himself great reward offered from the king of Sodom (Genesis 14:21-24).

i. God told Abram that though he had sacrificed for His sake, he would not be the loser for it. God would more than make up what Abram gave unto the LORD.

ii. God knows how to become the answer to our need. When we need a **shield** or a **reward**, He becomes those things for us. "I do not think that any human mind can ever grasp the fullness of meaning of these four words, 'I am thy reward.' God himself the reward of his faithful people" (Spurgeon).

iii. "If God be our reward, let us take care that we do really enjoy him. Let us exult in him, and let us not be pining after any other joy." (Spurgeon)

d. **Do not be afraid:** God told Abram this because he *was* afraid, and afraid for good reasons. Yet God also gave him a *reason* to put away his fear. God doesn't tell us **do not be afraid** without giving us a reason to put away our fear.

2. (2-3) Abram honestly expresses his doubts.

But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

a. **Lord GOD, what will You give me:** Certainly, Abram appreciated the promise from God. At the same time, there was perhaps a sense in which it sounded empty to Abram. It was as if Abram said, "**What good is it that You are my shield and reward?**" The only thing I've ever wanted with any passion in my life is a son. Where are the descendants You promised me?"

i. It is as if Abram meant, "LORD, You have prospered me materially and now promise to give me more, and to protect me. But what good is it if I don't have a descendant to give it to? I want the son You promised to give me!"

ii. **Eliezer of Damascus** was Abram's chief assistant, his main servant and associate. He was a good man, but not a son to Abram.

b. **Look, you have given me no offspring:** Abram's bold honesty before the LORD is a wonderful example of prayer. Instead of holding in his frustration, he brought it before God with an honest heart.

c. **You have given me no offspring:** To some degree, this question doubted God. Yet we can discern the difference between a doubt that *denies* God's promise and a doubt that *desires* God's promise. Abram *wanted* to believe and looked to God to strengthen his faith.

3. (4-5) God speaks to Abram's doubts with a promise.

And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

a. **This one shall not be your heir:** Abram would not end his days with Eliezer as his only heir. God would indeed fulfill the promise made long before, originally recorded in Genesis 12:2 and 13:15-16. Abram needed to be reminded of the promises of God, and we also need the reminders.

b. **One who will come from your own body shall be your heir:** This promise was repeated to Abram with such clarity and certainty that it was reasonable to suppose that he expected it would be soon fulfilled. Yet in the chronology of Abram's life, the fulfillment of *this* promise was still 15 years away.

i. No wonder the writer to the Hebrews says: *And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:11-12)*. We need faith and patience to inherit God's promises.

c. **From your own body:** God explained exactly what He meant in His promise to Abram. He meant that it wasn't a

spiritual descendant who would inherit the promise (such as Eliezer), but an actual flesh-and-blood descendant. This was necessary, because we sometimes *misunderstand* God's promises.

d. **Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them:** God not only *told* Abram the promise again, but He *confirmed* it with an illustration. The stars in the sky showed how vast the number of Abram's descendants would be.

i. One of those descendants – the greatest of his descendants – would be the *Bright and Morning Star* (Revelation 22:16).

4. (6) Abram's response of faith to God's promise.

And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

a. **And he believed in the LORD:** When Abram put his trust in God, specifically in God's promise to him (descendants leading to the Messiah), God credited (**accounted**) this belief to Abram's account as righteousness.

i. There are essentially two types of righteousness: righteousness we *accomplish* by our own efforts, and righteousness *accounted* to us by the work of God when we believe.

ii. Since none of us can be good enough to accomplish perfect righteousness, we must have God's righteousness accounted to us by doing just what Abram did: **he believed in the LORD.**

iii. God's accounting is not pretending. God does not account to us a pretended righteousness, but a real one in Jesus Christ (Romans 4:1-3).

b. **And He accounted it to him for righteousness:** This is one of the clearest expressions in the Bible of the truth of salvation by grace, through faith. This is the first time *believe* is used in the Bible and the first time *righteousness* is used in the Bible. This is the New Testament gospel in the Hebrew Scriptures, later quoted four times in the New Testament.

i. *What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."*(Romans 4:1-3)

ii. *Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.* (Romans 4:9-10)

iii. *And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.* (Romans 4:19-24)

iv. *Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? – just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.* (Galatians 3:5-7)

c. **He accounted it to him for righteousness:** Romans 4:9-10 makes much of the fact this righteousness was accounted to Abram before he was circumcised (later happening in Genesis 17). No one could say Abram was made righteous *because* of his obedience or fulfillment of religious law or ritual. It was faith and faith alone that caused God to account Abram as righteous.

i. "When the article of justification has fallen, everything has fallen... This is the chief article from which all other doctrines have flowed... It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and

defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour." (Luther, cited in Boice)

d. **He believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness:** The faith that made Abram righteous wasn't so much believing *in* God (as we usually speak of believing in God), as it was *believing God*. Those who only believe *in* God (in the sense of believing He exists) are merely on the same level as demons (James 2:19).

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1. (7-8) Abram's doubts surface again.

Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

a. **Then He said to him:** We don't know if the events beginning with Genesis 15:7 followed close upon what happened in Genesis 15:1-6; the flow of the text seems to indicate they did.

How's your doubts? Do they all come at once, or are they in the back of your mind and kind of with you constantly?

b. **I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it:** This wasn't the first time this promise was given (see also Genesis 12:1-3, 12:7, and 13:15-17). Yet this was a dramatic and clear restatement of God's promise to give the land to Abram and his covenant descendants.

c. **Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it:** The power and clarity of the promise makes us somewhat surprised by Abram's response. Abram boldly asked God for *proof* of the *promise*.

i. Though God had just accounted Abram as righteous, Abram could still demonstrate some degree of doubt, as indicated by his question, "**How shall I know that I will inherit it?**" Abram experienced what many of those who are accounted righteous do. It was as if he said, "I believe when I

hear God say it, but five minutes later, I'm not sure – please prove it to me.”

ii. “What! Abraham, is not God’s promise sufficient for you? ...
“Faith is often marred by a measure of unbelief; or, if not quite unbelief, yet there is a desire to have some token, some sign, beyond the bare promise of God.” (Spurgeon)

iii. Abram had no title deed to the land, no certificate of ownership that another person would recognize. Abram had nothing to make anyone else believe he actually owned the land. All he had was the promise of God.