

Genesis Chapter 15 - Commentary By Mike Wells

Chapter 15 Overview:

Chapter 15 picks up right after Lot was rescued in Chapter 14. God again confirms His covenant to Abram. The chapter can be divided into the following: (1) God's encouragement to Abram in verse 1. (2) Abraham's justification by faith in verses 2-6. (3) The promises of the land to Abraham for an inheritance in verses 7-11. (4) The covenant confirmed in a vision in verses 12-16. (5) The covenant confirmed by a sign in verses 17-21.

Genesis 15 : 1 - *After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*

- The "*after these things*" refers to the events in chapter 14 where Lot is rescued.
- At that time, "*the Word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision.*"
- Exactly how God spoke to Abram is not noted other than in a vision.
- Many theologians believe that Jesus Christ manifested Himself in a Christophany (a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ).
- No matter how it happened, the Lord clearly spoke to Abram.
- As God often did He began His message with "*Fear not*"
- Then God said: - "*I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*"
- God promised Abram that He would be a protective shield to him.
- That promise also applies to God's people everywhere

Psalm 3 : 3 - *But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.*

Psalm 5 : 12 - *For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.*

Psalm 28 : 7 - *The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.*

- God not only promises to reward His people, but He Himself is our reward.
- He is our "*exceeding great reward.*"
- There is no better reward than the Lord Jesus Christ!!

Genesis 15 : 2 - *And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?*

- Years had now passed since God had made His original promise to Abram concerning making him a great nation in Genesis 12.
- Lot, Abram's nephew had departed
- Abram who was now in his eighties still had no children.

- As we all do sometimes, Abram became impatient and started thinking about trying to take matters into his own hands.
- Abram asked, *“Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus.”*
- Note that Abram addressed God as “Lord GOD.”
- The Hebrew words are *Adonai Jehovah*.
- This is the first place in the Bible where ‘*Adonai*’ is used in the bible.
- The word has the sense of “**Lord**” in the New Testament sense.
- Abram had no children and had no prospects of children, so he came up with the idea to make one of His servants his heir.
- Abram suggested to God that perhaps Eliezer, his chief servant be made heir.
- Eliezer could be Abram’s ‘**acquired son**.’
- He was born in Abram’s household after all.

Genesis 15 : 3 - *Abram said, Behold to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.*

- Eliezer had most likely been born to a servant of Abram and had thus grown up in Abram’s house.
- Abram, as we all do on occasion, suggested to God what he could see by sight, and not by faith.
- He had lost faith in having his own son, so he wanted to claim one of his servants as son.

Genesis 15 : 4 - *And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.*

- God’s answer was plain and simple.
- *“This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.”*
- God made clear to Abram His promise would be born of Abram.
- The word translated as **bowels** (*hem me-ah*) in this context refers to his reproductive organs.
- Abram’s seed was going to come from Abram’s loins.
- Imagine being in your 80’s and having God tell you, nope you are going to have your own son still.

Genesis 15 : 5 - *And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.*

- The text seems to imply that God spoke to Abram at night.
- The phrase *“and he brought him forth abroad”* has the sense of bringing Abram out of something, perhaps out of his tent.
- God said to him, *“Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.”*
- Implied is that this took place on a clear, moonless night.
- As Abram looked up into the starry sky, God’s promise must have been made clear.
- Imagine how pretty the skies most likely were before all of our pollution and smog

- God basically told Abram that his seed (his descendants) would be numberless.
- That promise finds its fulfillment in not only the coming nation of Israel even more so, those gentile peoples who through faith in Christ have become heir of the promise God made to Abraham.

Genesis 15 : 6 - *And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*

- The first mention of faith is herein found in the Bible.
- The phrase could literally be rendered, “**And he believed the Lord,**” or “**He trusted the Lord.**”
- The idea is that Abram simply took God at His word.
- That is the simple, yet profound definition of faith (taking God at His word)
- The word translated as **counted** (*bx khaw-shab*) among other things has the sense ‘**to impute**’ or ‘**to account.**’
- The Apostle Paul refers back to this very passage in establishing the New Testament principle of justification by faith in Romans 4.
- What is clear is that Abraham was justified by faith.
- He took God at His word, he trusted Him, he believed Him.
- Abram took God at face value and he relied upon His promise.
- That principle remains to this day and is the essence of not only saving faith, but also living by faith.

Genesis 15 : 7 - *And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.*

- God reminded him that He was the same God who “*brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.*”
- If there was any doubt in Abram’s mind, God made it clear that He was the same One who had called him.
- He had now justified him, and He would in due season glorify him.

Genesis 15 : 8 - *And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?*

- Abram asked God to present a further sign of confirmation for future posterity to believe.
- It may be that Abram only doubted himself.
- He may have wondered if it was actually God speaking to him or if he merely was experiencing a dream.
- Therefore, to make it clear, he asked God for verification.
- The following is what God instructed him for that verification.

Genesis 15 : 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 turtledove, and a young pigeon.*

- God instructed him to “*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.*”
- Some have speculated as to what the significance the various animals mean.
- There is a wide variety of speculation; however, the text does not given any specific significance.

Genesis 15 : 10 - *And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.*

- Abram split the animals each into two parts (all except the birds).
- The animals (the heifer, she goat and ram) were divided in two, and each half laid on the ground apart from the other half.
- This was the custom of the day in making a covenant.
- The idea was that in providing a passage between the divided animals both parties in the covenant would walk between them and around them usually in a figure 8 pattern.
- The agreement was that if either party should break the covenant, they would be cut in half as the animals were.

Genesis 15 : 11 - *And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*

- The record of fowls coming down upon the carcasses and Abram driving them away implies significance.
- Many theologians believe that the fowls of the air coming down symbolized the various nations which would descend like birds of prey upon future Israel.
- Yet, God would in due season drive them off.
- Or, it may rather simply be part of the narrative.
- When airborne scavengers swooped down for a meal, Abram drove them away.

Genesis 15 : 12 - *And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.*

- As night came, “*a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.*”
- Many theologians believe that a “*horror of great darkness*” coming upon Abram has significance.
- The bible does not note it.
- However, some believe that this may be indicative of the times of difficulty and darkness which would befall Abraham’s seed over the years.
- The word translated as **horror** (*hmya ay- maw*) has the sense of ‘**fear**’ or ‘**dread.**’
- Either way, as Abram fell into a sleep/trance type of vision, it was horror provoking in its darkness.

Genesis 15 : 13 - *And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years.*

- God gave Abram further insight to what coming in his promised posterity.
- They would “*be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years.*”
- God revealed to Abram a prophecy that his seed (i.e., the coming nation of Israel) would be in servitude for four-hundred years.
- This was clearly was illustrated in detail in Exodus.

Genesis 15 : 14 – *And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.*

- Again, God foretold in precise detail that He would judge Egypt and deliver His people from Egypt.

Genesis 15 : 15 - *And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.*

- God promised Abram that he would die in peace and be buried in “*good old age.*”
- Indeed, Abram so died at the ripe age of 175 years. See

Genesis 25:7 - *And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years*

Genesis 15 : 16 - *But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.*

- Note that all, Biblical generations are not all the same.
- In Abram’s day, men lived longer.
- Scripture records that there were four generations between Levi and Moses.
- At that time, they would come forth out of “**that nation**” (i.e., Egypt).
- One reason for the delay was that “*the iniquity of the Amorites*” was not yet full.
- God works in ways which we at times do not comprehend.
- There was a right and just time for Israel to dislodge the Amorites.
- The Amorites were a subdivision of the Canaanites and the most wicked.
- As their cup of iniquity became full, God would in full justice cast them out of the land and give it to Abraham’s seed.
- At times, we may not understand why God lingers in acting.
- But in His perfect will, He knows the right and just time to act.

Genesis 15 : 17 - *And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.*

- Recall, that Abram had asked God for verification of his promise in verses 5-7.
- God had instructed him to divide several animals and lay them out on the ground as noted in verses 9-11.
- The time is still that same night.
- God had made further revelation to Abram in verses 13-16.
- Now, we return to Him granting the sign for which Abram had asked.
- On that same night, “*behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.*”
- God in symbolic fashion passed between the divided animals laid out upon the ground.
- By doing this, He signified that He had thus confirmed the covenant to Abram as noted in verse 10.
- The “**smoking furnace**” or at least the likeness of such may have been a symbol of the great troubles Israel would undergo in Egypt.
- Deuteronomy 4:20 likens their affliction in Egypt to an iron furnace.

Deuteronomy 4 : 20 - *But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.*

- The phrase “**burning lamp**” could be rendered as ‘**a lamp of fire.**’
- It may have significance to the later pillar of fire, to the Shekinah glory, to God being a consuming fire, or perhaps to Him as light.
- The Scripture is not clear in its application.
- I believe some or all of the above were in mind.
- Either way, the passing of (or the likeness of) a furnace and a lamp of fire was God’s sign verifying to Abram His covenant and the promises contained therein.

Genesis 15 : 18 - *In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river Euphrates.*

- God specified in more detail the boundaries of the land he promised to Abram’s seed.
- Most believe that the river of Egypt probably is the Nile River
- The land would someday stretch all the way from Egypt to the Euphrates River.
- Only during the time of David and Solomon has Israel ever come close to realizing the full extent of the land God promised to Abraham.

II Samuel 8:3 - *David smote also Hadadezer, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his border at the river Euphrates.*

I Kings 4 : 21 - *And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life.*

- That greatness of course will reach its full extent someday when Jesus Christ sits upon His throne in the Millennium.

Genesis 15 : 19-21 – *19 The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, 20 And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, 21 And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.*

- Simply put the seed of Abram would someday occupy the lands presently occupied by the nations noted.
- All was promised to the seed of Abraham in the full extent of the kingdom.
- From other Scripture, we know that will take place during Millennium, though there was a temporary fulfillment thereof during the reigns of David and Solomon.