**Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15)**

**God’s Revelation**

**I *am* your shield, your great reward (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 background to Genesis 15:1 started in Gen 14 with Abram battling four kings and rescuing his nephew, Lot. After the battle Abram had an encounter with Melchizedek king of Salem who shared bread and wine with him. And Melchizedek blessed Abram and Abram paid tithes unto him from his own possessions.

God tells Abram that He is his shield probably to comfort Abram who may have been expecting a retribution from the battle with the four kings. God also says to Abram – I am your great reward.

**God Promises to Abram**

Now when God says to Abram - I am your **great reward**. Abram was thinking back to Gen 12.

Gen 12:1Now the Lord had said to Abram:

“Get out of your country,  
From your family  
And from your father’s house,  
**To a land that I will show you.**2I will make you a great nation;  
I will bless you  
And make your name great;  
**And you shall be a blessing.**3I will bless those who bless you,  
And I will curse him who curses you;  
**And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed**.”

7Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, **“To your descendants I will give this land.”**

**Abram credited as Righteous (Gen 15:2-5)**

God had just revealed to Abram that “I am your shield, and thy exceeding great reward” yet it seems that Abram was still in doubt about God delivering on His promises in Gen 12.

Gen 15:2 Abram responds to God by saying - Lord God, what reward will you give me since I am childless and have no heir (descendants).

Abram was thinking that his servant, Eliezer of Damascus will become his heir, since it was the practice at that time to adopt a servant to be your heir.

God responds to Abram and lays out his promises:

* stipulating that Eliezer of Damascus shall not be your heir,
* your heir will be your biological son (come out of his own belly).
* furthermore, God tells Abram that his **descendants (seed) will be like the stars in the sky.**

**Rom 4:1-3**

1 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

Abram was counted as righteous not because of any religious act but only that he had faith and he believed in God and His promises.

**God’s Covenant with Abram**

**Gen 15: 7-8**

7Then 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.” 8And he said, “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?”

Abram does not question God ability to provide him an heir but he questions God on the promise of inheriting the land. Abram asking for proof on the promise of the land? This seems like a reasonable request and God responds to it.

**The making of the Covenant**

Gen 15: 9-11 **Making the right sacrifices**

9So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” 10Then he brought all these to Him and **cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other**; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

* Contracts were made by the sacrificial cutting of animals, with the split carcasses of the animals lying on the ground. The covenant was made when parties to the agreement walked through the animal parts together, repeating the terms of the covenant. The LORD **made** a covenant in Genesis 15:18 is literally, “the LORD **cut** a covenant.”
* Jeremiah 34:18-20 makes reference to this same practice of a covenant made by cutting animals and repeating the oath of the covenant as one walks through the animal parts.
* When Abram had his doubts and wanted assurance from the LORD, God said to him clearly, “Let’s sign a contract and settle this once for all.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**God’s promises over Abram’s life (verse 12 – 16)**

12Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him. 13Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. 14And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete.”

Just a few verses previously Abram may have been very excited when God told him that his own son will be his heir and his descendants will be as many as the stars. When Abram asks God for proof on the possession of the promised land, he may not have expected it to be couple with so many negative outcomes.

* strangers in a land *that is* not theirs
* they will be slaves
* afflict them four hundred years
* I [God] will judge
* they shall come out with great possessions
* you shall be buried at a good old age
* in the fourth generation they [Israelites] shall return here

**The Covenant is made**

17And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. 18On the same day **the Lord made a covenant with Abram**, saying:

“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— 19the Kenites, the Kenezzites, the Kadmonites, 20the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

* **“A smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces**: In walking through the sacrificed animals in the covenant ceremony, God represented Himself by two emblems – a **smoking oven and a burning torch**.
* **smoking oven** - smoke or a cloud representing the presence of God
* **burning torch** - fire representing the presence of God”[[2]](#footnote-2)

The making of the covenant was completed when God in the form of a smoking oven and fire passed through the middle of the animal parts. It was not necessary for Abram to pass through because God did it on his behalf.

**Rushing God’s Promise (Gen 16)**

It was years after the promise and Sarah TOLD her husband that the Lord had restrained her from having children because she was barren and beyond the age of bearing children. So, she suggested to Abram that he take their Egyptian servant, Hagar and have a child with her.

Afterall, God had not specifically stated that Saria would be the woman that would bear Abram’s son. So, Abram believing Saria and acting on her suggestion was putting limitations of God and His promises.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Abram the faithful man did not inquire from the Lord or pray about this matter as Sarai’s suggestion seem sensible and unselfish - it was also a common pagan practice to bear children through a servant.

Soon after Hagar conceived for Abram, she became proud and arrogant to a point that she despised Sarai. Sarai in return became bitter towards Hagar by treating her badly and blaming Abram for her predicament.

After Hagar was mistreated, she fled but she was recued by an angel and God and told to submit and return to Sarai. God promised her many descendants because God is faithful to his promises that he made with Abram.

**Galatians 4:23 His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born because of the promise.**

**The Covenant of Circumcision** **(Gen 17: 9-14)**

**Gen 17: 9-14**

9And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; 11and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. 13He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

God introduced circumcision into the covenant for Abraham and his descendants, that the foreskins of every man had to be cut off. **This was to be a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham.** Now, Abraham was told to actively participate in the covenant with God.

**Covenant of Circumcision – a fleshly sacrifice to indicate a spiritual separation**

**Romans 2.29 (KJV)**

29but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

**Colossians 2: -11-12**

11In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

**Change of Name for Abram and Sarai**

The change of name for Abram and Sarai is directly associated with their change of destiny.

**Genesis 17:4-7**

4“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

Abram’s name was changed from “exalted father” to Abraham meaning “a father of a multitude” [[4]](#footnote-4)

**Genesis 17:16-17**

15Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name. 16And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be *a mother* *of* nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.”

Sarai was changed to Sarah meaning “princess”[[5]](#footnote-5)

**References**

Guzik, David. *Genesis 15 Commentary*. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-15/> (17 Jan 2019).

Getz, Gene. *Abraham: Holding Fast to the Will of God.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996.

1. David Guzik, *Genesis 15 Commentary*, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-15/> (17 Jan 2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Guzik, *Genesis 15 Commentary* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Guzik, *Genesis 15 Commentary* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gene Getz, *Abraham: Holding Fast to the Will of God,* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers), 1996, p 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Getz, *Abraham: Holding Fast to the Will of God*, p 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)