

Genesis 15-16

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God Promises Abram a Son—Genesis 15-16

1. The Occasion

a. “After these things”

(1) The connection between this chapter and the preceding chapter is indicated by this statement.

(2) The question here then is; After what things did this vision come to Abram?

(a) The most natural antecedent of *these things* is that which is recorded in chapter fourteen. However, the plural *these* could refer to more than one incident and include Lot’s departure from Abram.

(b) There are strong indications in the chapter itself as to what it is to which “these things” refer.

1) What in chapter 15 indicates that Moses has in mind Abram’s rescue of Lot. Did Abram have to fear a return battle with these four kings?

2) What does it mean that God is Abram’s reward? How can God be his *reward*? See also Psalm 16:5, 6; Rev. 21:3, 4.

b. Abram pleaded for Eliezer.

(1) What does Abram mean by the statement that the steward in his house is his heir?

(a) Did he think that God would give him all this land in Eliezer’s children?

(b) Is it possible that Abram had before this considered Lot as the one who would be his heir? Could this be part of the reason why he rescued Lot? See Gen. 11:31; 12:4 and 13:1.

(2) Is there anything at all in the promises that God had given Abram up till this time that would give him the assurance that he would have a son of his own flesh? Was there any reason why Abram could have doubted that God intended to do this? What factors especially did Abram take into consideration in his reasoning? Do we throw away all reason when we walk by faith? Is a walk of faith unreasonable?

2. The Method of Approach

a. God came to Abram in a vision

(1) What is a vision and how does it differ from a dream?

(2) Did this vision continue through all that is recorded in this chapter so that Abram killed these animals, drove away the birds all during the time of that vision? Was it a vision of hours and hours in length, or does it stop at the end of verse 9?

b. And this by revelation

(1) This was that which man could never know without revelation. He could receive a son without it but would not know the covenant promise in that son.

(2) To what degree and for what are we dependent today upon revelation to know the covenant promises? What is the difference between direct and indirect revelation, and which do we have today?

3. The Promise

a. God promises a child out of his own bowels

(1) Does this promise yet imply that it will also be Sarai's son? Must Abram from any point of view be forced to conclude that it would have to be Sarai's son as well?

(2) Can you suggest any reason why God did not reveal to Abram ALL the covenant promise at one time? Why did He not tell him in Haran that this would take place?

(3) What part of the covenant promise makes the birth of a son so necessary?

b. Abram's Reaction

(1) Abram believed God.

(a) Did this in any way require of Abram that he believe in a miracle?

(b) Does salvation require of us today that we believe in miracles? Is regeneration a miracle? When young men and young women confess their faith before the congregation, are we witnesses of a miracle? What miracles do we have to believe, if we are truly to be believing children of God? What two fundamental miracles for sure?

(2) What does it mean that it was counted to Abram for righteousness?

(a) What is righteousness?

(b) Does it mean that God counted Abram righteous because he believed? Or does it mean that God counted Abram's faith as a righteous deed? See also Galatians 3:1-6

(c) Was Abram's faith essentially a faith in Christ? How would you show this?

c. The Ratification of the Covenant Promise

(1) Abram's part

(a) We are not to shy away from saying that we have a part in God's covenant. What does the Baptism Form say is our *part* in the covenant? What according to this Baptism Form is God's part? What is in this form the relation between these two parts? Is there any significance, that is, in the fact that God's part is mentioned first?

(b) Abram was to take various animals, cut them in two – with the exception of the birds – and wait for God to come.

1) This was not a sacrifice even though there was a shedding of blood. There is no mention however of an altar.

2) This was an ancient ritual whereby a covenant was ratified or made valid, put into effect.

a) See Jeremiah 34:18ff. for another reference to this practice in which it is literally suggested that this belongs to the covenant.

b) Notice also the practice of passing between the parts of the animals in Jeremiah 34.

c) There is a difference of opinion as to the significance. Some maintain that both parties agree by walking between the parts that they and their animals may be destroyed if they break the covenant. Others insist that by going between the pieces the two parties signified a formation of the two parties into one: That which is divided is now one by the joint act of the two entering into the covenant. Two partners become one party.

(c) Abram finds opposition in the covenant sphere

1) The birds sought to devour and destroy the elements to be used in the signs of the ratification.

2) Thus, we will always find opposition in the covenant life.

a) Abram has a long *wait* – till the sun goes down; and the sun often goes down on our lives as well and things look dark as far as God's promises are concerned.

b) It is not simply men around us who oppose us when we live as covenant children and wait for God; there is that within us also that opposes and seeks to fill us with horror and fear that God's promises might not be fulfilled in us.

(2) God's part

(a) Note that we are speaking here of God's part in the ratification of the covenant and not of His part in the covenant. This we treated already above in 3, c, (1), (a).

(b) God ALONE goes between the divided pieces. He appears as a smoking furnace (a burning cloud of smoke) and as a burning lamp (the flame). See also Exodus 3:2; 13:20; 24:15-18; Leviticus 16:2; 1 Kings 8:10 and Revelation 14:14.

(c) The point is that God *establishes* the covenant without Abram's help.

1) Abram falls into a deep sleep and did not go between the pieces.

2) The covenant stands by God's work and not man's. Indeed, we have a part, but this part we do only because God fulfills His part. But we have NO part in the establishing, realizing or originating of that covenant.

3) See Hebrews 6:13-18 and note that no mention is made of Abram being required to swear for the confirmation of the covenant.

4) What all is implied in the statement of Genesis 17:7, when God says, "And I will establish MY covenant..."? (Capitalization is ours - J.A.H.)

(d) further details of that covenant promise

1) The number of his seed. Is this literal or a figure of speech?

2) Prediction of enslavement in Egypt which will not be because the covenant fails or God is faithless but to serve their going out "with great substance."

3) The borders of the promised land defined. How large an extent of land was this?

Abram Begets Ishmael

1. The Birth of Ishmael

a. Sarai takes the initiative

(1) Was there any element of faith at all behind this act of Sarai? Was it because she too believed the covenant promise and desires to see it fulfilled?

(2) Is this another case of Satan coming to man through the woman to realize covenant rebellion?

b. Abram yields

(1) Was this a case of adultery? Was there any way in which Abram might know that one wife was all a man might have? Do the ten commandments specifically forbid more than one wife? What texts would you quote to maintain our stand of one wife for one man? Does I Timothy 3:2 refer only to bishops? Does the passage itself speak as though Hagar is Abram's wife?

(2) Was it a case of unbelief? Was not a son in the very near future necessary since Abram was already 85 years old? Should his *waiting* for God to appear at the ratification of the covenant not also have been practiced here? Was it an act of relying upon God when Abram took his wife's maid for the "covenant's" sake? Is it ever necessary to sin in order to further the covenant of God?

c. Ishmael is born and named

(1) At the time of his birth Abram is 86 years old. But compare this with chapter 14. Was he a frail and weak man, physically "played out" or in good physical health yet?

(2) Abram calls his son Ishmael after the child is born.

(a) This name was given to Hagar by the angel; and she in turn told Abram that her son should so be named.

(b) This was an act of obedience on Abram's part; but was it an act of faith?

1) Did Abram receive Ishmael as the promised seed? Is there anything in the account to indicate whether he did?

2) Do you suppose that Hagar told Abram ALL that which transpired in the wilderness or simply the name? Would verse 10 give Abram the right to assume that this was the promised covenant seed? Compare it with 15:5 and decide whether this is *conclusive* evidence.

2. The Flight and Return of Hagar

a. Sarai is despised by Hagar

(1) The word *despised* that is here used (there are several others even in the Old Testament) means to be or to become light. Just what would you suggest then as to Hagar's attitude towards Sarai? The word is not derived from the word *contempt* (the root meaning of which is to tread upon or loathe). What does it mean that she considered Sarai "to be light"? Light in what sense?

(2) Sarai speaks to Abram about this behavior of Hagar. She says, "My wrong be upon thee...the Lord judge between me and thee."

(a) What is the idea here of the word *wrong*? Is it wrong in the ethical sense of "my sin" or physical sense of "my injury"?

(b) And in that connection, does she mean that she has sinned by the words *MY wrong* or that Abram wronged her?

(c) Was Abram's answer to Sarai correct? Did he disown Hagar as his wife? Does he show true covenant excitement, joy and interest in the news that a child is to be born in the covenant sphere? Or does he simply mean that Sarai may punish her own maid for her act of disrespect?

(d) Does the whole incident give any ground for the position that neither Abram, Sarai or Hagar expected or intended that Hagar would be Abram's wife and that she would ever, even in bringing forth a son for Abram, be more than a servant?

(3) Sarai deals hard with Hagar

(a) The word here is *afflicted*.

(b) In what way, do you suppose, would a jealous wife afflict her maid after an event such as the one that just transpired?

(c) Was Sarai in her rights by afflicting Hagar?

1) Remember that she is not dealing hard with her because she now realizes that Abram and Hagar have committed adultery. She is irritated by Hagar's act of despising.

2) Does a master ever have the right to afflict a proud and disobedient servant? Does the angel of the Lord, when he tells Hagar that he has heard her affliction (the same word as in verse 6), necessarily vindicate Hagar in her behavior? Could that refer simply to Sarai's treatment of her rather than her adulterous act with Abram? Was there maybe something wrong with this whole relationship that Abram and Sarai tried to maintain over against Hagar?

b. Hagar flees

(1) Was Hagar justified in fleeing? Would you quote I Peter 2:18 or Matthew 24:15-21?

(2) Is there any reason to believe that Abram encouraged her to flee? Why did Hagar not appeal to Abram for protection? Could she claim it?

(3) Can you give a reason why Hagar fled to the way to Shur? Where is this way to Shur?

(4) About how many days, so you suppose, was Hagar gone from Abram's house and away from Sarai?

(5) That she stopped at a fountain, does that suggest that she might have intended to try to live there?

c. The angel of the Lord appears to Hagar.

(1) Who is this angel of the Lord? See also Exodus 14:19; Isaiah 63:9; Daniel 3:25.

(2) May we conclude from the appearance of the angel of the Lord that Hagar was an elect believing child of God?

(3) What is implied in the words *submit* and *mistress*? Is this a rebuke to Hagar or instruction?

d. Hagar's response to the angel's words.

(1) Was there anything comforting in the message that the angel gave to Hagar?

(2) What strikes Hagar as being so wonderful and unexpected? What content do you give to the word *seest*? Is that the same as looking at her? Why should Hagar have doubted that God had *seen* her?

(3) What does the name of this well mean?

3. Ishmael's Character and Future Foretold

a. He will all be wild man. This is further explained by the statement that he will have constant war and strife with his fellow men.

(1) "Against" in the verse does not mean that he will lean against men for support, depend upon them. It means against in the sense of opposition.

(2) And note that he will not simply come up against the Church, against Isaac and his seed, but against *every* man. He will have a belligerent nature.

b. He will dwell in the presence of his brethren.

(1) Grammatically this could be either Isaac and his seed, or it could be the Egyptians. For his mother was an Egyptian.

(2) Genesis 25:17, 18 indicates that he did live to the east of the Egyptians. And the phrase "in the presence" does indeed mean "to the east of."

(3) But subsequent history also makes it very plain that he and his descendants always maintained an independent life. They lived boldly before the face of their brethren. See also again Genesis 25:17, 18.

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