

### The Lord Reminded Abram of the Covenant

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn from the example of the way that Abram was learning to walk by faith. He had grown up in a family of idol worshipers, so learning to walk by faith was a process that took many years with both failures and victories. The last topic showed ways he was learning to depend on the Lord and not be deceived by Satan. In this topic, we will see that God reminded Abram of the covenant that God had made with him.

Abram did not have any of the books of the Bible to read so God could speak to him through the Word of God. As a result, God either spoke to him in person or spoke to him through things like visions. In these verses, we see that God spoke to Abram through a vision. God wanted to help Abram continue to learn to walk by faith. So, after the events of chapter fourteen, God again spoke to Abram through a vision. Genesis 15:1 says, “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.’” He began that vision by telling Abram three things. First, God told Abram, “Do not be afraid.” The word translated “be afraid” is used three hundred and fourteen times in the Old Testament, and is most often translated *fear or be afraid*. The first use of this word happened after Adam sinned and God came to him in the garden. Genesis 3:10 says, “So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.’” Here, we see that fear was one of five results of the original sin. The five were: separation from God, fear, guilt, shame, and blame. Those are the things that have controlled mankind ever since. Here, God told Abram that he did not need to fear. God knows our hearts, so He knew that there was a reason why Abram had fear in his heart. We will see that the question of Abram gave him the opportunity to tell God his fear in the next verse.

Second, God told Abram, “...I am your shield...” The word translated “shield” means *a shield or buckler that is used to cover over or to protect from danger*. The noun form is only used to speak of the protection by God from danger. This word is translated “defense” when David said in Psalm 7:10, “My defense is of God, who saves the upright in heart.” As a result, we see that God was making it clear to Abram that he did not need to fear for his life because God was his protection. Third, God told Abram, I am “...your exceedingly great reward.” The word translated “reward” is most commonly translated *hire or wages*. However, God says that He is more than just giving Abram wages. Instead, God said that He Himself was the exceedingly great reward of Abram. No wages could ever even be compared to this fact.

That led Abram to ask God a question. Genesis 15:2-3 say, “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!’” God had already promised Abram, in Genesis 12:2, “‘I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.’” As a result, the question in the mind of Abram was, how can I be blessed by having a great nation come from me when I do not have even one child? In that time, the custom for those who had no children was to pass the inheritance to the oldest servant and his family. For Abram, this meant that if he died without a child, his inheritance would go to Eliezer since he was the oldest servant of Abram.

Then, to explain that question in detail, Abram went on to say, “Look, you have given me no offspring.” The word translated “offspring” is most commonly translated *seed* and speaks of wheat seed or some other

seed that is planted in the ground. However, in part of the verses, it speaks of children or future descendants. In Genesis 4:25, we read, “And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, ‘For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.’” In this verse, we see that Adam recognized the fact that God had given him Seth to replace Abel. In Genesis 3:15, we read, “‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.’” In this verse, we see God promised Adam that a future descendant would defeat Satan who had spoken through the snake. That Seed was Christ. Abram told God that he needed to have at least one child if God was going to make a great nation from him. Otherwise, his servant would receive his inheritance because he had no family.

God gave Abram both an answer and an illustration to his question. Genesis 15:4-6 says, “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.’ And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” God began the answer by saying that Abram’s servant would not be the one who became his heir. Instead, he would have a child that came from his own body. That would be the person who would be his heir.

Later, Abram did have several sons. God told Abram many years after the vision that Isaac would be the seed through which the blessing would be carried out. The first son was Ishmael. Sarah suggested that Abram have a son by Hagar, her servant. Genesis 16:4 says, “So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.” Then, Genesis 16:15-16 adds, “So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.”

Thirteen years later, the Lord appeared to Abram. In Genesis 17:5, God told Abram, “‘...No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations...’” God also told Abraham that a son would be born to Sarah. Genesis 17:17-18 says, “Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall a *child* be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a *child*?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’” God did promise that Ishmael would be blessed and be very fruitful. However, God went on to say, in Genesis 17:21-22, “‘But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.’ Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.”

After the death of Sarah, Genesis 25:1-2 says, “Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.” As a result, we see that Abraham actually had a total of eight sons. Ishmael was born to Hagar and Isaac was born to Sarah. Then, these six sons were born to Keturah. However, Isaac was the only son of those eight sons with whom the covenant was established. Later, the Lord appeared to Isaac and confirmed this promise to Isaac. God said to Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, in Genesis 25:23, “‘...Two nations *are* in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; *one* people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.’” Later, God told Isaac, in Genesis 26:4, “‘And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed’” Here, we see that the promise given to Abram, in Genesis 15, would be fulfilled through his son, Isaac.

God then gave Abram a visual sign to confirm this promise to him. The Lord took Abram outside and told him, “‘...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.’” Even with the telescopes that we have today, men can only guess at the number of stars that there are in the heavens. In contrast, God is able to call all of the stars by name. Psalm 147:4 says, “He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name.” As a result, God knows how many descendants Abram will have, but no one on earth knows that number.

That is why it is so important to understand what God did when Abram believed the promise of the Lord. God “accounted it to him for righteousness.” The word translated “accounted” in this verse means that *God put it to the account of Abram that he was righteous*. Romans 4:3 says, “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’” Romans 3:28 introduces the thought of this word by saying, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” The word is used forty-one times in the New Testament; eleven of those times are in Romans 4 where the entire chapter is speaking about Abraham to illustrate the fact that we are justified by faith. This word is also used of Abraham in Romans 9:8, Galatians 3:6, Hebrews 11:18, and James 2:23. As a result, sixteen of the forty-one times that this word is used in the New Testament point directly back to Genesis 15:6.

Romans 4:20-25 says, “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, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.” Here, we see that righteousness and justification are put to our account by God and not as the result of something we have done. Instead, justification was put to our account because of the righteousness of Christ. That is a very important lesson that we want to help our children clearly understand and be able to explain to others. Abraham illustrates this in both the Old and New Testaments. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.