

September 10, 2006 AM

**SIGNED, SEALED, BUT NOT YET DELIVERED  
GENESIS 15.1-21**

**1. GOD'S OATH CONCERNING THE SEED (1-6)**

**The promise following the battle (1):** "After these things" = immediate context of war in ch. 14

Language points to the prophetic office of Abram (cf. also 20.7) - "word of YHWH came to" and "vision" (cf. e.g., Isa 1.1; Ezek 7.26; Dan 2.19; Oba 1.1; Nah 1.1).

Vision = prophet being caught up into the divine council of God and participating with God in deliberations.

YHWH speaks, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield," [and a better understanding of the next phrase is] "and your reward will be exceedingly great" (although either translation is correct).

(1) Chedorlaomer will not take defeat lying down. God will protect Abram. (2) Abram did not take reward or spoil from the victory he had over the armies of the land. God will reward him. He did not give up the spoil in vain. He is operating on the basis of faith, which always requires patience, waiting on God to fulfill his promises.

**What's my reward? (2-3):** God has made promises in chs. 12 & 13. Abram is wondering where the fulfillment is, which is legitimate.

Abram, thinking in terms of God's earlier promises about being a blessing to the nations and then, more recent about his seed inheriting the land, knew that any other kind of reward that excluded children—a seed—would ultimately be useless to fulfill God's larger promises.

Eliezar stands as the "son of the house" and heir. The question is, "Is this the true seed?"

**The promise of hosts (4-5):** God assures Abram that he will have a seed from his own loins.

Viewing the heavens, the firmament (cf. 1.8, 17). Abram's seed will be as numerous as the stars (cf. 22.17; 26.4; also Deut 1.10).

Why uses the stars? The stars (along with the sun and moon) "rule" in the heavens over the earth (cf. 1.16). Joseph and his family understand this later (cf. 37.9). We now sit with Christ in the heavenly places, ruling with him (cf. Eph 2.6).

**Abram's Amen (6):** The text could be translated, "And he [Abram] *amened* YHWH..." "Amen" has to do with covenant oath.

Now don't think that I am saying that this is *not* faith. It is faith, but it is biblical faith. Biblical faith is commitment and loyalty to God, not mere head knowledge or assent. Abram is saying, "I have built and will continue to build my entire life around your word of promise to me. That word will shape and direct my life. I will not go my own way but I will patiently follow you."

The Hebrew construction here does not simply point to this as a "one time experience." As Kenneth Mathews points out, "The force of the construction conveys an ongoing faith repeated from the past." (2:166)

God accounted Abram's faith as *righteousness*. Righteousness has to do with conformity to a standard in the broadest sense. But here as well as many other places in the Bible it finds its primary reference in the covenant. God counts Abram's faith as *covenant faithfulness*, the proper response to his word. Abram is counted as being "righteous Abram" because he *amens* God.

To be "counted" righteous by God is for God to declare you "not guilty" before him to be sure, but it is also to be declared his friend, his covenant partner.

**2. GOD'S OATH CONCERNING THE LAND (7-21)**

**Deliverance and its purpose (7):** Note the parallel with Exod 20.2, "I am YHWH who brought you out ..." Abram's deliverance was from Ur of the Chaldees. God delivered him from a pagan land just like he would later deliver the children of Israel.

Purpose: "to give you this land to inherit it." Abram is delivered in order that he might be given the land. The covenant ceremony is about land.

Why is this so important? The curse on Adam was specifically with reference to land/ground; cf. Gen 3.17-19. What God is doing through Abram and his seed is dealing with the curse.

Abram has been fighting “the land.” He has faced famine and been driven from the land. Land not able to support both Abram and Lot. Abram has been at war in the land.

God will not allow his creation to be ultimately controlled by the curse. He will overcome the curse. This is salvation.

**Sacrifice as sign (8-10):** Abram understands how God works by giving witnesses or signs/seals. This sign is not due to the weakness of Abram’s faith but the strength of God’s promise. It is Word and Spirit; promise and sign; oath and seal.

Sacrifices: these are the five fundamental animals that will be used in the sacrificial system later.

The heifer (a cow that has not calved), the female goat, and the ram are all three years old. This possibly has a connection to the time of Abram’s sojourn in the land to this point. Cf. Gideon in Judg 6.1, 25.

Three is also the time for new life and/or resurrection. This is established on the third day of creation and is fulfilled when Jesus is raised from the dead on the third day. This could also be part of the reference as well in light of everything going on here.

These are all made-from-the-ground-animals. Cf. Gen 1.24; 2.19. Man is also made from the dust of the ground; 2.7. The animals sacrificed represent both man and ground.

The animals are split in half (except for the birds) and they are laid opposite of one another. They are all dead (obviously). It seems to me that this represents the death of both man and the ground. They are at odds with one another. They are dead to one another.

**The protection of the sacrifices (11):** This idea of carrion eating birds coming down to eat dead bodies is a covenant curse idea. Cf. Deut 28.26; Rev 19.21

Abram frightens the birds away indicating that neither his seed nor the land will be completely consumed by the curse.

**The promise of death and resurrection (12-16):** Creation and Passover language; “the sun going down” and Abram going into “a deep sleep.” With this death there is a movement back to the beginnings of creation when darkness covered the face of the deep.

Deep sleep: remember Adam; he goes to sleep and is “cut in half;” a new creation comes out of this tearing in half. God is making–lit. “cutting”–a covenant.

Deep sleep language is a technical term that indicates a type of death. God is putting Abram to death (and his seed) along with the land. But God’s tearing these things in half in death is for the purpose of making a new creation. The seed will be “cut off” from the land for 400 years.

**The sign of death and resurrection (17-21):** “Dark,” back to primordial creation.

A “smoking oven” and a “burning torch:” Both of these images are replicated at the top of Sinai (cf. e.g., Exod 20.18). This is God’s presence walking between the pieces. The light comes through the darkness to make the new creation. That is what God is doing here. When God rips things apart he is doing so to make a new creation, a new covenant. God passes through the pieces of the animals indicating that he will bring reconciliation between man and the land. He will bring peace where the sin of Adam brought enmity.

Once he does this new thing both man and land will be fruitful, something which connects the promise of the seed with the promise of the land.

“Stars,” heavens; “Land,” earth; God is making a new heavens and a new earth through the seed of Abram.

**Application: (1)** God’s original purpose for creation has not been set aside and will not be overcome. He will accomplish what he intended from the beginning. **(2)** The seal of God’s word—the tangible sign that God’s word is true—is not due to the weakness of our flesh but to the way God works to confirm his word. **(3)** God will not allow his people to be overcome by the curse. We will be raised from the dead. **Application: (4)** To be counted righteous before God, you must *amen* the promise of God in Christ.