

Major Event: CALL OF ABRAHAM

Lesson #2: Ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant

Scripture: Genesis 15

Central Text: Gen. 15: 4-6, 15:18

Suggested Subjects:

Justification by faith, God as a covenant making faithful God (as distinct from all other false gods and religions).

Suggested Attributes:

1. Of God: Veracity, Immutability
2. Of Man: Ability to correspond with God because of image (1:26,27).

Suggested Home Study:

Compare Genesis 15:7 to Exodus 20:2 (Same formula to remind Israel of Yahweh's covenant faithfulness). Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6

Notes: Abram "believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. While most evangelical scholars don't believe this is Abram's point of conversion, it is the first time the formula "believed in the LORD" is used (cf. Acts 16:31) and Paul used this event to demonstrate that righteousness comes by faith in Romans 4. In 15:18 the LORD makes (or literally "cuts") an oath of malediction while Abram sleeps. Two very important ramifications of this oath are: 1. The covenant is unilateral. Therefore it is sure to come to pass because it is based on the LORD's character. 2. Someone making an oath of malediction, where animals are severed in two and then passed through, was saying "may this happen to me if I fail to keep this covenant"- cf. Jer. 34:18.

God's Demonstration (Gn 15:8-12, 17)

Abram believed God's promises, but his faith was in dire need of encouragement. The God who takes note of even mustard seed faith graciously condescended to bind himself by means of an oath—to even place himself under a potential curse—to fulfill his promises. Abram knew full well the legal implications of the action he was required to perform.

Abram was told to bring three animals—a heifer, a goat, and a ram—as well as two birds—a dove and a pigeon. The animals were to be cut in two, and a path formed between the carcasses. **To walk that path was to pronounce a self-malediction as if to say, May this terrible fate befall me if I fail to keep the promise I have given (cf. Jer 34:18f.).** All day long Abram waited for what he knew would be the most dramatic manifestation of God's presence that he had yet experienced. He drove away the birds of prey whose presence would detract from the sacredness of that spot.

As the sun was setting Abram fell into a deep sleep (*tardemah*). Terror fell upon him, and deep darkness, symbolizing the ominous character of the revelation about to be presented. After the sun had set the blessed theophany took place. A smoking fire pot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the animal carcasses. A fire pot was a portable clay oven a couple of feet high. It resembled an inverted bowl with a hole in the upper side for draft. The explanation of this theophany is clearly stated in verse 18: "On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram."

God's Declaration (Gn 15:13-16, 18-21).

The divine declaration which accompanied the theophany explained to Abram when the land promise would be fulfilled. The land of Canaan would belong to his descendants after five conditions had been met: (1) his descendants would spend four hundred years in a strange land where they would become slaves; (2) the land which enslaved them would be judged; (3) his descendants would come out of that land with great substance; (4) Abram would die in peace at an old age; and (5) the sin of the Amorites would have reached its full measure. Thus in the fourth generation (counting a generation as a hundred years) Abram's descendants would return to Canaan.

Genesis 15 concludes with specific boundaries for the Promised Land. Abram's descendants would occupy the land which stretched between the river of Egypt (not the Nile, but the Wadi Alrish) to the river Euphrates. At that time that region was occupied by ten different peoples. Someday, according to the oath of God, that land would belong to Abram's descendants.