



bb-TBC-15

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☰ with Allan H	
☰ with Ron B	

Introduction

This is Study 15 and is Part 2 of the theme "a day in the life of Abraham". Last time we tried to set the scene for what I called 'one of the most mysterious chapters of the Bible'.

Abram's question is basically 'what is the point of more blessings if all this dies with me?' I have tried to answer this in some detail in a series of blogs under the title of Abraham, my Friend, so I will not repeat that exercise here, but it results in the moment when Abram was 'justified by faith' - a key Bible landmark. This total dependence upon God becomes the definition of 'the faith of Abraham, a pattern of the 'justifying faith' that has to be repeated in the life of each man or woman who would be 'right with God'.

Abram's first question is 'What is the point?' Abram's second question is "how shall I know?"

▼ Genesis 15:6-8 ASV

And he believed in Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness.

And he said unto him, I am Jehovah that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

And he said, **O Lord Jehovah, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?** (Genesis 15:6–8 ASV)

1. A witness to the making of a covenant

God's answer is to instruct Abram to prepare for the making of a covenant.

▼ Genesis 15:8–9 ASV

And he said, O Lord Jehovah, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?

And he said unto him, Take me a heifer three years old, and a she-goat three years old, and a ram three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon. (Genesis 15:8–9 ASV)

Abram knew what this meant. God was going to seal the promise with an oath and covenant. Abram knew what he was to do with those animals... he needed no further instructions.

▼ Genesis 15:10–11

And he took him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each half over against the other: but the birds divided he not.

And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. (Genesis 15:10–11 ASV)

There is a reference to this kind of 'covenant making' in the prophecy of Jeremiah

▼ Jeremiah 34:18–20 ASV

And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, that have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before me, **when they cut the calf in twain and passed between the parts thereof;** the princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, that passed between the parts of the calf; I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life; and **their dead bodies shall be for food unto the birds of the heavens, and to the beasts of the earth.** (Jeremiah 34:18–20 ASV)

This is God holding the people of Jerusalem accountable for a broken promise. They had entered into a solemn promise and oath and had used the ancient form of oath-taking. They would have created an avenue of death with sacrificed animals and the two covenant parties entered from opposite ends of the avenue in a ritual that really said 'let my fate be the fate of these animals if I break my promise'.

this is known as a self-imprecatory curse

an imprecation is to call down a curse upon someone

a self-imprecatory curse is to call down a curse upon yourself.

Did you ever take an oath when you were a child? *I did*, although I had no idea that of what I was doing. If you made a promise and wanted to emphasize the seriousness of your intention, you might say "I will do it, cross my heart and hope to die". That last bit 'cross my heart and hope to die' was a 'self-imprecatory oath'. I was a naive child calling down a curse upon myself if I broke my word.

Abraham would have understood the seriousness of this solemn moment. It seemed that God was going to make a covenant with him in the tradition of the time. But Abram never did walk down that avenue of death... he waited through the heat of the day when the vultures swept in to eat the carcasses of the covenant sacrifice victims. He drove them off and waited... and waited

2. The deep sleep

...and a deep sleep fell upon Abram.

▼ Genesis 15:12 ASV

¶ And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him. (Genesis 15:12 ASV)

This was not the deep sleep of exhaustion but a trance-like sleep. Sometimes the Bible uses the repetition of words or ideas to create emotional links with other passages of scripture.

This word for a 'deep sleep' is used in a particular way in scripture. Here is the first instance...

▼ Genesis 2:21 ASV

And Jehovah God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof: (Genesis 2:21 ASV)

▼ it is usually a God-induced sleep.

Gen 2:21; 15:12; 1 Sam 26:12; Job 4:13; 33:15; Prov 19:15; Isa 29:10

and while in his God-induced trance-sleep he heard the voice of God

▼ Genesis 15:12–16 ASV

¶ And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him.

And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;

and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

But thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.

And in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full. (Genesis 15:12–16 ASV)

Remember, all that happens here is a follow-up to Abram's question about his descendants and how God will guarantee the promise.

His descendants will suffer horror and great darkness, they, his 'seed'. will suffer alienation, bondage and affliction but there will be an 'exodus' in which they will be brought back to the very spot where Abram is sleeping.

the seed here is the physical progeny of Abram but something more is happening here too.

And it happened, just as God had said. The prophet Hosea refers to the event.

▼ Hosea 11:1 ASV

¶ When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. (Hosea 11:1 ASV)

but Matthew quoted that verse almost 750 years later...

¶ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."

▼ Matthew 2:13–15 NKJV

¶ When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the

prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”
(Matthew 2:13–15 NKJV)

and almost 2000 years later Christ was heard having a conversation with Moses and Elijah about 'his exodus' that he would 'accomplish' at Jerusalem.

▼ Luke 9:31 ESV

who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure(2), which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:31 ESV)

Greek: exodus

which 'seed' is in view here and which 'exodus'. Both... Israel and Christ

▼ Genesis 15:17 ASV

And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold, a smoking furnace, and a flaming torch that passed between these pieces. (Genesis 15:17 ASV)

Then... two parties do enter the avenue of death and 'cut a covenant' together, but Abram is not one of them. He is in deep sleep. Only in his 'deep sleep' does he 'witness' this mysterious event. So who are the two parties to this covenant?

A smoking furnace and a flaming torch

The Bible adds no comment so I will do so with great caution. One of the aspects of God's unchangeable character revealed in Scripture is that he is a 'consuming fire'. A fire that is not a mere spectacle but one which 'consumes'. Usually that means 'smoke'. Does this speak of the righteous justice of God that must execute judgment upon the sinner and his sin?

There is another symbol. a flaming torch. Do we see here a representation of God as revealed in Christ; the faithful and true witness? Of one thing we can be sure that Abram in his deep sleep would have recognised this as covenant in which is was not one of the covenanting parties but only a witness.

3. The oldest promise

Let's go further back than Abraham. But first we will head in the other direction. When Paul wrote to Titus he spoke about God's truth and the hope of eternal life, but the way that he speaks of eternal life takes our breath away.

▼ Titus 1:1–3 NKJV

¶ Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness,
in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,
but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior; (Titus 1:1–3 NKJV)

This raises an obvious question... If God promised eternal life **before time began** to whom did he promise that life? This is God accommodating his language to mortal minds but it tell us that God's plans for 'eternal life' is older than the human race itself. This 'conversation' must have taken place within the Godhead. We are being given a glimpse into the eternity before time. In fact, it seems it was a conversation between the Father and the Son before time began.

▼ The Better Covenant Chapter 4

It is a theme that 'blows the mind' but the plan of salvation for a sinful race was not put together hurriedly 'when things went wrong'. It was in place before anything was made; God is never taken by surprise.

Later in the story of Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22) there is a foreshadowing of Calvary itself as the Father and the 'Only Son' together agree to fulfil the will of God. As Father and Son make their way to the place of

sacrifice there is little phrase in the older versions of the story of Genesis 22 which is pregnant with powerful truth; it provides a repeated progress report of the events of that day with words that almost sound like the chorus to a song; "the two of them went together" (Genesis 22: 6-8) It seems that what we have in Genesis 15, witnessed here in his deep dream vision by Abraham, was the enactment, on earth, of an agreement, in which "the two of them went together", and in which the Son would reach through generations of history and 'take hold of the seed of Abraham' in order to fulfil a promise made "before time began".

That last phrase is a quotation from the letter the Hebrews

▼ Hebrews 2:16 DRBY

For he does not indeed take hold of angels [by the hand], but he takes hold of the seed of Abraham. (Hebrews 2:16 DRBY)

This sounds very mystical but there are events that take place on earth that have an eternal element to them

A promise of God to the Seed

Stretching back to a time before Sinai and its Covenant there was a promise made to Christ himself;

▼ Galatians 3:19 NKJV

¶ What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till **the Seed should come to whom the promise was made**; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. (Galatians 3:19 NKJV)

The promise that Abram heard and which established a covenant in which his descendants would inherit the land on which he slept, has a double application. On the one hand it was a promise to Abram's progeny in answer to Abram's question 'how shall I know'? But on another level it was a promise heard, on earth, of a promise of the Father to the Son; **a promise to the Seed that should come.**

▼ The Better Covenant: Chapter 4

This taking hold of the seed of Abraham becomes a hidden thread in the old Testament story.

Some years ago I conducted a series of studies as an overview of the whole Old Testament for a small church in North London; we called the series "Following the Seed." At times it truly seemed that everything hung on a thread but with all the heights and lows of the Old Testament we can clearly "Follow the Seed" and trace God's eternal purposes worked out on earth.

God's purposes would not be frustrated by the failure of men. He had taken hold of the "Seed of Abraham" and he held onto it tenaciously until its glorious culmination in Jesus Christ; *the seed to hold the promise was made.*

In this chapter we examined the amazing account of *a day in the life of Abraham*, a day whose events spanned the journey from eternity past to eternity future.

We saw that God had set his purpose before the creation to make his Son the means of bringing salvation to the whole world.

We walked on tiptoe through one of the most mysterious passages in the Bible and saw the shadows of an eternal covenant between the Father and the Son.