

## Gen 15 – 16 Bible Study

### *God's Covenant with Abram*

A covenant is a permanent agreement between two people. It is often used to express the promise or favors of God to His people. Since Genesis 12, we have been watching the Abrahamic Covenant unfolding. In 12:1-3 we saw God promise seven things to Abram. Let's review. Underline the seven things God promises to do for Abram.

*“Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go out from your country, your relatives, and your father’s household to the land that I will show you. Then I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, so that you will exemplify divine blessing. I will bless those who bless you, but the one who treats you lightly I must curse, and all the families of the earth will bless one another by your name.”” (Genesis 12:1–3)*

Now in Genesis 15 we have more action on the part of God and His covenant with Abram and some questions from Abram. Let's take a look:

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for **I continue childless**, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me **no offspring**, and a member of my household will be my heir.”<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very **own son shall** be your heir.”<sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward **heaven, and number the stars**, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

<sup>6</sup> And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

<sup>7</sup> And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." <sup>8</sup> But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" (Genesis 15:1-8)

What is Abram's first question for God? (see verse 2-3)

What prompted this question? (see verse 1)

What is God's response to Abram? (see verse 4-5)

What is Abram's second question? (see verse 8)

What prompted this question? (see verse 7)

Next we see a ceremony that God performs in order to reveal to Abram that His covenant still stands and that it all relies on God himself and not Abram.

He said to him, "**Bring me a heifer** three years old, a female goat three years old, a **ram** three years old, a **turtledove**, and a young **pigeon**." <sup>10</sup> And he brought him all these, **cut them in half**, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.

<sup>11</sup> And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup> As the sun was going down, **a deep sleep fell on Abram**. And behold, dreadful **and great darkness fell upon him**. <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted **for four hundred years**. <sup>14</sup> But I will bring **judgment** on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with **great possessions**. <sup>15</sup> As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. <sup>16</sup> And they

shall come back here in **the fourth generation**, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

<sup>17</sup> When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. <sup>18</sup> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, <sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”

What was Abram’s job in this ceremony? (see verses 9-11)

What does God tell Abram about his future and his descendants future? (see verses 13-16)

When covenants were made in those days, both parties would pass between the cut pieces of a sacrificial animal, indicating that the covenant depended on both parties. In this scene we don’t see two parties but a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, which symbolize the presence of God. This means that the Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant. In this God binds himself to the covenant, making it a promise to Abram.

The use of smoke and fire for God reminds us of Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Sinai.

Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. <sup>19</sup> And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. (Genesis 19:17-19)

Now, let's look at Genesis 16, The Birth of Ishmael

Now Sarai, Abram's **wife**, had not given birth to any children, but she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. <sup>16:2</sup> So Sarai said to Abram, "Since the Lord has **prevented me from having children**, have sexual relations with my servant. Perhaps I can have a family by her." Abram did what Sarai told him.

<sup>16:3</sup> So after Abram had lived in Canaan for ten years, Sarai, Abram's wife, gave Hagar, her Egyptian servant, to her husband to be his wife. <sup>16:4</sup> He had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. Once Hagar realized she was pregnant, she despised Sarai. <sup>16:5</sup> Then Sarai said to Abram, "You have brought this wrong on me! I allowed my servant to have sexual relations with you, but when she realized that she was pregnant, she despised me. May the Lord judge between you and me!"

<sup>16:6</sup> Abram said to Sarai, "Since your servant is under your authority, do to her whatever you think best." Then Sarai treated Hagar harshly, so she ran away from Sarai. (Genesis 16:1-6)

Let's take a quick look at the difference between the two women. Under each name write down the things we learn about each woman:

Sarai	Hagar

Did you notice how opposite these women are? Wife vs. slave. Old vs. young. Powerful vs. powerless. Jewish vs. Egyptian. Just to name a few.

Later, in Genesis 39:1-2 we will see Joseph becoming enslaved to the descendants of Ishmael and being imprisoned because of an Egyptian woman, all of which foreshadows the bondage that Israel will be under by the Egyptians.

In Genesis 16:2, who do we see Sarai blaming for her infertility?

Psalm 127:1 has something to say about this topic as well. *“If the Lord does not build a house, then those who build it work in vain. If the Lord does not guard a city, then the watchman stands guard in vain.”* (Psalm 127:1)

How does Abram respond to Sarai’s idea for him to sleep with Hagar? (see verse 2) How does this compare to Adam’s response to Eve and the apple?

How do you suspect Sarai felt after Hagar became pregnant? She talks about it in verse 4.

How does Abram behave as the drama intensifies between the two women?

What does the reaction of Sarai and Abram reveal about their faith or lack of faith in God?

What do we learn about God when he sends an angel to meet Hagar in the desert and from what he says and what Hagar says?

What would be the future of Hagar’s son, Ishmael?

What kind of man does the angel describe Ishmael would become?

Obviously, both Sarai and Abram had grown impatient waiting for God to get things moving. Their limit was ten years. Honestly, it's amazing they waited that long. Have you ever been unable to wait on God for something and so taken matters into your own hands? If so, what do you think is your limit on waiting for God to do what God is going to do?

Why do you think that we grow so impatient instead of trusting that God's timing is perfect even if it is delayed?

What kinds of troubles do we see assailing humanity in this passage because of their inability to wait on the Lord?