

## Bible Study for May 12, 2021

### Read Genesis 15

After these things the LORD's message came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram! I am your shield<sup>[a]</sup> and the one who will reward you in great abundance."<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD,<sup>[c]</sup> what will you give me since<sup>[d]</sup> I continue to be<sup>[e]</sup> childless, and my heir<sup>[f]</sup> is<sup>[g]</sup> Eliezer of Damascus?"<sup>[h]</sup> <sup>3</sup> Abram added,<sup>[i]</sup> "Since<sup>[j]</sup> you have not given me a descendant, then look, one born in my house will be my heir!"<sup>[k]</sup>

<sup>4</sup> But look,<sup>[l]</sup> the LORD's message came to him: "This man<sup>[m]</sup> will not be your heir, but instead<sup>[n]</sup> a son<sup>[o]</sup> who comes from your own body will be your heir."<sup>[p]</sup> <sup>5</sup> The LORD<sup>[q]</sup> took him outside and said, "Gaze into the sky and count the stars—if you are able to count them!" Then he said to him, "So will your descendants be."

<sup>6</sup> Abram believed<sup>[r]</sup> the LORD, and the LORD<sup>[s]</sup> credited<sup>[t]</sup> it<sup>[u]</sup> as righteousness<sup>[v]</sup> to him.

<sup>7</sup> The LORD said<sup>[w]</sup> to him, "I am the LORD<sup>[x]</sup> who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans<sup>[y]</sup> to give you this land to possess."<sup>[z]</sup> <sup>8</sup> But<sup>[aa]</sup> Abram<sup>[ab]</sup> said, "O Sovereign LORD,<sup>[ac]</sup> by what<sup>[ad]</sup> can I know that I am to possess it?"

<sup>9</sup> The LORD<sup>[ae]</sup> said to him, "Take for me a heifer, a goat, and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."<sup>[af]</sup> <sup>10</sup> So Abram<sup>[ag]</sup> took all these for him and then cut them in two<sup>[ah]</sup> and placed each half opposite the other,<sup>[ai]</sup> but he did not cut the birds in half. <sup>11</sup> When birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup> When the sun went down, Abram fell sound asleep,<sup>[aj]</sup> and great terror overwhelmed him.<sup>[ak]</sup> <sup>13</sup> Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain<sup>[al]</sup> that your descendants will be strangers<sup>[am]</sup> in a foreign country.<sup>[an]</sup> They will be enslaved and oppressed<sup>[ao]</sup> for 400 years. <sup>14</sup> But I will execute judgment on the nation that they will serve.<sup>[ap]</sup> Afterward they will come out with many possessions. <sup>15</sup> But as for you,<sup>[aq]</sup> you will go to your ancestors<sup>[ar]</sup> in peace and be buried at a good old

age.<sup>[ap]</sup> <sup>16</sup> In the fourth generation<sup>[aq]</sup> your descendants<sup>[ar]</sup> will return here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its limit.”<sup>[as]</sup>

<sup>17</sup> When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking firepot with a flaming torch<sup>[at]</sup> passed between the animal parts.<sup>[au]</sup> <sup>18</sup> That day the LORD made a covenant<sup>[av]</sup> with Abram: “To your descendants I give<sup>[aw]</sup> this land, from the river of Egypt<sup>[ax]</sup> to the great river, the Euphrates River— <sup>19</sup> the land<sup>[ay]</sup> of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, <sup>21</sup> Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”<sup>[az]</sup>

## Footnotes

- a. Genesis 15:1 **sn** The noun “shield” recalls the words of Melchizedek in 14:20. If God is the shield, then God will deliver. Abram need not fear reprisals from those he has fought.
- b. Genesis 15:1 **tc** Instead of the Hiphil infinitive absolute הַרְבֵּה (*harbeh*), the Samaritan Pentateuch reads אַרְבֵּה, the first person imperfect and most likely still Hiphil (*'arbeh*) meaning “I will make [your reward very] great.” **tn** *Heb* “your reward [in] great abundance.” When the phrase הַרְבֵּה טַאָדָּה (*harbeh m'od*) follows a noun it invariably modifies the noun and carries the nuance “very great” or “in great abundance.” (See its use in Gen 41:49; Deut 3:5; Josh 22:8; 2 Sam 8:8; 12:2; 1 Kgs 4:29; 10:10-11; 2 Chr 14:13; 32:27; Jer 40:12.) Here the noun “reward” is in apposition to “shield” and refers by metonymy to God as the source of the reward. Some translate here “your reward will be very great” (cf. NASB, NRSV), taking the statement as an independent clause and understanding the Hiphil infinitive absolute as a substitute for a finite verb. However, the construction הַרְבֵּה טַאָדָּה is never used this way elsewhere, where it either modifies a noun (see the texts listed above) or serves as an adverb in relation to a finite verb (see Josh 13:1; 1 Sam 26:21; 2 Sam 12:30; 2 Kgs 21:16; 1 Chr 20:2; Neh 2:2). **sn** Abram has just rejected all the spoils of war, and the LORD promises to reward him *in great abundance*. In walking by faith and living with integrity he cannot lose.
- c. Genesis 15:2 **tn** The Hebrew text has יְהוָה אֲדֹנָי (*'adonay yehviah*, “Lord Yahweh”). Since the tetragrammaton (YHWH) usually is pointed with the vowels for the Hebrew word אֲדֹנָי (*'adonay*, “Lord”) to avoid pronouncing the divine name, that would lead in this place to a repetition of אֲדֹנָי. So the tetragrammaton is here pointed with the vowels for the

word אֱלֹהִים (*elohim*, “God”) instead. That would produce the reading of the Hebrew as “Lord God” in the Jewish textual tradition. But the presence of “Lord” before the holy name is rather compelling evidence that the original would have been “Lord LORD,” which is rendered here “Sovereign LORD.”

- d. Genesis 15:2 **tn** The *vav* (ו) disjunctive at the beginning of the clause is circumstantial, expressing the cause or reason.
- e. Genesis 15:2 **tn** *Heb* “I am going.”
- f. Genesis 15:2 **tn** *Heb* “the son of the acquisition of my house.” **sn** For the custom of designating a member of the household as *heir*, see C. H. Gordon, “Biblical Customs and the Nuzu Tablets,” *Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, 2:21-33.
- g. Genesis 15:2 **tn** The pronoun is anaphoric here, equivalent to the verb “to be” (R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 23, §115).
- h. Genesis 15:2 **sn** The sentence in the Hebrew text employs a very effective wordplay on the name *Damascus*: “The son of the acquisition (בֶּן־הַשְׂקָה, *ben mesheq*) of my house is Eliezer of Damascus (דָּמְסֵק, *dammeseq*).” The words are not the same; they have different sibilants. But the sound play gives the impression that “in the nomen is the omen.” Eliezer the Damascene will be Abram’s heir if Abram dies childless because “Damascus” seems to mean that. See M. F. Unger, “Some Comments on the Text of Genesis 15:2-3,” *JBL* 72 (1953): 49-50; H. L. Ginsberg, “Abram’s ‘Damascene’ Steward,” *BASOR* 200 (1970): 31-32.
- i. Genesis 15:3 **tn** *Heb* “And Abram said.”
- j. Genesis 15:3 **tn** The construction uses הֵן (*hen*) to introduce the foundational clause (“since...”), and הִנֵּה (*hinneh*) to introduce the main clause (“then look...”).
- k. Genesis 15:3 **tn** *Heb* “is inheriting me.”
- l. Genesis 15:4 **tn** The disjunctive draws attention to God’s response and the particle הִנֵּה (*hinneh*, translated “look”) mirrors Abram’s statement in v. 3 and highlights the fact that God responded to Abram.
- m. Genesis 15:4 **tn** The subject of the verb is the demonstrative pronoun, which can be translated “this one” or “this man.” That the LORD does not mention him by name is significant; often in ancient times the use of the name would bring legitimacy to inheritance and adoption cases.
- n. Genesis 15:4 **tn** The Hebrew כִּי־יָמִן (*ki ’im*) forms a very strong adversative.
- o. Genesis 15:4 **tn** *Heb* “he who.”

- p. Genesis 15:5 **tn** *Heb* “he”; the referent (the LORD) has been specified in the translation for clarity.
- q. Genesis 15:6 **tn** The sentence begins with *vav* (ו) plus a perfect verb. It does not show simple sequence, which would have been indicated with a *vav* plus preterite as in the surrounding clauses. The nuance may be that Abram had already come to believe or did so while God was speaking. For a detailed discussion of the *vav* plus perfect construction in Hebrew narrative, see R. Longacre, “*Weqatal* Forms in Biblical Hebrew Prose: A Discourse-modular Approach,” *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, 50-98. The verb אָמַן (*’aman*) occurs with a Niphal and Hiphil opposition. In the Niphal it means “to be faithful, reliable, firm, enduring.” While in the Hiphil, the form used here, it means “to consider or treat something as reliable, or dependable.” Abram regarded God as reliable for this promise; he believed.
- r. Genesis 15:6 **tn** *Heb* “and he”; the referent (the LORD) has been specified in the translation for clarity. The LORD is the subject of a series of third masculine singular preterite verbs in 15:5-7, while Abram is the subject of the perfect verb at the beginning of this verse.
- s. Genesis 15:6 **tn** The verb חָשַׁב (*hashav*) is a verb of recognition, which can be rendered with words like “think, plan, reckon, impute, consider, assign.” Uniquely in this verse, the verb has two objects (a double accusative) and a prepositional phrase with ל (*lamed*). Without the double accusative, the syntax of the verb would be straightforward. When the object of the verb is an attribute and the object of the preposition is a person, it means “consider X (the verb’s object) to apply to (ל) Y (person).” This also occurs when imputing guilt to someone (2 Sam 19:20; Ps 32:2); the attribute is functionally applied to someone. When the object of the verb and the object of the preposition are impersonal, it means “consider X to be Z.” Gen 15:6 has two direct objects and both are impersonal. The closest parallels use an additional preposition. For example, Job 19:11, “He considers me (object suffix) like (כ; *kaf*) his enemies toward (ל) him,” and Job 33:10 He considers me (object suffix) to be (ל) an enemy toward (ל) him.” So the normal uses of the verb include considering a trait or evaluation to apply to a person, and also considering one thing to be [like] another. The translation takes the two impersonal objects of the verb (the double accusative) as being equated, while the preposition (ל) indicates that the attribute is imputed to the personal object of the preposition. That is, the

Lord considered it (Abram’s belief) to be **תְּשׁוּבָה** (*tsedaqah*; “righteousness”), and he imputed this righteousness to Abram. We might suppose different nuances to be possible for how the two accusatives relate. Is one the evidence of the other, the basis for the other, an expression of the other? Or are these questions imposed on the text? We should note that when imputing (**כָּשָׁה**; *khashav*) guilt, or not imputing (i.e., forgiving) guilt (**פָּסַח**; *pasach*) the emphasis is on the legal or relational standing. The concept of considering righteousness to apply to someone’s account also occurs without this verb, as in **Deut 6:25** and **24:13** “it will be righteousness for you before the Lord your God.” While the act of obedience and motivation for it can be characterized as righteous, the emphasis is on the righteous standing that the obedient person has. Likewise, Abram’s righteous standing before God is of the greatest significance in this passage.

- t. **Genesis 15:6** **tn** *Heb* “and he imputed it.” The third feminine singular pronominal suffix refers back to Abram’s act of faith, mentioned in the preceding clause. On third feminine singular pronouns referring back to verbal ideas see GKC 440-41 §135.p. Some propose taking the suffix as proleptic, anticipating the following feminine noun (“righteousness”). In this case one might translate: “and he reckoned it to him—[namely] righteousness.” See O. P. Robertson, “**Genesis 15:6**: A New Covenant Exposition of an Old Covenant Text,” *WTJ* 42 (1980): 259-89.
- u. **Genesis 15:6** **tn** The noun **תְּשׁוּבָה** (*tsedaqah*, “righteousness”) occurs with the Niphal of the same verb in **Ps 106:31**. Alluding to the events recorded in **Numbers 25**, the psalmist notes that Phinehas’ actions were “credited to him as righteousness for endless generations to come.” Phinehas acted in opposition to idolatry. So he was righteous in motive, his actions were righteous in character, and after he acted he was accorded righteous standing before God. Further the Lord rewarded Phinehas with an unconditional, eternal covenant (**Num 25:12-13**) as he rewards Abram with a covenant. From that contextual fact, the **תְּשׁוּבָה** (*tsedaqah*) “righteousness”) may be viewed by some as focusing on the rewardability of the behavior more than the righteous standing before God, though the two notions are related. (See R. B. Chisholm, “Evidence from Genesis,” *A Case for Premillennialism*, 40.) In Phoenician and Old Aramaic inscriptions cognate nouns may be glossed as “correct, justifiable conduct” and may carry this same semantic nuance (*DNWSI* 2:962). *HALOT* seems to focus on the motive and character of righteous actions when it lists “loyalty to the

community” among its glosses for הַקָּדוֹשׁ (HALOT, 1006). The translation takes the righteous standing to be central, though it coincides with righteous or loyal motives, righteous conduct, and being viewed as worthy of reward. **sn** This episode is basic to the NT teaching of Paul on justification (Romans 4). Paul weaves this passage and Ps 32 together, as both refer to imputing an attribute, righteousness or guilt. Paul explains that for the one who believes in the LORD, like Abram, God credits him with righteousness but does not credit his sins against him because he is forgiven. Justification does not mean that the believer is thoroughly righteous in motive and conduct; it means that God credits him with righteous standing, so that in the records of heaven (as it were) he is declared righteous. See M. G. Kline, “Abram’s Amen,” *WTJ* 31 (1968): 1-11.

- v. Genesis 15:7 **tn** *Heb* “And he said.”
- w. Genesis 15:7 **sn** *I am the LORD*. The LORD initiates the covenant-making ceremony with a declaration of who he is and what he has done for Abram. The same form appears at the beginning of the covenant made at Sinai (see Exod 20:1).
- x. Genesis 15:7 **sn** The phrase *of the Chaldeans* is a later editorial clarification for the readers, designating the location of Ur. From all evidence there would have been no Chaldeans in existence at this early date; they are known in the time of the neo-Babylonian empire in the first millennium B.C.
- y. Genesis 15:8 **tn** Here the *vav* carries adversative force and is translated “but.”
- z. Genesis 15:8 **tn** *Heb* “he”; the referent (Abram) has been specified in the translation for clarity.
- aa. Genesis 15:8 **tn** See note on the phrase “Sovereign LORD” in 15:2.
- bb. Genesis 15:8 **tn** Or “how.”
- cc. Genesis 15:9 **tn** *Heb* “He”; the referent (the LORD) has been specified in the translation for clarity.
- dd. Genesis 15:10 **tn** *Heb* “he”; the referent (Abram) has been specified in the translation for clarity.
- ee. Genesis 15:10 **tn** *Heb* “in the middle.”
- ff. Genesis 15:10 **tn** *Heb* “to meet its neighbor.” **sn** For discussion of this ritual see G. F. Hasel, “The Meaning of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15,” *JSOT* 19 (1981): 61-78.
- gg. Genesis 15:12 **tn** *Heb* “a deep sleep fell on Abram.”

- hh. Genesis 15:12 **tn** *Heb* “and look, terror, a great darkness was falling on him.”
- ii. Genesis 15:13 **tn** The Hebrew construction is emphatic, with the Qal infinitive absolute followed by the imperfect from יָדָעַ (*yadaʿ*, “know”). The imperfect here has an obligatory or imperatival force.
- jj. Genesis 15:13 **tn** The Hebrew word גֵר (*ger*, “sojourner, stranger”) is related to the verb גָּר (*gur*, “to sojourn, to stay for awhile”). Abram’s descendants will stay in a land as resident foreigners without rights of citizenship.
- kk. Genesis 15:13 **tn** *Heb* “in a land not theirs.”
- ll. Genesis 15:13 **tn** *Heb* “and they will serve them and they will oppress them.” The verb עָנָה, (*ʿinnu*, a Piel form from עָנָה, *ʿanah*, “to afflict, to oppress, to treat harshly”), is used in Exod 1:11 to describe the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt.
- mm. Genesis 15:14 **tn** The participle דָן (*dan*, from דִּין, *din*) is used here for the future: “I am judging” = “I will surely judge.” The judgment in this case will be condemnation and punishment. The translation “execute judgment on” implies that the judgment will certainly be carried out.
- nn. Genesis 15:15 **tn** The *vav* with the pronoun before the verb calls special attention to the subject in contrast to the preceding subject.
- oo. Genesis 15:15 **sn** *You will go to your ancestors.* This is a euphemistic expression for death.
- pp. Genesis 15:15 **tn** *Heb* “in a good old age.”
- qq. Genesis 15:16 **sn** The term *generation* is being used here in its widest sense to refer to a full life span. When the chronological factors are considered and the genealogies tabulated, there are 400 years of bondage. This suggests that in this context a generation is equivalent to 100 years.
- rr. Genesis 15:16 **tn** *Heb* “they”; the referent (“your descendants”) has been supplied in the translation for clarity.
- ss. Genesis 15:16 **tn** *Heb* “is not yet complete.” **sn** *The sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its limit.* The justice of God is apparent. He will wait until the Amorites are fully deserving of judgment before he annihilates them and gives the land to Israel.
- tt. Genesis 15:17 **sn** *A smoking pot with a flaming torch.* These same implements were used in Mesopotamian rituals designed to ward off evil (see E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* [AB], 113-14).
- uu. Genesis 15:17 **tn** *Heb* “these pieces.”
- vv. Genesis 15:18 **tn** *Heb* “cut a covenant.”

- ww. Genesis 15:18 **tn** The perfect verbal form is understood as instantaneous (“I here and now give”). Another option is to understand it as rhetorical, indicating certitude (“I have given” meaning it is as good as done, i.e., “I will surely give”). **sn** *To your descendants I give this land.* The LORD here unconditionally promises that Abram’s descendants will possess the land, but he does not yet ratify his earlier promises to give Abram a multitude of descendants and eternal possession of the land. The fulfillment of those aspects of the promise remain conditional (see Gen 17:1-8) and are ratified after Abraham offers up his son Isaac (see Gen 22:1-19). For a fuller discussion see R. B. Chisholm, “Evidence from Genesis,” *A Case for Premillennialism*, 35-54.
- xx. Genesis 15:18 **sn** *The river of Egypt* is a wadi (a seasonal stream) on the northeastern border of Egypt, not the River Nile.
- yy. Genesis 15:19 **tn** The words “the land” are supplied in the translation for stylistic reasons.
- zz. Genesis 15:21 **tn** Each of the names in the list has the Hebrew definite article, which is used here generically for the class of people identified.

### Questions to Consider

1. How do you reassure someone your word is good: a] Say, “Cross my heart, and hope to die?” b] Give Scout’s honour? c] Involve a lawyer? d] Invoke God as your witness?
2. What does Abram fear most [see vs.1-3, 8]? What’s wrong with wanting some reassurance?
3. In proposing Eliezer of Damascus as his heir [v.2-3], is Abram being faithless, or faithful to God? What does God think about Abram’s decision? [vs.4-7, 9-21].
4. If God already told Abram he would have a son and land, not once [see 12.2-3, 7], but twice before [see 13.14-17], why remind Abram again here in chapter 15?
5. How is faith related to righteousness [see v.6; cf. Rms. 4.18-22; Gal. 3.6-9]? Which comes first? Which comes from God?
6. Where in your life do you need God to say to you, “Fear not, Abram! I am your shield and the one who will reward you in great abundance.”



7. "Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD credited it as righteousness to him" [v.6]. If you were to put your name in this verse, what difference would it make to your life?
8. As God restated his promise to Abram yet again, assuring him of his promise of a son and land, where in your life are you needing some assurance from God?