

A STAR ON GOD'S WALK OF FAITH

GENESIS 15:1-21 DECEMBER 22, 2021

Forbes Magazine says we've become a "nation of quitters."¹ Americans are leaving their jobs at record rates. A more polite term for it is "The Great Resignation." 55% of workers are thinking of quitting their job.² When do you know that it's time to find a new line of work? One article gave 30 signs. One of them was: "The reality of your day-to-day does not match the job description."³ The guidance given by someone called an 'Executive Career Change Coach' was: "*Listen to your gut. Do you feel light, inspired, and a little excited? Or do you have a sinking feeling in your stomach, a lump in your throat, and a tightening in your chest? That's your inner compass talking.*"

In Genesis 15, Abraham has a lump in his throat and a sinking feeling. He's been in Canaan for around 10 years - he's in his mid-eighties.⁴ We read his story and see great *moments* in his life. But Abraham lives it every day. And his day-to-day wasn't matching the description God had given. Abraham finds himself dealing with difficulties and confusion and frustration over how certain aspects of his life are turning out. He loves the Lord, he *trusts* the Lord, but he can't see beyond today and, is full of questions about the future. Sounds like the kinds of thoughts we have at times.

This chapter records for us a frank conversation Abraham had with God. That conversation leads to a covenant which is still in effect today. As usual, by studying this example, there is much we can learn about God's Word, His work, and the wonderful way He expresses His love for His people.

Genesis 15:1 - After these events, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great.

God doesn't tell us things we don't need to hear, so we can assume that Abraham was feeling very low. He was afraid of potential reprisals from foreign armies after his battle victory. And, it seems, he was feeling disappointment over how his rescue operation had ended. Because of spiritual conviction he turned down *all* the plunder and, in fact, came home 10% poorer than before. Some criticize Abraham and say he's throwing himself a pity party, but this text highlights Abraham's enduring faith and his trust in the Lord. But, clearly, he's second guessing his life's course.

In this moment of discouragement, the Lord comes to lift up Abraham's head. David knew this Divine kindness. He wrote in Psalm 3: "You, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, and the One who lifts up my head." God is revealing this aspect of Himself to Abraham, too.

This is a tender moment. God sees into the heart of His friend, sees that his friend is struggling and is downcast, and *the Lord* takes the initiative to come, not offering some empty catchphrase, but He offers *Himself*. "*I'll be your shield. I'll watch over you night and day. I'll keep the record and be sure*

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2021/11/15/weve-become-a-nation-of-quitters-44-million-americans-left-their-jobs-in-september/?sh=26c31b3d893e>

² <https://ergonomictrends.com/great-resignation-statistics/>

³ <https://upjourney.com/signs-that-your-new-job-is-not-working-out>

⁴ Genesis 16:3, 16

to give you an eternal return on your life's investment." If God can see into our hearts, then obviously He can see our circumstances. He is mindful of what you're experiencing.

In 1 Samuel we see that touching moment where Hannah is so broken-hearted because she has no child. Her husband tries to console her by saying, "Am I not better to you than 10 sons?" Not the best thing to say. But when *God* offers us *Himself*, He *is* better than all the things of earth. He is a greater treasure, a greater Friend, a greater Helper, than any we pass up in this life.

Genesis 15:2 - ²But Abram said, "Lord God, what can you give me, since I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

Abraham didn't want battle plunder. He wanted *that which God had promised to him a decade earlier*. God had said, "I'm going to make you a great nation." And here he was, with no family of his own. His nephew, Lot, who was *like* a son, had abandoned Abraham *a second time*. And, sure, he had a bunch of servants and employees. But no son.

Coming back from the battle, perhaps Abraham was feeling his age. What good was God's promise if his life was almost over? And so, he *boldly* speaks to God, saying, "If You're going to make me a great nation, we better get a move on!" He's still in a position of obedience and belief. He refers to God as, "Master, Lord."⁵ But, after he speaks, the Lord doesn't immediately reply. So Abraham speaks again.

Genesis 15:3 - ³Abram continued, "Look, you have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house will be my heir."

We can see that, at the same time, Abraham *believed* God's promise, but was also *blaming* God for what seemed like a failure in the work. "You have given me no offspring." Sarah will say the same thing in the next chapter and that attitude of blaming God led to a major misstep in their lives.

God had not failed. It just wasn't time. God does things at "just the right time." At just the right time Christ died for the ungodly. At just the right time He reveals Himself. At just the right time He pours out His grace and moves in compassion for us. We always want the time to be *right now*, while we're feeling the sting of disappointment. But the Lord has been working out His plan even *before* time existed. His plan is specific and it is personal. Look at verse 4.

Genesis 15:4 - ⁴Now the word of the Lord came to him: "This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir."

The Lord says, "I know Eliezer. I know you. I care about you both, but he isn't going to figure in my plan for your offspring."

Notice also, God knew the state of Abraham's heart. He knows our frustrations and weaknesses. But He did not want Abraham to *remain* in that state. He brought Abraham comfort and revelation so that he could strengthen himself and move out of his discouragement.

For some, it's fashionable to celebrate what they call "brokenness." Practically worked out, it produces a limp Christianity - one without confidence or answers or spiritual strength. God didn't want Abraham to stay in his brokenness, in his second guessing, and frustration. Puritan preacher Richard Sibbes wrote, "[Christ] was broken that we should not be broken; he was troubled, that we should not be desperately troubled. Whatever may be wished for in an all sufficient Comforter is... found in Christ: Authority from the Father...Strength in Himself...[and] Wisdom."⁶

Genesis 15:5 - ⁵He took him outside and said, "Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "Your offspring will be that numerous."

It seems the Lord was there with Abraham in what we call a Theophany - a PreIncarnate appearance of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. Abraham poured out his heart to His Master, and the Lord said, "Come with Me, I have something I want to show you." There, under the night sky, God told Abraham to "look toward heaven." Philosophers speak of "the music of the spheres," talking about the motion of the celestial bodies of the universe. Genesis drives home the fact that God made it all as a backdrop that He might commune with us. The universe exists, not only to declare God's majesty and splendor, but to *remind* us of His love and His power working on our behalf.

Genesis 15:6 - ⁶Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

This is one of the most important verses in all the Bible. The New Testament certainly thinks so. It is referenced multiple times by Paul. James cites it, too. This is the model diagram of how a person can be saved - how they can be made right with God. When a person trusts God, in faith, God's grace imputes perfect righteousness into their account, wiping out the debt of sin because Christ paid the penalty for it. Abraham did not have to *have a son* to be saved. He didn't have to be circumcised to be saved. He didn't have to pass a certain number of tests or obey for a certain number of consecutive days to earn a home in heaven. All he had to do was *believe* the Lord - trust Him as a Person and believe what He had said in His Word. The work of salvation is all done by God. Our part is to believe. Of course, saving faith is not just lip service, it's alive. Like Abraham, it brings us into a relationship with God. And though we struggle and fail, we continue to trust Him.

God, in His grace, is *excited* to count things on your behalf. This little, mustard seed faith of Abraham, God said, "That counts!" Jesus said, "Give a cup of water to someone in need, that counts as if you were giving it directly to Me!" Your prayers count. Your worship counts.

Genesis 15:7 - ⁷He also said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."

⁶ Richard Sibbes *The Bruised Reed*

After the tenderness of their friendly talk, this statement seems out of place. But God is now initiating a covenant ceremony with Abraham.⁷ He says, "Ok, Abraham. Let's make it official with a contract." It wasn't that God finally decided to commit. He wanted to demonstrate to Abraham how serious His commitment was. He knows that Abraham is *still* struggling emotionally with how it seems like it's *impossible* for God to do what He had promised. And so, the Lord starts off by pointing out that He has been watching over Abraham's life all this time.

The Psalmist wrote: "The course of my life is in Your power." God's goodness and faithful love pursues you all the days of your life.

Genesis 15:8 - ⁸But he said, "Lord God, how can I know that I will possess it?"

It's not always wrong to ask for confirmation. We can safely say that Abraham is having a crisis of faith. It doesn't seem like things are happening as they should. Was Abraham wrong about the decisions he had been making? "Lord, am I in the right place? Am I doing the right thing? I thought by now we'd see more fruit on the tree." One commentator notes that Abraham's question here shows that he was really taking God seriously.⁸

Genesis 15:9-10 - ⁹He said to him, "Bring me a 3-year-old cow, a 3-year-old female goat, a 3-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰So he brought all these to him, cut them in half, and laid the pieces opposite each other, but he did not cut the birds in half.

This was a ceremony people performed to confirm an agreement together. They would walk through these slaughtered animals, symbolizing that, if they violated the agreement, they deserved the same fate.⁹ This custom lasted a long time, at least to Jeremiah's day (he references it).

Genesis 15:11 - ¹¹Birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

Do you ever contend with seagulls on the beach who want to pilfer your snacks? They're relentless! I remember being closer to vultures in Peru than I wanted to be. Those are big, nasty birds.

On the one hand, this is a very humorous scene. Abraham has set everything up, but then nothing happens. He waits around, hour after hour. Imagine some of his servants coming out, or maybe passing neighbors, who ask: "Whatcha doing, Abraham?" "Oh, this? I'm cutting covenant with God." "...is God here now?" "No. He *WAS* here, but He took off for a little bit...but He'll be back!"

On the other hand, we saw that Abraham was struggling, he was frustrated. He had just been in conversation with God and now God seems to be absent - even *late*. Maybe he felt like Charlie Brown: "I shouldn't have picked this life. Everything I do turns into a disaster. Isn't there anyone who knows what spirituality is all about?!?"

⁷ NET Study Bible Notes

⁸ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

⁹ Warren Wiersbe *Be Obedient*

But the Lord wasn't late. He hadn't forgotten. He would not fail to accomplish His project.

Genesis 15:12 - ¹²As the sun was setting, a deep sleep came over Abram, and suddenly great terror and darkness descended on him.

It had been a long day after a long night. Now, Abraham was in the dark. Derek Kidner points out that God initiates covenants with moments of darkness. We see it here, at Sinai, and at the Cross.

But notice Abraham: He is deeply asleep - paralyzed for the rest of the proceedings. God *alone* will sign on to this covenant. Abraham has no portion that he must uphold. God does all the work, guarantees all the terms, brings all the capital, carries all the liability.

Genesis 15:13-14 - ¹³Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know this for certain: Your offspring will be resident aliens for four hundred years in a land that does not belong to them and will be enslaved and oppressed. ¹⁴However, I will judge the nation they serve, and afterward they will go out with many possessions.

Abraham had been worried about the *immediate* future. Yet, God shows him *centuries* ahead. Why? Well, in addition to making Abraham a father, God was making him a prophet, too.¹⁰

We should also note that God works with both fluid and fixed timelines. This prophecy shows a specific amount of time, after which things were determined to happen. At other points, God allows a fluidity in when things will happen. For example, after going out from Egypt, God said, "I'm going to take you back to this land." What should've taken weeks ended up taking 40 years! God has the power to give some flexibility to His providence. But, when He sets a time schedule, it *will* be done. So, how does that apply to us? Well, it tells us that we shouldn't be setting dates for the rapture of the Church. That's a *fluid* time table. The Bible calls it imminent. But, *once* the Great Tribulation begins, that is on a *fixed* time table. 7 years, down to the day.

Genesis 15:15 - ¹⁵But you will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age.

Not everything that would happen between now and then would be easy or pleasant, but the *end* would be good. As we walk with the Lord, we know that we are headed to a good completion - in peace with our heavenly Father. There will be hardships along the way, but we need not fear.

Genesis 15:16 - ¹⁶In the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

Now *this* is an astonishing revelation! "I thought we were talking about me?!?" Well, Abraham, we're talking about you *and* some other folks, like the Amorites. "Lord, what do *You* have to do with the Amorites? They're evil!" But the Lord loved them. As He had in the days of Noah, so here God

¹⁰ Genesis 20:7

was extending generations of mercy, giving these undeserving people a chance to turn to Him and be saved. God *must* judge sin, and He *will*, but His long-suffering waits because of His compassion.

“Ok, Lord, but what do the Amorites have to do with *me*?” God’s desire to save the lost impacts us in several ways. First, He sends us in to be a testimony of His love and grace and truth. Just as Abraham had developed relationships with those 3 Amorite brothers. But, God’s long-suffering also means that we, His people, will endure hardships at the hands of those He’s trying to save. We are called to endure with patience, remembering how glad we are that God waited for *us*.

Genesis 15:17-21 - ¹⁷When the sun had set and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch appeared and passed between the divided animals. ¹⁸On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “I give this land to your offspring, from the Brook of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River: ¹⁹the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰Hethites, Perizzites, Rephaim, ²¹Amorites, Canaanites, Gergashites, and Jebusites.”

There are a whole bunch of suggestions as to what the fire pot and the torch represent. But here’s our focus for tonight: First, the descendants of Abraham have *never* held all the land that is promised here. Not under Joshua, not under David, not under Solomon.¹¹ Which means God is *still* going to keep this promise to ethnic Israel. We look forward to that fulfillment in the 1,000 Year Kingdom. Second, it was all the Lord. Abraham was ‘sleeping’ on the sidelines. It was all by God’s power, all by God’s grace, all by God’s design. Abraham’s part was to believe and walk by faith. To not be worn down by his earthly circumstances but to be confident in the Lord - to anchor his life to the Word of God, knowing that He would accomplish all He had said.

In summary, this passage gives us a look at God’s Word and His work. We see here that God’s Word is prophetic and it is personal. He speaks through His Scripture *to you* about His intentions for your life and much more that He intends to do in this world. And He speaks *prophetically* and definitively about the *work* He is going to accomplish. He works powerfully, providentially, progressively, and persistently, based on the promises He has made. When we find ourselves discouraged or frustrated or wondering whether God has forgotten us or we’ve made a mistake, consider the life of Abraham and how the Lord drew him on little by little, by sending His Word, by being Abraham’s Friend, by pouring out His grace in Abraham’s life. And then remember that that is how God wants to show His love to you as you walk with Him. Don’t follow your human gut into a spiritual resignation. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths and will be faithful to complete the good work He started in you.

¹¹ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*