

**Introduction**

Now that we have seen Abram's family history and the initial giving of the Abrahamic Covenant, we will learn about some more of his travels, his dealing with Lot, and his interactions with the nations around him. Chapter 15 gives an important restatement and confirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant.

**Narrative Parts of the Text****1. Abraham and Lot Separate, 13:1-13**

After the famine, Abram brought his family back from Egypt. He returned to his former dwelling place between Bethel and Ai. He was very rich, as was his nephew Lot (13:1-5). They were so wealthy in livestock that the land immediately about them could not support their animals, so it became necessary to put some distance between themselves (13:5-9). This they did (13:10-12).

Abram had built altars at Shechem in 12:7 and between Bethel and Ai in 12:8, and now the text notes that he built one in Hebron as well (13:18). Evidently Abram was a man concerned with the atonement of sin and the proper worship of God.

Note that Lot had separated in the direction of Sodom, which verse 13 tells us was very wicked and rebellious against God. Lot later moved into the city (14:12) and then became one of the leaders of it (19:1). This is the opposite direction that one should be going with respect to wicked places.

**2. Battle of the Kings, 14:1-24**

Two confederations were at war for many years and finally when one rebelled against the subjugation of the other, the goods and some people of Sodom were carried off by their enemies (vv. 1-12).

Abram armed his servants and defeated the confederation that had taken his nephew hostage (vv. 13-16). He was able to return all the spoils to their original owners.

Upon this victory, the king of Sodom, who had lost the original battle, came out to thank Abram (17). He offered Abram all the spoils from the battle in return for the people that Abram had saved (21) but Abram basically refused the offer (22-24).

In the meanwhile, the king of the city Salem, whose name was Melchizedek, blessed Abram and his God. Abram gave him a tenth of the spoils. Melchizedek was a king and also a priest of the true God. Before the priesthood was centralized in the Levitical code in Exodus and Leviticus, there were evidently other priests set up by God. The patriarchs were "house priests" as well—we know this because Abram offered sacrifices and Job did as well (Job 1:5, 42:8).

This account of Melchizedek, though only 3 verses, is mentioned in several other places in the Bible (Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 5:6, 10, 6:20, 7:1, 10, 11, 15, 17, 21).

**1. First time, 13:14-18**

In this restatement of the promise, God emphasized the promise of the land (13-15, 17) and the large number of descendants that Abram would eventually have (16).

**2. Second time, 15:1-21**

The offer of spoils in 14:21 could easily be refused by Abram because it was God who blessed Him; in fact, God Himself was Abram's "shield, and exceedingly great reward" (15:1).

Remembering the promises God gave him, Abram replied to God in the vision that he had no offspring (15:2-3). Again, the LORD promised an heir to Abram, a child of his own, not his servant (15:4). Here God compares the number of Abram's descendants to the number of stars (15:5). Abraham believed this, and we are given for the first time the truth that belief is the channel through which God imputes righteousness (15:6).

In response to Abram's question as to how he could *know* (15:7-8) that God's promise was sure, we see this strange ritual of cutting the animals in two (15:9-11). In the midst of this activity, Abram fell into a horrible vision in which he learned that his descendants would be held in captivity in a foreign nation for 400 years (15:12-16). This is the Egyptian captivity that is set up in the account of Joseph (Gen. 37-50) and is completed in the Exodus.

Then a manifestation of God appears as a smoking oven and burning torch and passes between the pieces of the animals (v. 17). The practice of cutting animals and passing between them is known from other sources. For instance, Jeremiah 34:18 mentions the calf which was cut in two which men walked between. What is being said by doing this activity is that if one person does not keep his side of the covenant, then it will be done to him as to the animals he is walking between. Usually this was done by both parties making the covenant.

In this case, however, only God passed through the midst of the dismembered animals (Abram was basically put to sleep!). This indicates the unconditional or one-sided nature of the covenant. God is making a promise that if He does not keep the covenant, then He should be dismembered like the animals. This is obviously an impossibility, but that is OK because God always keeps His promises! The covenant does not depend on Abraham for its fulfillment.

Finally, the restatement of the promise here includes the dimensions of the land (15:18-21). It is a huge area, spanning the whole region between the "river of Egypt" (the Nile) and the Euphrates. This is much larger than Israel ever historically held under its power.