

Abram Believed the LORD and He Credited It to Him as Righteousness

15: 1-6

DIG: What does Abram fear the most (see 15:1-3 and 8)? What's wrong with wanting reassurance? In adopting a servant heir, is Abram faithless or faithful? What does Adonai think (see 15:4-7 and 9-21)? If the LORD said it once (12:2-3 and 7), even twice (13:14-17), why remind Abram again? How had God already been Abram's shield and great reward? How is **faith/trust/belief** related to righteousness (see Romans 4:18-22 and Galatians 3:6-9)? Which comes first? Which comes from the LORD? Which is indispensable to a right relationship with Him?

REFLECT: Where in your life do you need Adonai to say: Do not be afraid. I am your shield, your very great reward? The LORD credited Abram as righteous. What affirming word might God use to describe or credit you today?

Abram was a hero, but he was also a human. Perhaps, after the great battle and victory of the four kings of the east and the marvelous experience with Melchizedek, he began to be depressed. The reality was that he still did not have a son to become a great nation (12:2) and he was still in the middle of a dangerous and wicked country. Abram became doubtful and afraid of what the future might hold for him. At that time the spoken word of Adonai, YHWH came to Abram in a vision. The Hebrew for vision is *machveh* and is found only three other times in the Hebrew Scriptures in reference to a vision from the LORD, here, Numbers 24:4 and 16, and Ezekiel 13:7. In Hebrew this literally means *in the vision* and is the first time it is mentioned in the Scriptures. It is a specific vision, not a dream, which would finalize God's covenant with Abram. He was awake and the vision would continue all day and into the night (15:17).

Knowing Abram's greatest fears, ADONAI said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram." This is the first mention of the phrase **do not be afraid** in the Scriptures. He will say this again to Isaac in 26:23, and Jacob in 46:3. So, at some point all three patriarchs will receive the same message The LORD continued by giving Abram two reasons for not being fearful. First, He said: **I am your shield**, mentioned for the first time here, reminding him that He had protected Abram from the four eastern kings (In fact the verb **delivered** in 14:20 is a play on words since in Hebrew, it sounds very similar to the word **shield** here). The second reason was a **very great reward** (15:1).

Perhaps it would have sounded more pious to simply thank **the LORD** for this **vision**, with its assurances of safety and compensation. But **Abram** was a man on a mission. **He** could not forget, nor did **he** want to forget, the original promise that **he** would have a **son** (12:2). But at **his** age, and with a barren wife, it seemed impossible.²⁵⁹ **Abram** hints at the real problem when **he** said: **Adonai, God, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer, which means God helps or God comforts, of Damascus (15:2)?** This is the first time in the TaNaKh where **Adonai**, and **God's** four-lettered name **YHWH** are combined together. It is used twice in this chapter, and in the *hamishshah humshe he-Torah*, or the five books of Moses, it is used only two other times (**Deuteronomy 3:24** and **9:26**). **Adonai** is translated a number of times by the word *owner* or *master*. By using this name, **Abram** was acknowledging that **Adonai** was also **his Master**. Certainly **Abram** understood what this relationship meant; perhaps better than we do today, for those were days of slavery. Lordship meant complete possession on the one hand, and complete submission on the other. As we have already seen, **Abram** himself sustained the relationship of master and lord over a very considerable number of people. Therefore, by addressing **YHWH** as **Adonai** he acknowledged **His** complete possession of and perfect right to all that **he** was and had.²⁶⁰

Nevertheless, **Abram** expressed his real fear when **he** said: **You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir (15:3)**. What is implied here is that a **very great reward** that could not be transmitted to his family is of little value. The only person who could **inherit his estate** was **Eliezer of Damascus (Proverbs 17:2)**, who was **his** chief servant because **he** had no natural **son**. How many times have we felt the same way that **Abram** did? We get to the point of hopelessness and then **the LORD** blesses us in ways we could not imagine.

As he was speaking, the word of ADONAI came to Abram, "This man," not even using Eliezer's name, "will not be your heir." The Hebrew literally reads, *not your heir this one*. **"But a son coming from your own body will be your heir" (15:4)**. Then **Elohim** gives **Abram** an illustration at during the night.

To make His promise even clearer, **the LORD** went far beyond **Abram's** concern for a single **son** when **He** took **Abram** outside his tent at night, under the open sky and said to him, **"Look up at the heavens and count the stars, if indeed you can count them."** Of course **Abram** could not count all the stars that **he** saw. Then **Adonai, YHVH** said to him, **"So shall your offspring be" (15:5)**. Back in 13:16 the illustration was that **if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted**. **He** also uses a third illustration of **the sand on the seashore (22:17)**. All three illustrations point to the fact that **his offspring could not be counted**.

Then Abram's heart responded and he **believed in**, had **trust in**, or had **faith in** ADONAI. This is the first mention of the word **believed** in the Scriptures. In the B'rit Chadashah this is the Greek word *pisteo*, and occurs ninety-nine times in the book of John alone. The particular form used here implies continuous action, meaning that Abram's normal response to God was that he **believed Him**. But what did he **trust** in? Did Abram have **faith** in the coming of the Messiah? No. Did he **believe** that the **Messiah** would die for his sins? No. Abram **trusted in the LORD** and His promises. And in this context, what Abram had **faith** in was that Adonai, YHWH would **make him into a great nation**, make his name great and that he would be a blessing. Elohim would **bless those who blessed him**, and **curse those who cursed him**; and that **all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through him** (12:2-3). The Hebrew word for **believed** is the hypo-stem of the Hebrew word *aman*, which will be used two more times in 42:20 and 45:26. As we progress through the Scripture, the light of the Gospel becomes clearer and clearer.

And as a result of Abram's **trust**, ADONAI **credited or imputed** (the Hebrew word *chashad*) His **belief** to him as righteousness (15:6 also read Romans 4:1-25). This is the first occurrence of **imputed** in the Bible. When Yochanan says **the Spirit gives life** (John 6:63a), he means that all the **righteousness of Christ** is transferred into our spiritual account at the moment of **faith** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith**). The theological name for this is **imputation**. The Bible teaches us that we have all inherited Adam's sin nature. **Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God** (Romans 5:12 and 3:23). In the TaNaKh, there had to be a sacrifice for sin to be temporarily atoned for. Blood had to be shed, and a death had to occur; therefore, because of the death of the **Meshiach** on the cross we have a perfect, absolute, **righteousness that God the Father imputes** to us through His Son. Because of our **faith**, we have passed ADONAI's final exam of the universe with a hundred percent. When HaShem sees us, He doesn't see our sin, He sees the **righteousness of His Son** (Romans 1:17). We are in the **Holy One**, and He is in us. The only way we get to heaven is a result of the **perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ**.

So salvation, whether in the TaNaKh, was, and is, by **grace through faith**. **In fact the rabbis teach that Abram, having received God's assurance, believed that the prophecy would certainly be fulfilled, and that he need not fear that he might forfeit it through sin**. For it is by grace you have been saved, through **faith** - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). That doesn't change. But what does change is the content of that **trust**. In other words, what is it that one needs to **believe** to be saved? And that changes from dispensation to dispensation, depending on what Elohim has revealed up to that point.

This verse is one of the most important verses, in the entire Bible, for it tells for the first time how sinful man or woman may become right with **God**. In ourselves we are not right with **Him**. We are alienated from **Him** by our sinful natures and by deliberate sinful choices. We are under **ADONAI's** wrath, and apart from **Him** we are destined to perish miserably. If it is possible that we can become right with **God** once again - as this verse says we can - thereby passing from sin to holiness and from wrath to blessing, this is clearly great news, and the verse that tells us how this can happen is of supreme importance.²⁶¹ The influence of this verse on the B'rit Chadashah cannot be overstated. It is quoted three times (**Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23**) and in each case it is emphasized that salvation comes by **faith**, and that **Abram** was a type of all who would **believe**.