

Gen 15 exegesis brief write-up

GEN 15:7-21 EXEGESIS

Gen 15:17-21 describes the covenant that God made with Abraham confirming his promise that he would give him the land. **The unit sits within** the larger patriarchal narrative (Gen 12-50) in which the Abraham cycle (11:27-25:11) records Abraham’s initial call and God’s promise to give him descendants, blessings and land (12:1-3, 6). The rest of the narrative then tells the story of how these promises are (partially) fulfilled. **Gen 15:1-6** reveals for the first time that the descendants God had promised to Abraham will be his physical offspring, to which Abraham responds with a resounding affirmation of faith. The rest of the chapter focuses on the second great aspect of the promise, namely the land.

What the passage is about

Context: explain the larger unit

Explain the immediate context and how your text is linked

vv.7-11

Textual analysis in sections—give verses as section heading

God introduces himself in v.7 using the same expression well known from the exodus: ‘I am the LORD who brought you out...’ (Exod 20:1).¹

Note features in the text

It encourages the reader to connect these two events and remember that the God who saved Israel from oppression is the same one who had called Abraham. It also foreshadows the revelation that is to unfold later in the chapter. The patriarch asks for confirmation of the promise (v.8) and God’s response is a preparation for the covenant (vv.9-10). **The practice of cutting**

Explain what the feature does, what its significance is

up animals as part of a covenant ceremony is well-known in the ancient Near East. The covenant partners are expected to walk between the pieces as an ‘enacted curse’ (e.g. Jer 34:18), as if they were saying ‘May I become like this animal if I do not fulfil the covenant.’²

Explain cultural customs

vv.12-16

...

vv.17-21

¹ Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2004), 74.

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 332.

Theological message

As we have seen in this passage, it is God who is the primary actor, who brought Abraham out of Ur in a move that foreshadows what Israel will go through when brought out of Egypt. He is the one who both calls and redeems out of slavery. His promise of the land to Abraham is sealed by a unilateral covenant emphasising his utter commitment to his promise and his people. While Abraham's life in the land is relatively peaceful, God reveals a future that involves exile (in Egypt) and slavery, a period of oppression, darkness and fear. The fulfilment of the promise will take time and will involve suffering. The comment that the sins of the Amorites were not yet complete alerts us to the fact that God has other story-lines going, which may cause delay, but ultimately God will judge injustice and evil and fulfil his promise to his people. While Abraham's response is not mentioned in our text, it is clear from the chapter overall that he acts in faith and obedience.

This summary should answer the questions of what this passage communicates about the various actors in the story (e.g. God, Abraham). It should not include new information but a summary of the key theological points that arise out of the textual analysis.

Application

Abraham's journey is in many ways paradigmatic of the path that God's people must walk, both in the OT and the New. As Christians, we too, are called as strangers and foreigners not quite belonging to the world we live in. Since Christianity transcends political and ethnic boundaries, the promise of a physical land is no longer directly applicable. Nevertheless, the NT speaks of the hope for a home with God, which Jesus describes as a mansion with many rooms (John 14:2) and Hebrews refers to as a city (11:16 cf. Rev 21:2). In our Western context, we, like Abraham, may experience a relative time of peace, where our views are at least tolerated. For us, the warning of a rocky path ahead may be a challenge not to feel too comfortable and forget that our home is not here. For many of our brothers and sisters in Christ, their experience is closer to that of the Israelites in Egypt: without a home and oppressed or persecuted because of their Christian convictions. For them, this passage is about hope that God will be faithful to them despite their suffering.

I explain here how our calling as Christians has parallels with Abraham's calling, but also what is different and why (the land).

Here I explain what might be parallels to Abraham's relatively peaceful life and the Egyptian oppression and what we might learn from both.

We also see in this chapter that often **there is a considerable time between God's promise and its fulfilment** and while his commitment is firm, the journey is frequently no easy ride. After all, Abraham did not get to see in his lifetime the fulfilment of the promise regarding the land. **This is a principle that I see again and again in my own life** and in those of other Christians. Early on, after I came to faith as a teenager, I had a deep desire to teach the Bible and I had God's affirmation that he would equip me, but I did not realise then that this will end up being a 'career path'. It was a gradual journey of discovery over 20-odd years that eventually led me to theological study and now to teaching the Old Testament at Carey. Seeing how God took care of me and led me, like he did Abraham, encourages me to trust him with other hopes that likewise take time.

Here I expand on what I said in the Theological message about a time delay between promise and fulfilment.

I give here a personal example. At any point, as you draw out your application you can include personal stories or relevant examples from other people's experience).

In Abraham's story, we also see that sometimes **the fulfilment of God's promises can involve the lives and contexts of other people** and the delay may be due to what God is doing in their lives that takes a while. God in Abraham's time is not yet willing to bring punishment on the Canaanites for their sinful behaviour, so Israel must wait. Although this is a mystery and only God sees all the various strands, it lifts us out of our self-absorption to realise that God in his wisdom is holding in his hands not only our lives but those of others as well. **All this must lead us to live in patience trusting God's ways and his timing, just as Abraham did.**

Here I reflect further on the delay that is present and the cause for it.

I refer briefly here to Abraham's attitude that is implicit in the story.