# Torah Series - Book of Genesis

## A. Chapters 14:19-16:16 – Abram Continued

**Genesis 14:19-20 – Abram's Blessing:**

- He blesses Abram: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand."
- Abram gives him a **tithe** (tenth) of all (the recovered spoils) - also prefigures Levitical offering/sacrificial pattern.

**Genesis 14:21-24 – I don't want your stuff!:**

- The king of Sodom offers Abram the goods (spoils) in exchange for the persons/captives.
- Abram **refuses**, swearing an oath to Yahweh (God Most High) that he will take nothing—not even a thread or sandal strap—so no one can say they made Abram rich.
- He allows his allies (the three Amorite brothers, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre) to take their portions.
- Abram's refusal highlights **faithfulness**: he **rejects** enrichment from Sodom (**worldly riches**) and **credits God alone** as his shield and exceedingly great reward (echoed in the next chapter). Emphasizes separation from worldly ideals for faithfulness to God.
- This **contrasts** with Lot's earlier choice to dwell near/ in Sodom.

**Genesis 15:1 – Do Not Be Afraid:**

- "After these things, the Word of the Lord came to Abram **in a vision**, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield and will be your exceedingly great reward.'"
- Emphasis on **"the Word of the Lord"** (Heb: *Debar Yahweh* / Greek: *Logos*) appearing visibly in a vision — **Abram *sees* the Person** who speaks to him (not just hears a voice).
- This identifies the **pre-incarnate Christ** (the God who is seen and interacts with people).
- *Hypostasis* (Person) - can't see God in His essence, but you can see God in the person of Christ.
- Aramaic Targums (translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) insert *Memra* ("Word") in such theophanies.
- St. John's Gospel Prologue draws directly on this Jewish interpretive tradition, identifying Jesus as the *Logos* who makes the Father known.
- Abram's fear was his 'Achilles heel' in Egypt (with passing Sarai off as his sister). God addresses this as being Abram's **shield**/protector.

**Genesis 15:2-3 – No Heir:**

- Abram expresses doubt due to childlessness; his heir would be **Eliezer of Damascus** (household servant born to a maidservant).
- In ancient extended family/nomadic clan (*mishpacha*) structures, servants could inherit if no biological son existed
- Social units involved adoption/incorporation more than strict **bloodlines**.

**Genesis 15:4 – You will have an heir!:**

- God assures him: "This one shall not be your heir, but the **one who will come from your own body** shall be your heir."
- This seems unlikely given Abram (~85-90) and Sarai's (~80) ages.

**Genesis 15:5 – Star Gaze:**

- God takes Abram outside: "count the stars, if you are able to number them… So shall your seed be."
- Not just quantitative (many descendants, like sand); qualitative: "***So shall your seed*** be" — like the stars.
- In Abram's Mesopotamian context, stars were divine beings/gods!
- God promises descendants: who will become *like gods* (Patristic idea of salvation as theosis/glorification). Also attests to Jesus the Messiah/Son of God from this family line.
- Links to Daniel 12:3 (righteous shine like stars), Christ's teaching on resurrection (equal to angels/sons of God) MT 13:43

**Genesis 15:6 – Faithfulness:**

- "And Abram believed God, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."
- Context: Abram is fearful. Has no heir. Lacking hope. Dishevelled. Emphasis: Belief here is active faithfulness and hope, transforming how Abram lives (not fear-driven, as in Egypt).
- Righteousness = proper order in life (parallels creation account)
- St. Paul in Romans (4:11-12) quotes this (before circumcision) to show justification by faith applies to Gentiles too; Abram was still a Gentile at this time.

**Genesis 15:7 – Out of Ur**

- God identifies Himself as "the God who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."
- This phrasing prefigures/echoes the covenant language later used in Exodus 20 (Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt").
- It signals God initiating a **covenant** with Abram.
- Trivia: Midrashic Jewish interpretations link "Ur of the Chaldeans" (Hebrew play on "fire") to legends of Abram being thrown into a furnace for refusing idols (like Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego)
- **God's choice of Abram** is ultimately mysterious (cf. why the Theotokos or apostles). "Ur of the Chaldeans" is anachronistic (Chaldeans/Neo-Babylonian refer to a later period).
- **Covenant (*beriyth/diathiki*) context** - Ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal (Hittite-style) treaties.
- God (suzerain/great king) identifies Himself, states what He has done, what the vassal (Abram) must do, and what He promises in return, with consequences for breaking it. "**Cut a covenant**" (Hebrew *karat*) foreshadows the ritual.

**Genesis 15:8-11 – Cut it out!**

- Abram asks how he will know he will inherit the land.
- God instructs him to bring a three-year-old heifer, female goat, ram, turtledove, and young pigeon (clean sacrificial animals).
- Abram **cuts** the larger animals **in half** (butterflied), places pieces opposite each other (birds uncut), and drives away vultures. This is the origin of "**cutting a covenant**."
- Altars and sacrifices were **already in use** (ex: Noah, Abram building altars).
- Genesis **retrojects** later Torah elements as built into creation (clean/unclean animals, etc.).

**Genesis 15:12 – Great Darkness**

- At sunset, a trance falls on Abram with "horror and great darkness" — evokes Adam's deep sleep (Eve's creation) but here **terrifying**;
- Foreshadows God's presence in darkness (ex: Mount Sinai).
- Sinful humanity (darkness) cannot fully encounter God's holiness (light) (cf. Isaiah's "Woe is me!").

**Genesis 15:13-16 – Exodus Foretold**

- God prophesies Abram's descendants will be strangers in a foreign land (Egypt), serve and be afflicted ~400 years (sojourn in Egypt/Exodus), after which God will judge that nation and they will exit with great possessions.
- Abram himself will die in peace at a good old age. They return in the fourth generation "for the sin of the Amorites is not yet full" (**cup of iniquity** imagery used throughout Torah/Joshua).
- *Amorites* ("westerners"/*Amurru*) linked to **giant clans/nephilim** traditions (claiming pre-flood divine wisdom).
- God delays giving the land due to **mercy** (desire for repentance) vs. **justice** (cry of victims); eventual judgment when iniquity is full (cf. Sodom). Egypt as a refining "furnace."

**Genesis 15:17 – Pot Smoking!**

- Smoking oven and flaming torch (pillar of fire — Holy Spirit manifestation) pass between the pieces.
- Normally the vassal walks through (self-maledictory oath: "May I be like these animals if I break it").
- Here God (higher party) passes through, vowing to uphold it — even if broken, God will "be split in two" (foreshadows Christ's death to renew the covenant).

**Genesis 15:18-21 – Land Promised**

- Covenant confirmed. Land from river of Egypt to Euphrates given to Abram's seed (plural), listing **giant clans** (Kenites, Kenezzites, etc., including Amorites, Rephaim).
- This broader territory fulfilled via **Abraham's other descendants** (Edomites, Moabites, Ishmaelites, etc.) per Deuteronomy 2(v.5 "I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession"); Israel receives a specific portion (firstborn status, not exclusivity).
- Not modern nation-state of Israel borders.

**Genesis 16:1-3 – Hereditary Hijinks!**

- Sarai (barren) gives her Egyptian **slave** Hagar to Abram as a wife/concubine (likely acquired during the Egypt episode) so that "perhaps **I shall** obtain children by her."
- **Abram obeys Sarai's voice** rather than trusting God's recent covenant oath. Parallels drawn to **Adam obeying Eve** (Genesis 3) and the temptation to "make it happen ourselves" instead of waiting for God's timing (// tree knowledge of good and evil).
- Biblical narrative describes **ancient slavery** (not chattel {property} like the Atlantic trade, but still ownership of one person by another, including sexual use and potential abuse) without endorsement.
- Stories often illustrate its **problems** (similar to how polygamy is shown as dysfunctional).
- The Bible describing an event ≠ divine approval/endorsment.

**Genesis 16:4-6 – Contempt Ahoy!**

- Hagar conceives; she despises Sarai, who then blames Abram.
- Abram abdicates responsibility ("your maid is in your hand; do with her as you please"). Sarai "deals harshly" (abuse/beating) with Hagar, who flees.
- Highlights failures in Abram's leadership and treatment of relationships.

**Genesis 16:7-10 – Nations from Hagar**

- The **Angel of the Lord** (repeated vs 7,9,10,11 - *Hypostasis vs. 13 "the Lord who spoke to her"*) finds Hagar by a spring on the way to Shur. Commands her to return and submit, but promises to **multiply her offspring** exceedingly (echoing Abrahamic promises, as this child is Abram's).
- Emphasizes that **Abraham's descendants include many nations**, not just **exclusively** Israel.

**Genesis 16:11-12 – Ishmael**

- Hagar to name the son **Ishmael** ("God hears"), "for the Lord has taken notice of your humiliation."
- Prophecy: He will be a "wild donkey of a man" (**nomadic**/rustic life, not urban/Cain-like city life), with his hand against every man and vice versa; he dwells in the presence of all his brethren.
- **Positive** in Genesis context (nomadic lifestyle aligns with Abram's calling).
- Ishmaelites linked to later Midianites and broadly to Arabian tribes.

**Genesis 16:13-14 – God sees me**

- Hagar names God **El Ra'i** ("the God who sees me"), declaring she has seen Yahweh face to face (clear **theophany**: Angel of the Lord as second Person of the Trinity/Christ).
- Well is named *Beer Lahai Roi* ("well of the Living One who sees me").
- God's **personal care** for the lowest status person (runaway pregnant slave) underscores human dignity and Torah's critique of slavery.
- Same "face to face" language as Moses later. God (Creator) personally knows, hears, and appears to the marginalized — radically different from Ancient Near Eastern gods. Foreshadows care for the humble (cf. Magnificat).
- All **Abrahamic peoples** (including Ishmael's line) share in promises, with Israel as the channel of blessing to nations, not in opposition.

**Genesis 16:15-16 – It's a boy!**

- Hagar bears Ishmael; Abram (age 86!) names him. Time passes toward further covenant developments.

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