

Genesis 15-"Our Covenant God: A God of Promises"

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Introduction

The living God who reveals himself to His people is a God of promises. He stoops to reveal himself specially and specifically to his people. He promises verbally to those who believe him that what he says - - **He will do**. But God also promises us by showing us his grace visually. In our study today, we want to consider God's verbal and visual promise made to Abram and to all of those who would believe God -- like Abram.

When we think of the term 'covenant', it can be a difficult term to define. To put it simply however, the word 'covenant' has to do with God's promises to His people. 'Covenant' is the way God binds himself, or promises, or vows to his people that he will save them. God binds himself with a verbal promise to his people, in Genesis 15, to Abram. He then "signs" his promise with blood visually (which we will see in Genesis 15:8ff), then he makes sure, or guarantees that what he promises both verbally and visually will come to pass.

Let us read Genesis 15, then begin our study today!

Genesis 15

Genesis 15: After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." 2 But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." 4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." 5 And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. 7 And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." 8 But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9 He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. 11 And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. 14 But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. 16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." 17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

God Promises Abraham Verbally

In Genesis 15:1-5, God promises to Abram verbally that he will keep his word to him and give him numerous descendants by his grace!

Remember that Abram had left his land of Ur of the Chaldeans by faith because the LORD had appeared to him and told him to leave the land of his fathers. The LORD was going to bless him with a great inheritance as he promised him in Genesis 12: 1-4:

when he left his home and believed God's promises. However, this time, for the first time, Moses teaches us that Abram's faith was credited or reckoned to him as righteousness.

Abram knew that if any of God's promises were to come to pass, it would not be based upon his own wisdom and efforts, but it must be dependent on the LORD who had revealed himself to Abram and will continue to be faithful to him. God has sovereignly and graciously revealed himself to Abram by promising him a great reward and inheritance, and all Abram had to do was believe. This can be quite amazing when you think about it. The LORD, the Sovereign Creator of heaven and earth appeared to a simple and sinful Chaldean man to bring him knowledge of himself and to even reward him with a great inheritance- -all because of faith!

It is just because that faith is extraspective in character. That is, it looks away from oneself to the only LORD and God that can truly provide; the only God who man can truly believe. This great and sovereign God revealed himself to Abram in a vision, just so he could bless he and his descendents. What grace the LORD shows to his people. Sure Abram had concerns about how this was all going to "pan out"- - he is human. He doesn't know how this will all come about, but because God has graciously revealed himself to Abram, he knows the LORD is able to keep his promises. In fact, the LORD not only accommodated and stooped to reveal himself to sinful Abram, but was about confirm his promise in an even more astounding manner. What was about to happen, Abram could have never imagined.

God Confirms His Promise to Abraham

Genesis 15:7-21: And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." 8 But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9 He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; 14 but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. 16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." 17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

So Abram had believed God and God credited this or reckoned this to him as righteousness, nevertheless Abram sought a little bit more information. He believes God and believes God can do it, but he wants to know how. He asks, "But LORD how am I to know that I will possess it?" You see, faith is imperfect. Abram's faith was not a perfect faith. It was a small faith, but God was great. In God's sovereignty, he had enabled Abram to believe, but Abram still had questions.

As we all do from time to time. You know, when we have those questions of God's goodness and the "how's" that we all have now and then, we need to be reminded of this. We should never ask: "Why?", but "WHO?" That is, when we are troubled by situations and circumstances, we should be reminded never to try and penetrate the mystery of God's purposes (the "why's", but simply to rest on Who He is and how He has always revealed himself as faithful and committed to his people (the "WHO")!

The LORD then tells Abram to participate with him in a covenant ceremony. The LORD was not only gracious enough to promise Abram a great inheritance, he was willing visually to show Abram just

ceremonies that Abram was familiar with would be where the people, like himself, would walk through the bloody path of animal pieces.

In contrast, what we have here is not only the unexpected, but the unbelievable. The Sovereign LORD of heaven and earth has not only revealed himself by his grace to sinful man in spite of what they deserve; he has not only promised, literally the world to Abram and his seed; he has not only reckoned Abram righteous because of his faith and belief in God's promises; but God covenants with Abram that if the promises are not kept, God himself would be cut in half, God would have to die!

The symbolism of the smoking fire and flaming torch, or the cloud and the fire that God reveals himself through later, is none other than an appearance of God Almighty as he passes through the pieces. This is not just amazing grace, but astounding grace! This is incomprehensible grace, but then that is the YHWH who Abram believed by faith!

In the fullness of time, God does come as man in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus does walk the bloody path, not with the blood of the halved animals forming a path, but with his own blood and the blood of others as he walked the via dolorosa, or way of suffering, to the cross. This is what Galatians 3 is all about when it said that Jesus became a "curse" for us (Gal. 3:10-13).

The incredible news of God's gospel and promise to his people is that in order to fulfill the promises to Abram and to HIS Seed, which is Christ (Gal. 3), God would come and take upon himself the covenant curses in order to keep his promises to his people!

Weekly Commemorative Covenant Ceremonies for the People of God

As the people of God, when we look upon the cross of Jesus Christ, let us be reminded that God always keeps his promises to his people! When we come together for worship on the Lord's Day, let us be reminded that through the preaching of God's Word, God is still verbally promising us that he is faithful - and his people respond by faith. When we come together and take the Lord's Supper or participate in baptism, we are visually seeing God's promises to his people. When we believe together as a people God's Word, both verbal and visual, so we commit to one another, and honor other above ourselves because of God's commitment to us. You could say that every time we worship together, it is a covenant ceremony commemorated! Praise be to God for his faithfulness!

No matter what your difficult situation or circumstance, rest in the LORD who keeps his promises to his people. No matter how many have caused you to distrust, become cynical, or unbelieving of promises in this world. Believe God! Because in the cross of Christ we see the "yes" and we yell "amen" to the glory of God - because God is a promise-keeping God! When we think of our commitment to God, let us first think of His commitment to us. Then in light of His commitment may we live our lives committed in love to Him and to our neighbor around us!

Soli Deo Gloria!

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