

**SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY**  
**Week 7: Genesis 15 – God’s Covenant with Abram**

So, we left off last week with the following questions:

- Will Abraham believe that God will keep God’s promise?
- Will Abraham remain faithful to God if it *appears* that God is not being faithful to him?

And those questions can be asked of all God’s people:

- Do we trust that God will keep God’s promise to us?

**KEY THEMES OF GENESIS 12-50 – THE FOUR PATRIARCHS: ABRAHAM, ISAAC, JACOB, AND JOSEPH**

There are five key themes that we are going to be able to see throughout the rest of the book of Genesis:

- 1) **God is going to choose one family so that God can rescue all the nations;** God will rescue all of humanity through God’s covenant with Abram.
- 2) **God’s blessing to the nations through Abram provides the foundational storyline for the rest of the bible.**
- 3) **God’s choice of Abram’s family doesn’t mean that they are perfect.** On the contrary, they are very dysfunctional. It’s on account of God’s faithfulness and not theirs that God’s promises are fulfilled. Look at just how dysfunctional they are:
  - a. Abraham tries to give away his wife (Genesis 12, 20)
  - b. Sarah forces God’s hand by having Abraham sleep with Hagar (Genesis 16, 21)
  - c. Isaac gives away his wife Rebekah (Genesis 26)
  - d. Jacob is a thief and a liar (Genesis 25, 27)
  - e. Joseph’s brothers try to kill him (Genesis 37)
- 4) **God remains faithful to them and constantly intervenes to rescue them.**
  - a. Rescues Sarah twice (Genesis 12:17-20; 20:6-10) and Rebecca once (Genesis 26:8-10)
  - b. Provides an heir for Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18, 21)
  - c. Protects Jacob despite his selfishness and deception (Genesis 27-35)
  - d. Transforms the intentions of Joseph’s brothers into something that saves nations from famine (Genesis 50:20)
- 5) **God works through people of low status who are weak and marginalized**
  - a. Not the firstborn sons: Abel instead of Cain; Isaac instead of Ishmael, Jacob instead of Esau, Joseph instead of Reuben
  - b. Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21:8-10)
  - c. Leah the unloved wife (Genesis 29:31-35)
  - d. Joseph the despised brother (Genesis 37-50)

Watch video from The Bible Project called “[Covenants](#)”.

**SYNOPSIS OF GENESIS 12-15**

What has happened between the time Abram first appears on the scene in chapter 12 until we get to chapter 15?

**CHAPTER 12**

God calls Abram (from Ur of the Chaldeans).

**The Promises:** God promises that Abram will found a great nation; and God will bless him, make his name great, and cause him to bless others. Everyone on earth will be blessed through him.

**The Travels:** Abram then travels from **Ur** to **Haran** and from **Haran** to **Canaan**. First, he stops at **Shechem** and Abram builds an altar there. Then he stops at **Bethel** and builds another altar. But, then there’s a famine and he travels from **Canaan** to **Egypt** to escape the famine.

**In Egypt:** Abram is afraid for his life, and so he tells his wife Sarai to pretend that she is his sister. Pharaoh rewards Abram with riches for Sarai’s sake, and he takes Sarai into his home to be one of his wives. But God intervenes and

sends plagues to Pharaoh and his household. So, Pharaoh rebukes Abrams for lying to him and sends he and Sarai on their way back to Canaan.

### CHAPTER 13

**Back at Bethel:** Abram worships God again (vs. 1-4). But, the herdsmen of Abram and Lot (his nephew) have a dispute over grazing rights (vs. 5-7). To settle the dispute, Lot is allowed to select his own land and Lot foolishly chooses land close the city of Sodom (vs. 8-13). After Lot's departure, God again promises to make Abram's descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth and to give them the land of Canaan (vs 14-18).

### CHAPTER 14

Five Canaanite city-states rebel against Kedorlaomer of Elam (vs. 1-4). Kedorlaomer and his allies defeat the armies of the five city-states, plunder their cities, and carry many people away as slaves (vs. 5-11). Lot, now living in Sodom, is taken away as a slave (vs. 12). Upon learning of Lot's capture, Abram and his 318 trained servants ride out to rescue Lot (vs. 13-14). Abram divides his mean and initiates a surprise attack at night (vs. 15). Kedorlaomer is defeated, and Lot is rescued (vs. 16). As Abram is returning from battle to his home in Hebron, Abram meets Melchizedek, who blesses him. Abram offers him a tenth of all the goods he has recovered from Kedorlaomer (vs. 17-20). In stark contrast, Abram refuses to have any fellowship with Bera, king of wicked Sodom (vs. 21-24).

#### Genesis 15 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." <sup>2</sup> 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?" <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." <sup>4</sup> But the word of the Lord came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup> He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." <sup>6</sup> And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness. <sup>7</sup> Then he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." <sup>8</sup> But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. <sup>11</sup> And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. <sup>12</sup> As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; <sup>14</sup> but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. <sup>16</sup> And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." <sup>17</sup> When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

### CHAPTER 15

When we turn to chapter 15, we see that Abram begins to express some doubt that God will keep God's promise. Abram complains that upon his death, all his goods will be passed on to Eliezer, one of his servants from Damascus. Eliezer will then become the heir to the covenant (vs. 1-3).

God responds and tells Abram that the promised heir will be Abram's own son and that Abram's descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens (vs. 4-5). Abram's response: "And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord declared him righteous because of his faith" (vs. 6). Abram believes that God will give him a son, but he isn't so sure about the land. He wants more proof than just God's word on this one (vs. 8). To ratify the promise made to Abram, God makes a covenant sealed by blood (vs. 7-11). At sunset, Abram falls into a deep sleep and sees troubling visions (vs. 12). God then speaks to Abram in his sleep, telling him his descendants will be enslaved for four hundred years. God also tells

him that the oppressors will be punished, and that Abram's descendants will be set free and depart with great riches (vs. 13-16).

Notice that the covenant in Genesis 15 is all about what God promises to do for Abraham. Other covenants from the ancient world between kings and subjects are a two-way street: "I am your king, and here is what I am going to do for you (protection from invaders), and here is what you will do for me (pay me tribute, worship me, don't rebel against me). God's covenant with Abraham is different: "I am your God and this is what I will do for you." Period.

A smoking firepot and a flaming torch, probably symbolizing God, pass between the dead animals of the blood covenant (vs. 17). Then God reveals to Abram the boundaries of the Promised Land, from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates River (vs. 18-21). God even takes it a step further. In the form of a smoking firepot and blazing torch (God's appearances in the Old Testament are often in the form of fire), he passes in between the severed pieces of sacrificial animals. God was taking an oath: "May I be like these pieces, cut in half, if I don't follow through on the promise." God means business. The plan is going forward no matter what. (Later, in Exodus 2:24-25, we will see that the whole deliverance from Egypt business was all about God keeping this very promise to Abraham.

Abraham is promised that he will be fruitful and multiply—God will give him a brood of descendants. And he is promised a land for them to call their own, a land that would later be called a land of "milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8), shorthand for a paradise-like piece of property—like Eden. People and land. This promise to Abraham is not random. God is on the move to create a people and place for them in Canaan—just as God had placed Adam in Eden.