

## Genesis/God's Covenant/15:7-21

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### MAIN POINT

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God's covenants are not based on my ability or works, and we need to trust with God with our life.



### INTRODUCTION

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As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**ICE BREAKER QUESTION:** What kinds of covenants have you entered into in your life? How important are covenants?

Marriage is a covenant. A mortgage is a kind of covenant. When someone enters the military, that person takes an oath, which is a covenant. Presidents of the United States, senators, and representatives take oaths of office. We make an oath before we testify in court. Covenants, as we see, are things that we must not take lightly.

God Almighty made a covenant with a man named Abraham. God promised Abraham a son, and through that son, God promised him many offspring. The covenant changed Abram (Exalted Father) to Abraham (Father of Many). It also altered the course of the lives of Abraham's descendants forever. God gave this covenant to Abraham, not because Abraham was good, but entirely by God's character of grace. Abraham did not enter the covenant by great deeds; he entered it by simple faith, the same way we enter today.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. **What insight, lesson, or observation from this weekend's message did you find to be the most helpful, eye-opening, or troubling? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**
2. **Why do you think the Lord reminds Abraham that it was He who "brought [him] from Ur of the Chaldeans to give [him] this land to possess" (15:7)?**

The Lord reminds Abraham that He is the one who brought him to this point so that Abraham could remember God's faithfulness up to this point. God had never failed

Abraham, and because of this, Abraham could be confident He would not fail him in the future. Give the group also time to process and think for themselves as well.

**3. What does verse 8 tell us about Abram's faith? Is that encouraging or discouraging to you? Why?**

That verse showed us that Abram has doubts just like us and is not this mythical man who we could never be like. Saving faith is not always perfect faith. Abram himself cried out to God a couple of verses later, immediately after God had just reminded him of the promise He would keep. After everything, Abram's heart was still saying, "Yes, I believe You, but how will I know that You are going to come through?" God credits our faith in Him to us as righteousness, but we also have fears, doubts, and struggles.

This should encourage us as we get to see Abram as this normal man just like us who has doubts but God will never fail on His promises.

**4. How did God answer Abram's question in verse 8? What is the significance of cutting the offerings in half and Abram's vision?**

God answers Abram by establishing a covenant to show that was going to uphold the promise. God was specific with the covenant, and he used a more vivid method to help Abram believe the promise.

God does not chastise Abram for His lack of faith; rather, He tells Abram to cut up various animals and to lay their pieces side by side in a line with a pathway between the pieces (vv. 9–11). The animals were cut in half by custom. It is said that in ancient Middle Eastern covenants, sacrifices would be arranged like this so the covenanting parties could walk between them. In essence, they were promising that if they broke the covenant, they would become like the dead animals!

It is important to note that Abraham never walked between the pieces. God alone went (the "smoking fire pot and flaming torch" in verse 17 are symbols for the presence of God). This is to teach us that God takes all the responsibility to bless Abraham and His descendants upon Himself. It would not be by Abraham's works or ability to keep the covenant; God Himself would keep it by grace. Even though Abraham would at times be unfaithful, and even though all of Abraham's descendants would be, God would still send the Messiah to bless all the nations. The blessing is that whoever believes in the Messiah, as Abraham did, would find salvation through Him by grace through faith.

Smoke and fire are symbols in the Old Testament of God's presence. God met Moses in a burning bush (Ex. 3:2) and God led Israel out of Egypt in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21-22). Thus in verse 17, God Himself passes between the pieces of the animals. By doing this, God was promising to bear the consequences of His own covenant (2 Corinthians 5:21). As the lesser person in the covenant, Abraham should have passed between the pieces, but instead God passes through the pieces giving us sure hope that He would fulfill His promises to Abraham and to us as the covenant God made with Abraham has been extended to us through Christ (Rom. 4:23-25).

a. **How does this story remind you of the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

This covenant is foreshadowing what happens on the cross and this idea is stated well by Iain Duguid:

“By what figure could God have demonstrated his commitment more graphically to Abram? How could it have been displayed more vividly? The only way would have been for the figure to become a reality, for the ever living God to take on human nature and taste death in the place of the covenant-breaking children of Abram. And that is precisely what God did in Jesus Christ. On the cross, the covenant curse fell completely on Jesus, so that the guilty ones who place their trust in him might experience the blessings of the covenant. Jesus bore the punishment for our sins, so that God might be our God and we might be his people”

5. **Does it surprise you that God revealed so much of what would lie ahead to Abram? Explain.**

It is interesting at this point that God revealed so much of what lie ahead, as up to this point God did not give that much detail when he was talking about the promises and Abraham’s future. God would tell Abram about a promise but then would not tell him exactly where he was going, how he was going to acquire that promise, when it would happen and why.

God might be giving Abraham what he needed to trust God through the next seasons of life and pass in peace in a “good old age”. This is a good reminder that we have a gracious God who is gentle and patient with us when we have troubling trusting.

6. **What promise that God makes to Abraham amazes you the most? What does it look like to trust in God’s promises?**

There are so many amazing things that God does in this passage. God answered Abram’s questions by assuming the full risk of the covenant. He walked through the slaughtered animals as a sign of His faithfulness to Abram. In other words, if He didn’t fulfill His promises, then let His holiness and perfection be chopped into pieces like the animals. God provided a reminder. In essence, God was letting Abram know that nothing would stand in the way of His faithfulness to him.

When we trust in God’s promises we will respond like Abram after God telling Abram to count the stars and showing He would fulfill the covenant all by Himself. We see other good reminders on what it is like to trust God in His Word below:

**2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NIV)**

<sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

### **Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
<sup>6</sup> in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.<sup>[a]</sup>

#### **7. How can we know, like Abram, that we will possess all of God's amazing promises?**

Abraham had God's word and that is how He knew He would possess all of the amazing promises. We can know in a similar way by trusting in God's written Word. Scripture gives us many reminders on the promises He makes to His children.

There is a difference however in a principle and a promise in God's word. God's principles are God's commands for how we should live our lives, but the result of the principle is not a promise. The proverbs are great example of God's principles. Proverbs present biblical truths that in general are usually true. A proverb should not be viewed as a firm promise that automatically comes true in every instance. Some good examples are below:

### **Proverbs 27:23-27 (NIV)**

<sup>23</sup> Be sure you know the condition of your flocks,  
give careful attention to your herds;  
<sup>24</sup> for riches do not endure forever,  
and a crown is not secure for all generations.  
<sup>25</sup> When the hay is removed and new growth appears  
and the grass from the hills is gathered in,  
<sup>26</sup> the lambs will provide you with clothing,  
and the goats with the price of a field.  
<sup>27</sup> You will have plenty of goats' milk to feed your family  
and to nourish your female servants.

### **Proverbs 22:6**

New International Version

<sup>6</sup> Start children off on the way they should go,  
and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

Then we have promises in God's word of what God says he will keep. Some examples are below:

### **John 16:33 (NIV)**

<sup>33</sup> "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

## 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NIV)

<sup>9</sup> But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

### 8. What emotion do you experience when you’re reminded that God is actively at work on behalf of His people?

- a. What is one step you could take toward being more mindful of God’s faithfulness?

When we see God at work in others it should encourage us and embolden us in our faith. We are then reminded of how great our God is and reminded that He is always at work in this world for His good plan.

It will most likely look different for each person to be more mindful of God’s faithfulness, but we can all look to God’s word and past experiences in our own lives for ways to be mindful.

## Romans 1:11-12 (NIV)

“I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong- that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith”

## 2 Corinthians 1:3-6

“Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.”

## Conclusion

This is done before Abram’s name is changed to Abraham. It is done before any commands are given. God is pledging that no matter what His people do, He will fulfill the promise. To be sure, obedience on our part does matter. But God, knowing the extent of our sin, shows us that it is He alone who will be able to fulfill the covenant. It is God who must take the necessary steps in order to reckon us obedient to the covenant.

At this point in the Abrahamic covenant, God takes it upon Himself to make sure the covenant is fulfilled. But God was making Himself responsible for this long before Abraham was born. God's children are His solely due to His electing grace. Remember that you are a believer only because God chose you.

## **PRAYER**

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Close the meeting with a prayer of thankfulness to God's faithfulness. Thank the Father that we, too, are children of Abraham by promise because of God's faithfulness to us. Thank the Father that He sent the Son of Promise, Jesus Christ, to bless the nations and save us from our sins.



### **FURTHER STUDY**



#### **Jeremiah 34:18-20 (NIV)**

<sup>18</sup> Those who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. <sup>19</sup> The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, <sup>20</sup> I will deliver into the hands of their enemies who want to kill them. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds and the wild animals.

#### **Romans 9:16-18 (NIV)**

<sup>16</sup> It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. <sup>17</sup> For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>18</sup> Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.



“Settle this in your heart: Whether I am up or down, the Lord Jesus is the same. Whether I sing or sigh, the promise is true and the Promiser is faithful. Whether I stand on the summit or am hidden in the vale the covenant stands fast and everlasting love abides.”

**Charles Spurgeon**

Those that set God always before them and walk before him with all their hearts, shall find him as good as his word and better; he will both keep covenant with them and show mercy to them.

**Matthew Henry**

## **Additional Resources**

Devotionals-

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/abrahamic-covenant-ii/>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/our-great-reward/>

Articles –

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/do-promises-in-the-psalms-apply-to-me>

Sermon-

<https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/abraham-and-the-torch-5860/>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-covenant-of-abraham>