

Genesis 15:7-21 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 you, 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."

Announcements:

1. Membership is available at info@redemptiondenver.com
2. RCD Kids Volunteer Training: 3/14 11am -1pm

Genesis 15:7-21 | Cost of the Covenant

As Christians we are heirs to the unthinkable riches of the promises of God. We have verses like the one in Romans 8, in which God promises that he causes all things to work together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. That is about as good of a promise as you can receive. But how do you know you will receive it? How do you know?

The question of how do I know becomes deeply meaningful when we press these promises of God into the darkest spaces of our own lives. How do I know that God will cause the abuse I suffered to work together for good. How do I know that the abandonment I've experienced will work together for good. How do I know that my unsatisfied longing to be married will work together for good, or my disappointment with my marriage will work together for good? Or what about the sins that I myself commit? How do I know.

Abram is given amazing promises from the Lord concerning his offspring and land that is promised to him, but Abram's question is precisely like ours, how do I know?

1. The Question

Genesis 15:7-8 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?"

Last week we looked at the first part of this conversation between God and Abram, they discussed the promise of a son. God had promised Abram an heir that would come from his own loins, but Abram's faith is pushed because after years, there is no heir. Likewise, God has promised Abram this land, the land of Canaan, and while Abram faithfully left his home to pursue it, there has been no realization of the land. He still lives as an unsettled sojourner.

God in speaking to Abram brings him right back to the origin of his story. God first called him to leave everything he knew to go to a place God promised him but where he'd never been before. Abram faithfully left. But at the first experience of hardship in the land Abram fled to Egypt. Since then Abram has demonstrated a faithfulness to remain in the land even when hardship arises, but still he remains without the land. So when God brings up his origin and Abram's initial response of faith, Abram is pressed right into the question of "is this ever really going to happen?"

It is the dark, unfulfilled, remaining injustices, sinful patterns, that press us into this deep question of our faith. "How am I to know what the Lord promises will come to be?"

We talked about this last week, how Abram's question about his future offspring was not a doubting of the promise but an expression of his faith with a recognition that his faith needs help from God. We see the same thing here. John Calvin notes regarding Abram's question:

The wicked, because their minds are entangled with various conflicting thoughts, do not in any way receive the promises, but the pious, who feel the impediments in their flesh, endeavor to remove them, lest they should obstruct the way to God's word; and they seek a remedy for those evils of which they are conscious. (Calvin Ge):

Abram feels the impediment to his belief in God in his own flesh. Many of you do as well, but you don't have the faith to trust God with your weakness. So you hide it, or try and solve it with your own mind, or your own psychology or your own new strategy of the month. But Abram trusts God, so he brings his question right to the one he trusts. "God how will I know that I'm going to possess it?" Here is God's answer;

Genesis 15:9-10 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.

Alright, perhaps not helpful, at least to our ears, but for Abram's ears it would have made perfect sense. How do I know? Well God enters into the language of promises that Abram has available, and that is the language of a covenant. In our time it would be the language of a contract. What Abram heard when God said this was, if you don't believe me, I had the contract written up and it's right here. In our modern contracts we draw something up which causes both parties to put skin in the game, by our signatures we are rendered accountable. The old way was like that but perhaps a bit more intense. Jeremiah sheds some light on the practice:

Jeremiah 34:18 And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts—

The parts of the animals were cut in half and made to be an aisle, and those who transgressed the terms of the covenant would be made like the animals. Skin in the game. This was how the covenant was demonstrated. Both parties take on the consequences by passing through the animals.

2. Salvation through Judgement

Genesis 15:12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.

The form of the contract is laid out, but God provides a somber tone. In Abram's sleep God speaks to him and shares details of how God will fulfill his promise. It is a more complicated story than Abram would have probably liked. It always is. God shows two examples of his salvation, both through judgement.

Genesis 15:13-14 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.

Abram, prepare to have your time frame exploded. God is thinking in terms of centuries. Abram's offspring of course will develop in Egypt and they will be oppressed. But God will save them by judging the oppression of the Egyptians. And they will leave Egypt having prospered. Salvation through Judgement.

Genesis 15:15-16 As for you, 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."

Next God shares the story of Abram himself, he will die in peace in a good old age. It is a comforting promise from the Lord. And his offspring will come back from Egypt but not for a long time because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. This phrase sheds light on the purpose beneath the conquest of the promised land. The war's lead by Joshua to take the promised land were the judgement of God against wicked peoples. Once again we see that they are to receive the promised land through judgement. Salvation through judgment.

The promise of God to Abram has been made explicit, the terms have been set, and now is the time to enact the covenant.

3. The Answer

Genesis 15:17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

This is one of those rare moments in scripture where God makes himself seen. It is called a theophany, an image of God and here in two forms, a smoking pot and a flaming torch. God reveals himself as the smoking cloud of judgement and the flaming torch of light. He shows himself as the light breaking out of the darkness of the smoke. God is the smoke and the light. The judgement and the deliverance. As these two images God passes through the aisle of the animal carcasses.

Thus God is saying to Abram, If I do not fulfill my side of the covenant then I will become like these animal carcasses. But notice, Abram is never asked to pass through. God in his two images passes through twice.

God is saying to Abram, "If I do not fulfill my side of this covenant than I will die, and if you do not fulfill your side of the covenant then I will die." God takes the curse of the covenant upon himself. This is the gospel.

Yes God but how do I know? Do you see how we know. Because we too are saved through judgement. We are the covenant breakers, but God caused the iniquity of us all to fall upon him. Jesus on the cross dies because that's what we deserve for breaking the covenant.

How do we know God will fulfill his promises? We look to Jesus taking upon himself the curse of our faithlessness.

Nobody but Gimli wanted to go through the Mines of Moria. But Gandalf was in charge and he knew that it was the only way. Aragorn trusted Gandalf, so he spoke to the group and he said this;

Do not be afraid! I have been with him on many a journey,
if never on one so dark; ... He will not go astray - if there is
any path to find. He has led us in here against our fears,
but he will lead us out again, at whatever cost to himself.

Aragorn keeps moving through the darkness because he knows that Gandalf would die to protect them. Run into your darkness knowing that Christ has died to protect you.

This is the kindness of the Lord, that he died for you. Oh it is a severe kindness, almost unbearable. Because of you he had to die, and because of his love towards you he did. Trust him. Trust him.