

3. The scene with the sacrificial animals is a bit strange to us, but it would have been all too familiar to Abram. Whenever a great king made a covenant with a client king, he would require the client to declare an oath of loyalty and walk through the severed animals as a sign of good faith. The client king was in effect saying, may I suffer the same fate as these animals if I fail to live up to this agreement. Abram probably prepared the animals thinking he would walk through them. God would stipulate his terms. Abram would swear his loyalty, and God would fulfill his promise if and only if Abram was able to live up to his end of the bargain. The billows of smoke and flame represent God (see Exodus 13:21; 19:18; Isaiah 4:5). It is God, not Abram who walks between the severed carcasses. God is in effect saying, I take full responsibility for the fulfillment of these promises, and do so at the expense of my life.

- a. What is remarkable about this scene?
- b. What are some of the ways this event reminds us of what God has accomplished for us in Christ?
- c. What does it tell us about God's level of commitment to his promises?
- d. What does it tell us about his level of commitment to his people?



When we meet Abram in Genesis 15, he is in a bit of a funk. He has been following God for the better part of two decades. God has made some significant promises to Abram, and he has come through for Abram in some remarkable ways. But God's greater promises seem just out of reach. Abram was promised he would become a great nation, but he remains childless. Abram has enjoyed some fantastic panoramas of the land his descendants would one day enjoy, but he has no place to call his own. We find Abram in a moment of doubt.

God offers Abram the reassurance he so desperately needs. The chapter begins with a command and promise. It ends with an extraordinary act of commitment. The Sovereign Lord of the universe binds himself to Abram as if Abram were the sovereign, and God were his vassal. There few places in the Old Testament where the gospel is more vividly on display than it is in Genesis 15.

A COMMAND AND A PROMISE (v. 1)

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

*"Do not be afraid, Abram.
I am your shield, ^s
your very great reward. ^t"*

1. One of the more frequent commands in Scripture is "Do not be afraid." When our fears and anxieties become larger than life, the promises of God are often lost in the noise.
 - a. How would you describe Abram's fears and anxieties?
 - b. What are some of the things we tend to be anxious about?

- c. What happens when our anxieties become larger than life?
2. How does God introduce himself to Abram in this passage?
3. What do you think God means when he tells Abram, “I am your shield?”
4. How has God been Abram’s shield so far in the story?
5. What do you think God means when he tells Abram “I am... your very great reward?”
6. How is God our “shield” and “very great reward?”
7. What happens when we fail to realize that God is our “very great reward?”

A MOMENT OF DOUBT (vv. 2-6)

² But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?”

³ And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

⁴ Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” ⁵ He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

⁶ Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

1. God promised Abram he would become a great nation. Abram’s greatest fear is that he would remain childless and his servant would inherit his estate. Rather than pointing Abram back to his initial promise, God enlarges his promise and makes it even more vivid.
 - a. How does God build on his previous promise?
 - b. How does he make the promise even more vivid?
 - c. What do we learn about God’s patience in this passage?
 - d. What do we learn about the nature of his promises?
 - e. How can we draw comfort from this passage?
2. Abram will prove to be a remarkable person, but he will never be righteous in his own right. Even though he is commended for believing God, he will succumb to doubt.
 - a. What do you think it means to “believe the Lord?”

- b. What does it mean for “believing the Lord” to “credited as righteousness?”
- c. How does this describe our relationship with Christ?
3. What will our life look like when we are indeed “believing the Lord?”

AN EXTRAORDINARY ACT OF COMMITMENT (vv. 7-21)

⁷ He also said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.” ⁸ But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

⁹ So the Lord said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.

¹³ Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. ¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”

¹⁷ When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

1. Not only does Abram have a hard time believing he will have an heir, he also has a hard time believing his descendants will inherit the land. Abram will live to see an heir, but he will go to the grave without significant holdings in the land.

How does God reassure him that this promise will come to pass?
2. God offers some hard truth along with firm reassurances.
 - a. Why do you think it was important for Abram to hear both?