

Theme: God's Covenant is given in order to confirm His promises so that we might trust that God will fulfill everything He has promised.

I. Intro - Mom, Is that true?

- A. Pulling my kids legs
- B. How they confirm the truth – go to Mom!
- C. How can we verify the truth?
- D. The ancient method – covenant oaths
- E. This is one of the greatest of these in Scripture

II. God's Promises & Abram's Struggles

- A. God had given Abram great promises (Genesis 12:1-3)
 - 1. Posterity - a nation of descendants
 - 2. Provision - God's blessing, and the Promised Land
 - 3. Protection - God would protect Abram
 - 4. God gives them anew in our text
After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Genesis 15:1
- B. Abram's struggle - and ours
 - 1. God had been protecting Abram - but he was surrounded by potential enemies (Genesis 14)
 - 2. But there were no descendants after many years
But Abram said, "O 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." Genesis 15:2–3

- 3. Abram had not yet possessed the land promised
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, "O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" Genesis 15:7–8
- 4. Circumstances are eclipsing Abram's faith - how can he know?
- 5. When circumstances eclipse our memory of God's promises to us, our faith begins to waiver

III. God Confirms His Promise By Covenant

- A. A strange response from God
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." Genesis 15:9
 - 1. What a strange response! How will this help?
 - 2. God is setting up a covenant ceremony - an oath will be made
 - a. Abram knows what to do without being told
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. Genesis 15:10
 - b. God refers to this as a covenant
On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram ... Genesis 15:18
- B. Understanding this covenant ceremony
 - 1. Animals are slain and cut in half to form a path between the parts of the animals
 - 2. Parties making a covenant walk between the pieces

3. Parties take a self-maledictory oath - "May this happen to me if I do not keep this covenant"

- a. We know this from other documents of ancient covenant ceremonies
- b. Jeremiah 34 speaks of a similar ceremony
 1. Rulers took oath to free slaves, but broke it
The word came to Jeremiah from the Lord after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for the slaves... ¹¹But afterward they changed their minds and took back the slaves they had freed and enslaved them again. Jeremiah 34:8, 11
 2. The covenant breakers will bear the penalty - death!
The men 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. ¹⁹The 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, ²⁰ I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. Jeremiah 34:18–20
4. Cost of broken covenant is death - just like the animals!

IV. The Covenant Oath

A. Hard times will seem to threaten the promises

As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. ¹³Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. Genesis 15:12–13

1. Thick and dreadful darkness surrounds Abram

2. Promise threatened by hard times - slavery
3. Promise threatened by delay - 400 years!
4. Will Abram & seed be able to keep the covenant?
5. Perhaps Abram should reconsider!

B. God alone takes the covenant oath

As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him... 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... Genesis 15:12, 17–18

1. Abram is asleep when the covenant is made
2. Smoking firepot and blazing torch - a theophany (same words as when God comes down at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19-20)
3. God alone bears responsibility to keep the covenant
4. If Abram and their descendants fail to walk faithfully - and they most certainly will - God will take the covenant curse upon Himself
5. No matter what comes, Abram will never be forsaken - for God's own Son will bear the covenant curse, being forsaken, crushed and killed for us!
6. No matter the circumstances, we are never forsaken for Christ has taken the covenant oath and borne the curse in our place - this is the Gospel!

V. Applying the Word

A. Abram's response of faith

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6

1. Abram believed God and was credited as righteous
2. The NT tells us this is justification by faith alone
3. This is another example of Gospel rather than law
4. We do not live by our own works, but by God's faithfulness
5. If you have never embraced Christ by faith - do so today!

B. Trusting in God's covenant promises

1. Like Abram, our circumstances can cloud God's promises
2. But we have every reason to trust in God's covenant
3. Christ has already come and fulfilled the covenant
4. Christ has already borne the covenant curse
5. If God did not spare His Son, how can we doubt He will fulfill His promises to us?

C. A prayer of trust

Trusting In God's Covenant Promises

Genesis 15
January 10, 2016
Prayer

Deuteronomy 1:11

Teaching keywords: covenant; blessing; faith; justification

May the Lord, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised! Deuteronomy 1:11

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

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

2 But Abram said, “O 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 coming from your own body will be your heir.” 5 He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens 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.

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, “O 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 your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 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 fathers 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 river 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.” Genesis 15:1–21

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:31–39