

God's Covenants

Embracing The Covenant Promise By Faith

Key idea:

God's Covenant is given in order to confirm His promises so that we might embrace them by faith.

Key text:

Genesis 15

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, ²⁰Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

Key points:

1. In Genesis 12:7 God had summarized his covenant promises to Abram in two great promises: offspring and land.
2. In Genesis 15 Abram is struggling with doubt because he has no children or land. Circumstances are casting doubt on God’s promises.
3. God bolsters Abram’s faith regarding the promise for offspring by telling him they will outnumber the stars.
4. God initiates a covenant ceremony with Abram to confirm His promises to give Abram and his offspring land. This covenant ceremony was common and well known in the ancient world. Normally both parties in the covenant would walk between the pieces of the slain animals as a symbol that if they did not keep their covenant vows they would be slain like the animals.
5. When the time came for the ceremony Abram was in a deep sleep, and God (represented by the flaming torch and smoking pot) walked between the pieces. God would bear the responsibility and curse for the covenant alone.
6. Abram’s responsibility is to respond to God and His covenant promises in faith.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday’s text and teaching stood out most to me? Why?
2. Years after God’s initial promises to Abram, circumstances made it look like the promises were not being fulfilled. Can I think of similar events in my own life where circumstances began to make me doubt God’s promises? How can my faith be strengthened in such times?
3. God tells Abram that his descendants will be like the number of stars. How does this sign serve to strengthen Abram’s faith? When I consider that there are actually far more stars than Abram even realized, what does that tell me about the nature of God’s promises and their fulfillment?

4. Why is it important that Abram is asleep when the covenant ceremony is enacted? What does this tell me about the nature of how God's promises are fulfilled?
5. How does this covenant ceremony find its fulfillment in Jesus Christ? How does it point me to the Gospel?
6. How does Abram respond in Genesis 15:6? Why does the New Testament make so much of this response? Why is faith THE response that God demands?
7. Can I think of any areas where my trust in God's promises is wavering at present? How can God's covenant in Christ bolster my response of faith?
8. Whom can I pray for, share what I have learned, and invite to church this week?

Preview of next week: The Obedience of Faith (Genesis 17)