

## “Fear Factor” (Genesis 15:1-21)

One tribe of Native Americans had a unique practice for training young braves. On the night of a boy’s thirteenth birthday, he was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone. Until then he had never been away from the security of his family and tribe. But on this night he was blindfolded and taken miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of thick woods...by himself...all night long. Every time a twig snapped, he probably visualized a wild animal ready to pounce. Every time an animal howled, he imagined a wolf leaping out of the darkness. Every time the wind blew, he wondered what more sinister sound it masked. No doubt it was a terrifying night for many.

After what seemed like an eternity, the first rays of sunlight entered the interior of the forest. Looking around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path. Then, to his utter astonishment, he beheld the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow. It was the boy’s father. He had been there all night long.

Can you think of any better way for a child to learn how God allows us to face the tests of life? God is always present with us. While His presence is unseen, it is more real than life itself.<sup>1</sup> In Genesis 15:1-21,<sup>2</sup> we will learn that our Father helps us overcome the fear factor. He helps us, as we trust Him. Two principles stand out in this section: Trust in God’s promises and rest in God’s covenant. First...

**1. Trust in God’s promises (15:1-6).** In 15:1, Moses writes, “**After these things<sup>3</sup> the word of the LORD came<sup>4</sup> to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great.’**” This is a puzzling verse. Why would Abram be afraid?<sup>5</sup> He had just won a great victory over four powerful eastern kings. The battle was over. He was a war hero. He had saved his nephew Lot from slavery or death (14:13-16). Yet, despite these victories, Abram is fearful for he knows that the four eastern kings won’t take this defeat sitting down. A vicious counterattack is inevitable! These kings had been undefeated champions and they will want to quickly avenge their first and only loss. No doubt, poor old Abe is shaking in his sandals. Later in Scripture, this same type of fear attacks Elijah, another great man of faith. After experiencing a great victory on Mount Carmel and terminating 450 prophets of Baal, Elijah ran scared from one “witchy woman”—Jezebel (1 Kings 18-19).

Fear usually nips at the heels of victory. This means we must always be aware of our vulnerability after victory. We have a natural tendency to let down. Little things and small people worry us that normally would not.<sup>6</sup> Frequently, we can exercise great courage and strength amidst a white-hot crisis, yet succumb to day-to-day fears.<sup>7</sup> Fear can make cowards of us all.

According to our nation’s Bureau of Standards, a dense fog covering seven city blocks, to a depth of a hundred feet, contains less than one glass of water. All of that fog, if it could be condensed into water, wouldn’t quite fill a drinking glass. Compare this to the things we often worry about. Like fog our worries can thoroughly block our vision of the light of God’s promises, but the fact is they have little substance to them.<sup>8</sup> When you feel fearful, remind yourself that by tomorrow this fear may not seem as pressing. Most of the things that we fret about are relatively insignificant.

It is interesting to note that the most frequent biblical command is, “**Do not fear.**”<sup>9</sup> The inescapable conclusion is that Abram and every last one of us are fearful creatures. However, we typically hide our fear by frantically pursuing whatever we define as success or significance. This is a reminder for us not to judge people by outward appearance of success. Beneath the homes, titles, success, wealth, and power there is often an aching and broken heart.<sup>10</sup> Abram appeared to have it all but he was still fearful for his security. We are like this too.

Nevertheless, in the midst of Abram's fear, the Lord declares: **"I am a shield** [a protector or defender] **to you.**"<sup>11</sup> The Lord's providential care for Abram is to be seen as preventing the four eastern kings from returning and settling the score. These words undoubtedly provided a great deal of comfort to Abram's anxious heart (cf. 14:20; Ps 18:2-3). Are you afraid of something or someone today? Are you facing an enemy in your life? God is always the answer! He is your refuge, your strength, and your deliverer! If God is your shield, you have nothing to fear (cf. Heb 13:5-6).

Yet, most of us prefer to construct our own shield. We want to feel safe and secure so we turn to comprehensive insurance policies, robust 401K plans, a secure job, a steady income, and a large house. In reality, it amounts to nothing more than tinker toys and construction paper. God watches as we meticulously craft our flimsy defense. It may not be much, but it makes us feel safer; the things of this world used to ease our anxieties. And after observing for a time He says, "You don't need that. Just come and sit in the palm of My hand."<sup>12</sup>

Abram not only wants the peace of security; he also wants the joy of prosperity. Like all of us, he wants not only to survive, but also to thrive and to experience a life of blessing and satisfaction. God fills that desire for joy and satisfaction by offering Himself. In 15:1, God also says to Abram, **"your reward shall be very great."** This phrase is better translated, "[I am] your very great reward" (see NASB marginal reading).<sup>13</sup> God assures Abram that although he has just declined the king of Sodom's great reward (14:22-24), God Himself will be his reward.

We get caught up in a delusion of our own making, convincing ourselves of the value of the treasures we pursue while blind to the treasure that is right before us in God Himself. We demand gifts and quickly forget the Giver. We come to God for His presents, rather than His presence. We set our sights on the fleeting pleasures of this world—a happy family, a prosperous career, a luxury car, a beautiful house, a powerful position, a good reputation, a night on the town, a sexual experience, a good hearty laugh. We fool ourselves into thinking that satisfaction is found apart from God. But in the end we find that all of the things we chase are either elusive or unsatisfying. The truth is: satisfaction is not found apart from God or even through God—it is only found *in* God. The "reward" is a relationship with God Himself.<sup>14</sup>

In 15:2-3, Abram verbally responds to God for the first time,<sup>15</sup> **"O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer<sup>16</sup> of Damascus?"** And Abram said, **"Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir."** After ten years of waiting, Abram must have thought to himself, "What good is it that You are my shield and reward if I have no one to pass it on to?" "What good is success, without a successor?"<sup>17</sup> Can you feel Abram's pain? His family line is facing extinction. The whole genealogy listed in Genesis 11, stretching from Shem to Abraham, is about to be broken. The curtain will be drawn on his family name—unless he produces an heir. Thus, Abram is ready to accept his chief servant, Eliezer, as an adopted son.

God sometimes seems to take a long time to fulfill His promises and we can get discouraged and fearful. When fulfillment of God's promises is delayed we think of lesser possibilities and are tempted to be content with less than God wants to give us (see Gen 16).<sup>18</sup> But it is precisely at such a time that we must trust in God's promises.

You may be saying, "Fear is a reality in my life. Even though the Bible commands me to shake it, I can't seem to do so." All of us can feel the same way. Fortunately, there is an encouraging clue in 15:2 (cf. 15:8). In his doubt and fear, Abram willingly places himself under the sovereign control of God. He uses a new title for God calling Him **"O Lord GOD"**: *Adonai* ("Master") *Yahweh*. Abram is casting all of his cares upon God because He knows God cares for him (1 Pet 5:7).

What a powerful reminder that fear, in and of itself, is not sin. It really comes down to what you do with your fear. John Wayne once said, “Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway.”<sup>19</sup> How true! Faith is doubt saying its prayers. It is a conscious commitment to give God our fears. Have you given your fears to the Lord today? Will you trust Him with your worries?

The suspense has built up to 15:4-5, where Moses records these words: “**Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘This man [God refuses to even use his name] will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.’ And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’**”<sup>20</sup> Instead of rebuking Abram, God assures him that he will have a “natural-born son,” not an adopted heir (cf. 12:7; 13:15-16; 17:15-16).<sup>21</sup> Amidst Abram’s doubt and despair, God encourages him. He not only tells Abram the promise again (12:2; 13:15-16), He confirms it by stating that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars<sup>22</sup> of heaven.<sup>23</sup> God knows just how much we can stand. Abram is almost at the breaking point of fear and despair so God comes to his aid with even more confirmations of His promises.

In the middle of this chapter occurs the most important verse in the Old Testament: Genesis 15:6.<sup>24</sup> This is the first verse in the Bible that explicitly speaks of faith, righteousness, and justification.<sup>25</sup> Moses writes, “**Then he [Abram] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.**”<sup>26</sup> It is important to recognize that this is not the first time that Abram believed in the Lord.<sup>27</sup> The English word “**then**” in the NASB is misleading, that is why other English translations do not include this word. Clearly, Abram believed in the Lord and was declared righteous when he left Ur (Heb 11:8; 11:31-32).<sup>28</sup> From that point on, Abram’s normal response to God’s words was to believe them.<sup>29</sup> Abram had believed<sup>30</sup> in the Lord for over a decade, but he evidently had not realized that God would give him an heir from his own body (15:4).<sup>31</sup> Abram’s faith is not mentioned until now in order to emphasize the fact that a biblical faith is one that focuses upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Here, Abram’s faith is focused upon the promise of a son, through whom blessing will come to the whole world. While it is difficult to determine how complete Abram’s understanding of all this was, we must not overlook Jesus’ words: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56).<sup>32</sup>

This important verse demonstrates that Abraham was “**reckoned**” with righteousness,<sup>33</sup> not after he made some great sacrifice, or after purifying himself of all sin, or when he got his act together, but at the moment he simply believed in the Lord (cf. Gal 3:6-9). Faith is simply taking God at His Word. The word “reckon” (*chashab*) means, “credit to an account.” In the business world, when debits are balanced by credits, the account is “paid up.” Similarly, when God received Abram’s trust as credit, He responded by releasing him from any debit of sin. Abram’s faith caused God to write on Abram’s sin ledger, “Paid in full” (see Col 2:14). We can have a relationship with God on the very same basis, simply by taking God at His word and believing in His promised Son, Jesus Christ. Have you done this today? If you have, God has credited the righteousness of Christ to your account.

[We have been challenged to trust in God’s promises. Now we will be encouraged to...]

**2. Rest in God’s covenant (15:7-21).**<sup>34</sup> In 15:7-8, the pattern continues: God speaks to Abram and Abram asks God a question.<sup>35</sup> What a reminder that God always takes the initiative. Verse 7 tells Abram what God has done for him (“**I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans,**” cf. Acts 7:2-5)<sup>36</sup> and what the purpose of his salvation is (“**to give you this land to possess**”<sup>37</sup> it,” cf. 12:7). The purpose of salvation is inheritance. God brought us out in order to bring us in. We were brought out of idolatry and sin in order to be brought into our inheritance.<sup>38</sup> The Christian life begins when a person

places faith in Jesus Christ. But the abundant life begins when the Christian begins to pursue Christ (John 10:10).

In 15:8, Abram says, **“O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it?”** Abram’s response reveals that he had doubts about God’s promise to give him the land. Even people of great faith experience their moments of doubt. Living the life of faith is not like starting at the bottom of an escalator that always and continually moves upward toward heaven. It’s more like riding a roller coaster with its hills and valleys. In 15:6, Abram was on the mountaintop—he believed; in 15:8, he was down in the valley, doubting.<sup>39</sup> But again, please notice that Abram brought his fears directly to the Lord. God placed within Abram a desire to believe. He does the same within us today. Therefore, we must look to God and rest in Him.

Again, instead of rebuking Abram, the Lord gives him some directions. In 15:9, the Lord said to him, **“Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”** These are the same “clean” animals that are used later in the sacrificial system under the law of Moses. The use of five different kinds of sacrificial animals underlines the solemnity of the occasion.

Moses then tells us that Abram **“brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds.<sup>40</sup> The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses,<sup>41</sup> and Abram drove them away”** (15:10-11).<sup>42</sup> In Abram’s day, legal and binding agreements were not drafted by attorneys and then signed by the parties involved. Instead, legal agreements were formalized by means of a very graphic covenant ceremony: the dividing of an animal sealed the covenant. The animal was cut in half<sup>43</sup> and the two parties would pass between the halves while repeating the terms of the covenant. By doing so, the two parties were stating, “If I fail to fulfill my commitments to this covenant, may I suffer the same fate as this animal” (cf. Jer 34:18-20).

In 15:12-21, we come to one of the most dramatic scenes in Abram’s life. Yet, the Lord puts him down for a **“deep sleep”** so that he is depicted as a passive, non-participant.<sup>44</sup> During his nap, **“terror and great dreadful darkness fell upon him”** (15:12; cf. Job 33:14-18). These emotions are common when a man or woman is in the presence of God. Abram’s experience reminds us that God is a fearful being. He is not to be taken lightly (see Isa 6:1-8).

In 15:13-16, God makes a seven-fold prophecy concerning the nation of Israel.

- 1) You will be strangers in another country (Egypt). See Ps 105:11-15.
- 2) You will be slaves in Egypt.
- 3) You will be oppressed four hundred years. (The actual period of slavery was 430 years. In this passage it is rounded off to 400.) See Exod 12:40-42.
- 4) God will judge Egypt. See Acts 7:6-8.
- 5) Israel will come out with many possessions. See Exod 3:21-22 and 12:35-36.
- 6) Abram will not live through this period of slavery. See Gen 25:7-8.
- 7) In the fourth generation (400 years), Israel will return to the land. See Deut 9:4-6.

All of these predictions were perfectly fulfilled to the very letter because God always performs what He promises. But the promises of God to Abram and his descendants were not without pain and struggle. Many of these promises were painful. Often, God takes us through very painful periods. Why? So that we will cling to Him and so that we will have a greater appreciation for the promise of heaven. Another aspect of struggle accompanied with these promises is the time required for their outworking. There is usually a delay in God’s promises (Heb 11:13). God plans it this way for our spiritual well being.

Somehow delays refine us and drive us to have further dealings with God and to seek personal contact with Him. If the promises of God flowed into our lives with ease and without seeking them, we would forget where they come from.<sup>45</sup> God wants us to wait on Him. He wants us to trust Him.

In 15:17, **“a smoking oven and a flaming torch”**<sup>46</sup> passed between the pieces of animals. The smoking oven and flaming torch represent the presence of God. So the Lord Himself passed between these pieces of animals in making a covenant with Abraham (cf. Lev 26:12).<sup>47</sup> In doing so, He obligated Himself to fulfill this covenant (see Heb 6:13-14). God is not saying, “Now, Abram, if you will live up to certain conditions, then you will have a son, and I will give you the land.” He is not saying, “Abram, as long as you obey A, B, C, and D, I’ll keep My end of the bargain.” God is saying to Abram, “I’m going to give you this land, and I am making an unconditional promise that you will receive it. It is not up to you, your effort, your battle strategy, your initiative, or your intelligence. You can get that land because I’m going to make it happen. I am making this agreement. I am passing through the pieces. I am making an agreement that you’ll possess this land.”<sup>48</sup>

This is the heart and character of God. He loves us unconditionally, no matter what we do, say, or think. God is patient and long-suffering (Exod 34:6). He is the ultimate Father and He often does His greatest work in and through us when we do nothing. This past week, I was overwhelmed by God’s sovereign protection and provision. I often sense that I am simply a spectator in my Christian life. I look at how God has protected me from myself. I look at how He has changed my thought patterns. I experience blessings from Him that I don’t deserve. All of this leads me to say, “It’s not about me; it’s all about You!” I can’t take credit for anything in my life. It can only be attributed to the work of a sovereign and gracious God.

In 15:18-21, God gives the geographical boundaries and the nations of the land that He will give to Abram. From the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (see Deut 11:24-25). The borders of this land, promised to Abram’s descendants, appear to coincide with the border of the garden of Eden (2:10-14). The land consists of ten nations of “ites”: Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Gergashites, and Jebusites. God will grant Abram’s descendants victory over these peoples. He will show Himself strong...He will be a “shield” to them (cf. 15:1). After all of these promises and confirmations, what more reassurance could be asked for?

For the past two years, our middle child, Justin, has been trying to learn to ride his bicycle without training wheels. While he has always excelled at riding his bike with training wheels, he had feared making the move to riding without training wheels. Lori and I spent a great deal of time trying to help him work through this transition. The tactic I would always take is: “Justin, trust me, you can ride without training wheels. I believe in you. I know you can do this.” But nothing worked. Finally, Lori said, “Justin, if you ride your bicycle without training wheels, we will buy you that new Lego set that you want.” After Lori made that promise and sealed it with an oath, that very day, Justin stepped out in faith and rode his bicycle without training wheels. He trusted in a promise and rested in an oath. Now when Justin rides, he bears down and attacks the asphalt! It’s quite impressive. Watch for Justin to take the Tour de France in a few years!

Today, you and I must ask these two questions: Can we trust God? Can God be trusted? If we can answer both of these questions with a “yes,” then we must trust in God’s promises and rest in God’s covenant.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Preaching Today Citation: Leonard Sweet, *SoulSalsa* (Zondervan, 2000), 23-24; submitted by Mike Kjergaard, Hampton, Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> Waltke writes, “Chapter 15 consists of two divine encounters (15:1-6 and 7-21) involving dialogue between the Lord and Abraham and powerful images symbolizing God’s presence and promises. The first occurs at night (15:5) as a vision (15:1) and pertains to the promised seed. The second occurs at sundown (15:12), partially in a deep sleep (15:12), and pertains to the promised land.” Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 238.

<sup>3</sup> See Gen 22:1; 39:7; and 40:1.

<sup>4</sup> This phrase is repeated some 221 times in the OT. Constable writes, “‘The word of the LORD came’ is a phrase typically introducing revelation to a prophet, e.g., 1 Sam 15:10; Hos 1:1; but in Genesis it is found only here and in v 4 of this chapter. Abraham is actually called a prophet in 20:7. It prepares the way for the prophecy of the Egyptian bondage in vv 13-16. Visions were one of the three primary methods of divine revelation in the Old Testament along with dreams and direct communications (cf. Num. 12:6-8). Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Genesis* (<http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes/pdf/genesis.pdf>, 2005), 134.

<sup>5</sup> Fear has been stalking Abraham at every turn. When he’s told to leave Haran (Gen 12:1), it’s fear that would hold him back, fear of stepping out into the unknown and leaving behind the safety and security of life, as he knew it. When he arrives in the land and finds it occupied (12:6), we can imagine fear raising questions of whether this major uprooting has been in vain. When he travels to Egypt (12:10-13), fear looks over his shoulder, and capitalizes on a vulnerable moment. He fears for his life and lies about his wife’s identity. When he reflects on his wife’s barrenness (15:2) he fears that his inheritance will go to his servant Eliezer. Fear has been stalking him at every turn.

<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew verb used by God to tell Abraham not to be afraid is used frequently, according to one Hebrew Dictionary, to express “the terror associated with some of the common circumstances of everyday life.” The emphasis on common circumstances is helpful, but terror is too strong a description in some uses of the word. For example, when Elihu hesitates to speak to Job before those who are older (Job 32:6), it’s not because he’s terrified, but because he is anxious—not wanting to give the impression of impudence. Or when Lot was afraid to live in Zoar after Sodom and Gomorrah had been destroyed (Gen 19:30) it was less about terror and more about general uneasiness. See William A. VanGemeren, Gen. Ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), Electronic Ed.

<sup>7</sup> Philip M. Huber, “Faith’s Bitter Foe” (Genesis 15:1-6); *Preaching Magazine* May 2005 Preaching Online.

<sup>8</sup> Preaching Today Citation: Brian Heckber, Southeast Christian Church.

<sup>9</sup> The phrase “Do not fear” could be translated: “Stop being afraid!” The verb *yare*’ here is in the imperfect tense, suggesting Abram was somewhat afraid of the circumstances in which he found himself before this manifestation of God. This is the first of 84 OT occurrences of this phrase.

<sup>10</sup> Ed Dobson, *Abraham: The Lord Will Provide* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1993), 74.

<sup>11</sup> The shield was the primary defensive weapon of the OT warrior. It was a portable fortress, a defensive wall that could be taken with the warrior into battle. It provided a barrier between the vulnerable flesh of the warrior and the dangerous impact of various weapons. It’s a recurring image, particularly in the Psalms, of God’s protection (see Ps 3:3; 5:12; 7:10; 18:2, 30, 35; 28:7; 33:20; 35:2; 59:11; 76:3; 84:9, 11; 89:18; 91:4; 115:9-11; 119:114; 144:2).

<sup>12</sup> Huber, “Faith’s Bitter Foe.”

<sup>13</sup> Here the noun “reward” is in apposition to “shield” and refers by metonymy to God as the source of the reward. Some translate here “your reward will be very great” (cf. NASB, NRSV), taking the statement as an independent clause and understanding the Hiphil infinitive absolute as a substitute for a finite verb. However, the construction is never used this way elsewhere, where it either modifies a noun (see the texts listed above) or serves as an adverb in relation to a finite verb (see Josh 13:1; 1 Sam 26:21; 2 Sam 12:30; 2 Kgs 21:16; 1 Chr 20:2; Neh 2:2). See the NET Bible Notes.

<sup>14</sup> Huber, “Faith’s Bitter Foe.”

<sup>15</sup> Typically, when God speaks Abram is silent and usually obeys (e.g., Gen 15:2-3, 8; 17:18; 18:23-33; 22:11).

<sup>16</sup> Eliezer means, “God of help.” In the Ancient Near East it was a common practice for a childless couple to adopt one of the servants born into their household. This adopted son would care for them in their old age and would inherit their possessions and property at the time of their death. See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*: NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 420.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Deffinbaugh, *Genesis: From Paradise to Patriarchs*. Lesson 16: The Focal Point of Abram’s Faith Genesis 15:1-21 ([www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org), 1997), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Eaton, *Preaching Through the Bible: Genesis 12-23* (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 1999), 53.

<sup>19</sup> Preaching Today Citation: John Wayne, *Leadership*, Vol. 17, no. 2.

<sup>20</sup> This was God's fourth revelation to Abram (cf. Gen 12:1-3; 12:7; 13:14-17; and 15:4-5).

<sup>21</sup> From Genesis 12-14 issues involving God's promise to Abram concerning land have predominated. However from Genesis 15 on tensions arising from the promise of descendants become central in the narrative. Constable, *Notes on Genesis*, 134.

<sup>22</sup> One of these descendants would be the "bright morning star" (Rev 22:16).

<sup>23</sup> Constable suggests, "This is perhaps a promise of Abram's spiritual children, those who would have faith in God as he did. Abram may not have caught this distinction since he would have more naturally taken the promise as a reference to physical children." Constable, *Notes on Genesis*, 136.

<sup>24</sup> This verse breaks the narrative pattern (see chart below) to make this very important point.

<sup>25</sup> The only OT reference to this verse is Neh 9:8. However, the context of that passage does not focus on the theology of justification. The NT writers quote Gen 15:6 in Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; and Jas 2:23.

<sup>26</sup> The English translations vary in their rendering of Gen 15:6b: ESV: "and he counted it to him as righteousness." NET: "and the LORD considered his response of faith proof of genuine loyalty." NIV: "and he credited it to him as righteousness." NKJV: "and He accounted it to him for righteousness." NLT: "and the LORD declared him righteous because of his faith."

<sup>27</sup> Abraham raised so many questions in this chapter that the author seems compelled to remind the reader of his unwavering faith. John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis: EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), Electronic ed.

<sup>28</sup> The syntax of Gen 15:6 and the form of the word "believed" show that Abram's faith didn't begin after 15:1-5.

<sup>29</sup> Wenham states, "The verbal form (waw + perfect) 'he believed' probably indicates repeated or continuing action. Faith was Abram's normal response to the Lord's words." Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15: WBC* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 329.

<sup>30</sup> The word "believed" (*'aman*) means "to trust or accept."

<sup>31</sup> Moses probably recorded Abram's faith here because it was foundational for making the Abrahamic covenant.

<sup>32</sup> Deffinbaugh, "The Focal Point of Abram's Faith," 2.

<sup>33</sup> The word "righteousness" (*tsadaq*) means "to cleanse or to make morally right." This doctrine is so important and fundamental to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to the Christian life that it is quoted repeatedly in the NT (e.g., Rom 4:1-3; 4:9-10; 4:19-24; Gal 3:5-7; Jas 2:23).

<sup>34</sup> Genesis 15:7-21 recounts God's making of the covenant with Abraham. The emphasis in this section shifts to the "land" promised by the Lord to Abraham's "seed." He encourages Abraham with the fact that He had brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give him the land of Canaan as his inheritance (15:7).

<sup>35</sup> The following chart demonstrates the parallelism of Genesis 15:1-21.

First scene	Activity	Second scene
15:1	The Lord's word to Abram	15:7
15:2-3	Abram's questioning the Lord	15:8
15:4-5	The Lord's assurance to Abram	15:9-21
	15:6: Abram's faith in the Lord and consequent righteousness	

See Keith H. Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant" *Masters Seminary Journal*: 10:2 (Fall 1999):199.

<sup>36</sup> This statement is virtually identical to the opening statement of the Sinai covenant in Exod 20:2: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." The expression "Ur of the Chaldeans" refers back to Gen 11:28, 31 and grounds the present covenant in a past act of divine salvation from "Babylon," just as Exod 20:2 grounds the Sinai covenant in an act of divine salvation from Egypt.

<sup>37</sup> The root *yaras* ("to possess") connects the "land" with the "heir" (from *yaras*) in Gen 15:3-4. Thus, the inheritance to be given to Abraham's "seed" refers primarily to the "land."

<sup>38</sup> Eaton, *Genesis 12-23*, 59.

<sup>39</sup> Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 162.

<sup>40</sup> The Mosaic law instructed the priests not to "sever" birds (Lev 1:17).

<sup>41</sup> Constable suggests, "The birds of prey are unclean (Lev. 11:13-19; Deut. 14:12-18) and represent foreign nations (Ezek. 17:3, 7; Zech. 5:9), most probably Egypt... Thus Abram driving off the birds of prey from the dismembered pieces portrays him defending his descendants from the attacks of foreign nations. Genesis itself tells of a number of attacks by foreigners against the children of Abraham (e.g. chs. 26, 34) and it already looks forward to the sojourn in

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Egypt (chs. 37-50 [cf. Exod. 1:11-12]). But in what sense can Abraham's actions be said to protect his offspring? Genesis 22:16-18; 26:5 suggest it was Abraham's faithful obedience to the covenant that guaranteed the blessing of his descendants...Exodus 2:24 and Deuteronomy 9:5 also ground the exodus in the divine promises made to the patriarchs. The bird scene therefore portrays the security of Israel as the consequence of Abraham's piety." Constable, *Notes on Genesis*, 138.

<sup>42</sup> The text implies that Abraham knew of the ritual to take place because God does not explicitly state what he is to do with these animals. He only commands Abraham to "take" (Gen 15:9), but Abraham "took," "cut in two," and "laid" (15:10). Abraham seems to understand what the animals signify: the Lord's assurance to Abraham would come through a binding "covenant" in which both He and Abraham would swear to fulfill certain obligations to each other, recognizing that death would be the certain consequence of their failure to accomplish their binding commitment faithfully.

<sup>43</sup> Eaton writes, "Covenant always has the shedding of blood as its starting point. This was the custom of the ancient world, but it also has importance in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It looked forward to Jesus. The death of Jesus on the cross for our sins is the starting point of any relationship with God. One cannot even begin to be in a relationship with God unless sin is atoned for in some way. So in the ancient world, the shedding of blood came in at any early stage in the procedure of any covenant." Eaton, *Genesis 12-23*, 60.

<sup>44</sup> Hamilton concludes, "Nothing, however, in this chapter is imposed on Abram. He is free of any obligation. The only imposition or obligation that Yahweh lays upon anybody is upon himself, and that is the obligation to implement his promise of descendants, and especially of land, to Abram and to his descendants." Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 438.

<sup>45</sup> Eaton, *Genesis 12-23*, 53.

<sup>46</sup> The smoking firepot reminds us of the pillar of cloud representing the presence of God (Exod 13:21-22), the smoke on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:18), and the cloud of God's Shekinah glory (1 Kgs 8:10-12). The blazing torch reminds us of the pillar of fire representing the presence of God (Exod 13:21-22), of the burning bush displaying the presence of God before Moses (Exod 3:4), and of the fire from heaven, which sometimes consumed sacrifices, God was well pleased with (1 Kgs 18:38, 1 Chron 21:26, 2 Chron 7:1).

<sup>47</sup> Constable writes, "The Abrahamic Covenant is basic to the premillennial system of theology. This covenant has not yet been fulfilled as God promised it would be. Since God is faithful we believe He will fulfill these promises in the future. Consequently there must be a future for Israel as a nation (cf. Rom. 11). Amillennialists interpret this covenant in a less literal way. The crucial issue is interpretation. If God fulfilled the seed and blessings promises literally, should we not expect that He will also fulfill the land promises literally? The Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenants are outgrowths of the Abrahamic Covenant. Each of these expands one major promise of the Abrahamic Covenant: the land, seed, and blessing promises respectively." Constable, *Notes on Genesis*, 142.

<sup>48</sup> Dobson, *Abraham: The Lord Will Provide*, 79.