

Genesis Ch15v1-21 - Covenant Commitment

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[0 : 00] He said, Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless, and the one who will inherit my estate is Eleazar of Damascus?

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

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.

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. 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. But Abram said, Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I shall gain possession of it? 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.

[1 : 19] 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.

Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.

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 they will be enslaved and ill-treated there.

But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure. When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brassiere with blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

[2 : 35] 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 of the Euphrates, the land of the Canaanites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

Well, let's pray and ask for God's help. Father God, thank you for this account, this true account of Abraham.

We pray that as we think about his encounter with you, that we ourselves would encounter the living God.

that we would hear his words to us, that we may go trusting a faithful and good God.

Help us this morning by your Spirit's power we ask. Amen. Well, over Covid I had a painting job to do in the house, so a trip to B&Q; was organised.

[4 : 07] But I had a dilemma. If you go to B&Q;, you're not short of choice. There was a whole aisle full of paint, each one claiming to be the best paint you could buy.

So what do I choose? How do I know which is the right one? Well, one stood out. You might remember the catchphrase from the TV advert.

Ron Seal. It does what it says on the tin. In other words, it promises to deliver. It's not going to let you down.

Well, our text this morning is a bit of a Ron Seal promise. It does what it says on the tin.

In other words, God promises to deliver. What God says he will do, he will do. He isn't going to let you down.

[5 : 09] But it isn't always as easy as that, is it? We know the words. We sing them. We repeat them.

But there's still a wondering in our lives. Will God deliver? Can I trust God with his promises? Will God do what he says he will do? Will he forgive me of all my sins? Will he give me all that I need in my walk with him? Will he build his church here in Carragaleine? Will he keep me in the midst of all of my failures until Jesus returns? Well, Abram had been given some great big promises and he wanted to know, is God going to deliver?

[6 : 15] Let's go back to chapter 12. God makes a great big promise. Verse 2. He says to Abram chapter 12, I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.

And then in verse 7, the Lord appeared to him and said, to your offspring, I will give this land. When we get into chapter 13, God repeats the same promise.

Verse 15. All the land you see, I will give to you and your offspring forever. And I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth.

And in chapter 14, God protects the promise. Abram has come up against some tribes who are after him and, well, God intervenes.

Verse 20. Praise be to God most high who delivered your enemies into your hands. Then we step into chapter 15.

[7 : 19] But it seems God still hasn't delivered. Well, God is gentle and gracious and he gives us the assurance that we need.

You see, when it comes to God's promises, it does what it says on the tin. Four things we're going to see. The promise or the surprise of God's promise, the timing of God's promise, the guarantee of God's promise, and then the response to God's promise.

So there's a surprise, the timing, the guarantee, and the response. So first, look at the surprise of God's promise.

Despite all of God's words to Abraham, he still has no children. He doesn't have this great nation. So, as we would expect, God gives him some reassurance.

Verse 1. We're in chapter 15. After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. Don't be afraid, Abram. I'm your shield. Your very great reward.

[8 : 33] I'm with you. Well, without being disrespectful, it just sounds like more words, doesn't it? Verse 2.

But Abram said, Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless? I've got everything I need, but I haven't got the one thing that I desperately need.

Verse 3. And Abram said, You've given me no children. Well, to strengthen Abram in his faith, God takes him stargazing.

Verse 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.

Now for us, clear nights are hard to come by, but when they do, and we gaze up into that night sky, wow, it's like somebody's opened up a container of glitter and fired it over a blank or black canvas.

[9 : 48] And we can count, can't we? One, two, three, keep going, 267, 268, a thousand.

I mean, you could be there all night. Not just one child, Abram. Your children will be like the stars of the sky, more than you can count.

You see, there's something of a surprise here. God's promise is bigger and greater and more than we could ever expect or imagine. But yet we shouldn't be surprised because this is the kind of God that we have who's for us.

God doesn't dish out small promises, but great, big, history-shaping, world-transforming, people-saving promises.

Promises to bless all the nations of the world. You see, God is determined to have a people for himself who will live in God's place.

[10 : 58] Look up at the stars, Abraham. How do you think they got there? I spoke every one of them into existence. I placed them there and I will deliver on my promise and I will give you a people.

He's determined to bless us with big, surprising promises. And along the way, he continues to surprise us.

Here's two great, big promises for us to think about. Here's the first one. 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?

Here's another one. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

He graciously gives us all things, every spiritual blessing in Christ. So in our days of wondering and questioning, is God going to deliver?

[12:20] Remember, when your head is down in the dumps, go out into the night, go stargazing, look up into the night sky and begin to count and be reminded of the God who spoke those stars into existence, who sustains them and keeps them, is the surprising God who graciously gives us all things for our Christian life.

and fills us with every spiritual blessing. God's promise does what it says on the tin.

So the surprising promises of God. Second, we have the timing of God's promise. The timing.

Abraham is not only without a nation, a people at this stage, he's also without a place, isn't he? He lives in the land, but it's not his.

It doesn't belong to him. So once again, God gives the assurance that we need. Verse 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.

[13:45] Well, Abram's a trusting kind of guy. But let's just say his confidence is pretty low right now. He's heard all the words.

When's it going to happen? Verse 8, Abram said, Sovereign Lord, how can I know? Give me something so that I shall know that I will gain possession of it.

Well, what follows is a lesson in butchering. A bunch of animals are cut in half. We're going to come back to them in a minute. For now, God wants us to understand the timing of his promises.

You see, God's promises are not always fulfilled as we expect or imagine. Surprising, yes, but when will they happen?

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

[14:57] There's trouble ahead. Well, what's the trouble? Verse 13, Then the Lord said to him, Know for certain that for 400 years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and they will be enslaved and ill-treated there.

But, verse 16, here's another promise. In the fourth generation, your descendants will come back here for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

The promise is going to be fulfilled but not according to Abram's timing. In fact, it's going to involve a lot of waiting.

400 years. In fact, the waiting is also going to involve suffering. Did you see it at the end of verse 13?

This nation that I've promised to you, well, they're going to be enslaved and ill-treated. Suffering first, Abram, and then glory.

[16:10] And before any of this happens, God says to Abram in verse 15, you, however, well, you're going to go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age.

You're going to die before this promise happens. What? I mean, what about the surprise of God's promise?

is God failing to deliver on what he says? Does he just say things and then not deliver? Well, no, God didn't fail.

The author of Hebrews reminds us this. He gives us the assurance that we need. Follow on screen. All these people, he's talking here of people like Abram, all these people were still living by faith when they died.

They did not receive the things promised, they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. Instead, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one.

[17:19] Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. You see, the land promise was only ever a foretaste of the ultimate land, a better country, a heavenly one.

And Abram knew that. He had his sights fixed on something better and greater, and like us, waiting for the fulfillment of the glorious land to come.

God does. God will deliver on his promise, but it's not according to our timing.

We need to adjust our clocks to God's clock. We may want things to happen now, rather than later. We may long for justice to be done today.

We may want healing now. we may want peace and prosperity now, but we can't fast forward God's timing.

[18 : 28] We've got to adjust our clock. Blessings we have in abundance, but the greater and eternal blessings are yet to come.

God's timing is always right, and we need to fit in with that. God's promise does what it says on the tin.

So there's a surprise, there's a timing. And then we need to think about the guarantee. Let's go back to the animals being cut up.

Verse 8. Abram said, Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I'll gain possession of it?

How do I know you're going to deliver on your promise? Give me something. Verse 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.

[19 : 36] So Abram brought all these things to him, cut them in two, and arranged the halves opposite each other. The birds, he didn't cut in half. Presumably, they were too small.

It's a strange event, isn't it? It's as if Abram is arranging a corridor of dead animals with pieces of meat this side and pieces of meat this side.

What's going on? Well, before we call the animal welfare rights, let's understand something of how people made commitments to each other.

It was called a covenant, a promise of guarantee. So say Jimmy enters into a contract with Bob over some land.

To seal the deal, an animal would be cut in half, the parts would be placed opposite each other. And then Jimmy and Bob would walk between the cut-up animal, and the symbolism was very clear.

[20 : 40] if you should break your promise, if you should fail to keep your commitment, then what happened to this animal should happen to me.

You are putting your life on it. Your word was your life. So as Abram arranged the animal parts, he knows what's coming.

He's going to walk with God between the animals. animals. And if either party should break their commitment, if they should break their word, then may what happened to this animal happen to me.

Except for that's not what happened. Look at verse 12. As the sun was setting, Abram fell into his deep sleep, and he has this vision, this dream.

verse 17. When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brassiere with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

[21 : 50] Now, we've got to get the symbolism right here because smoke and fire were common signs of God's presence. This is a vision he has, and in his vision he sees this smoke and fire.

this is God who's present. And what happens? Well, instead of both Abraham and God walking between the pieces, God alone appears and passed between the pieces.

Verse 18. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham and said to your descendants, I'll give this land from the wadi of Egypt to the great river of Euphrates. You want a sign?

You want to know that this is going to happen? Well, have you seen what I've just done? God is making it abundantly clear to Abraham, if you should break your promise, if you, Abraham, should fail to keep your commitment, then what happened to this animal will happen to me.

I am the God who will go to death for you so that the promises I make to you will be guaranteed. I am going to take the curse for you, Abraham, so that you might receive all the blessings.

[23 : 20] That's the commitment of God to us. But you say, how? How could God possibly die for us?

how could God possibly take the curse? Well, let this truth penetrate our disobedient hearts. Here's how the New Testament puts it.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. You see, God was the one who never ever failed in his commitment to Abraham.

Abraham failed many times. We saw that in chapter 12. and we will see it in the future. So God had to die for him.

And we are no different. Either God dies or we die. And on the cross, God in the person of Jesus dies for us. Jesus, as it were, was slaughtered for us.

[24 : 19] He takes the curse of God's judgment so that we might receive his blessing. you want to know that God's promises are guaranteed to you today?

You want to know that God is loyal and steadfast and committed to you? Look to the cross. Look at Jesus. He went to death for you.

He took your judgment for you. God is for you. This is the assurance we have. God's promise does what it says on the tin.

So the surprise, the timing, the guarantee and the response. We have the guarantee that God will keep his promise.

So how do we respond? Well, Abram leads the way for us. He may fail, but he has something to teach us about faith.

[25 : 28] Look back at verse 6. Abram believed the Lord and God credited it to him as righteousness.

Now before we get into the detail, it's important to note that this is not the first time Abram has expressed belief. Just quickly look back at chapter 12, verse 1.

The Lord had said to Abram, go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you. Verse 4, so Abram went as the Lord had told him.

You see, obedience to God is always evidence of faith in God. So what we need to see here, what the author is telling us is Abram was a man of faith.

That's what's going on in all of chapter 15. Here's a man with faith and we would do well to follow in his steps. So what's the details?

[26 : 38] What is this faith all about? Well first it's faith in the faithfulness of God. Let's look at chapter 15 verse 6. It says Abram believed the Lord.

Abram has faith in God. It's not faith in his own faithfulness, it's faith in his faithful God.

You see, Abram failed, he disobeyed, he got it wrong, but he never trusted in his own ability. He is trusting in the God who will be faithful to him, especially in his failure.

It's faith in the faithfulness of God. And it's faith in the declaration of God. Do you see what verse 6 says?

Abram believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness. God saw Abram's faith, he saw where his faith was resting. He trusted God, so God credited his faith to him as righteousness.

[27 : 53] Abram didn't have a righteousness of his own. He didn't have a right standing before God, but God gave it to him. He credited it to him. God declared him to be righteous because he believed.

God is not rewarding Abram's faith. He's not looking at Abram and going, oh, what amazing faith this guy has.

I must declare him righteous. Or he's not looking at him going, oh, what little faith he has. He must do better. Now, it's never about the quality or the quantity of faith.

It's what God declares. Abram mightn't ever feel righteous. He mightn't even live as righteous. But he believes what God declares about him.

And God says, you are righteous. You see, it's never about us. It's always faith in the promise of God.

[29 : 01] This is how we should respond. We don't follow Abram example of failure, but we follow this failure's faith.

You see, the way of Abram is the way for us. Listen again to what scripture says. You can follow it here on screen. The apostle Paul, I don't have it.

You just have to listen. It comes from Romans 4, 23 to 24. This is what Paul says, the words it was credited to him were written not for Abram alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness, for us who believe in him, who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

You see, what God is saying to Abram, God is saying to you and I. me. Here's the response that is required of us.

Simple, failing faith in our great faithful God. It's faith in the promiser.

[30 : 16] It's faith in the one who is loyal and committed to us and will never ever give up on us. He will hold us fast.

You see, as we look at Abram, we need to see through Abram and we need to see faithful God. We need to hear God's promise.

He always does what it says on the tin. Let's pray. Lord God, would you help us to hear your promises, to meditate and to reflect on the surprising awesomeness and greatness of your promise. would you help us to adjust our clock to your timing, to your perfect way and will?

And would you help us to marvel at your guaranteed commitment demonstrated by Christ's death for us taking the curse that we deserve so that we might receive all of your blessings now and for all eternity.

[32 : 04] And would you help us strengthen our faith that we may look to the promiser, the one who never fails, the faithful God who has declared us to be righteous because of Jesus.

Thank you for who you are. Amen. We're going to sing together.

The song helps us reflect where our hope should be built and therefore the song helps us to declare afresh that we dare not trust in anyone else but in the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus.

Let's stand together if we're able and we can sing. Amen.