

WEDNESDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY

Genesis 15:7–21

THE COVENANT GOD KEEPS

God's promises ultimately rest upon God's faithfulness, not man's ability.

MAIN THOUGHT

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SUB-THOUGHT BREAKOUT

1. The Question of Assurance (15:7–8)
2. Preparing the Covenant (15:9–11)
3. The Deep Sleep and Divine Revelation (15:12–16)
4. God Passes Through the Pieces (15:17)
5. The Covenant Confirmed (15:18–21)

CONTEXT

Where This Passage Fits

IN GENESIS

Genesis 15:1–6 established justification by faith.

Genesis 15:7–21 establishes covenant certainty.

The first section answers how Abram is counted righteous.

The second section answers how Abram can know God's promise will come to pass.

IN THE WHOLE BIBLE

This covenant becomes the foundation for:

- Israel
- The Land Promise
- The Davidic Covenant
- The Messiah
- The Future Kingdom

The covenant established here drives biblical history from Genesis through Revelation.

John Tie-In

John repeatedly presents salvation as resting upon Christ's ability to keep what the Father gives Him.

Just as Abram's covenant ultimately depended upon God alone, salvation ultimately depends upon Christ's finished work rather than man's strength.

John 6:39

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me."

Every believer eventually arrives at the same question Abram asks

"I believe God." But how do I know?

How do I know God will keep His promise?

How do I know His Word is trustworthy?

How do I know He will finish what He started?

Genesis 15 begins with faith.

Genesis 15 ends with assurance.

Abram believed God's promise in verses 1–6.

Now God reveals why that faith can rest securely.

MAIN DRIVING QUESTION

How can I know God's promises are secure when my circumstances still seem uncertain?

Genesis 15:7–8

The Question of Assurance

Genesis 15:7-8

Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

◆ **HIDDEN GEM**

Abram asks, "How shall I know?" immediately after being declared righteous by faith.

Faith is not the absence of questions.

Faith is bringing questions to God.

Many believers think that once faith arrives, questions disappear.

Abram proves otherwise.

The same man who believed God and was counted righteous now asks, "How shall I know?"

God does not rebuke him.

Instead, He begins by reminding Abram who He is and what He has already done.

The covenant name YHWH anchors Abram's future in God's unchanging character rather than Abram's changing emotions.

Throughout Scripture God repeatedly calls His people to remember His past faithfulness when facing future uncertainty.

A believer facing financial pressure, family struggles, ministry challenges, or unanswered prayers should often begin where God begins with Abram: remembering what God has already done.

The God who called Abram out of Ur is the same God who will bring him into the inheritance.

APPLICATION: When uncertainty grows, start by remembering God's previous faithfulness.

Genesis 15:9–11

Preparing the Covenant

Genesis 15:9-11

"Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."

Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

Why These Animals? Why Three Years Old?

Scripture never explicitly tells us — so we must be careful not to be dogmatic. However, several observations are worth noting.

1. Same animals used in Israel's sacrificial system.

Long before Sinai, long before the Law, long before the priesthood — God is already using animals associated with sacrifice, atonement, cleansing, and covenant.

2. Three years old indicates full maturity.

Abram was not bringing weak animals or leftovers. He was bringing valuable animals in their prime.

3. **The animals are connected to sacrificial themes.** **Heifer** — strength & value. **Goat** — sin offerings. **Ram** — substitution. **Dove/Pigeon** — available even to the poor.

Point 4 — What Abram Was Asked to Bring

4. Abram was not asked to bring possessions. Not gold. Not silver. Not weapons. He was asked to bring living creatures whose blood would be shed.

A Single Thread Runs Throughout Scripture

Genesis 3

Animal skins

Genesis 15

Covenant animals

Mosaic Covenant

Sacrifices

New Covenant

The blood of Christ

Covenants are ratified through sacrifice.

Covenant vs. Contract

CONTRACT

- Primarily a legal agreement
- Built on mutual benefit
- Asks: "What do I get?"
- Dissolved when circumstances change
- Serves self-interest

COVENANT

- Primarily a binding relationship
- Built on commitment
- Asks: "Who am I bound to?"
- Considered sacred — cannot simply be dissolved
- Involves promises, obligations, and blood

Covenants Before the Bible's Covenants

God did not invent the concept of covenant when He called Abram.

Covenants were already well known throughout the ancient Near East.

- Kings made covenants with other kings.
- Rulers made covenants with conquered nations.
- Families made covenants with families.
- Tribes made covenants with tribes.

When God told Abram to prepare the animals, Abram did not ask what he was doing.

He immediately began preparing the covenant ceremony.

That tells us Abram already understood the significance of what was taking place.

What God often does throughout Scripture is take something people already understand and use it to reveal a deeper spiritual truth.

The covenant form was familiar.

The covenant maker was not.

Three Types of Ancient Covenants

1. Equal Covenants (Parity Covenants)

Agreements between two parties of similar standing. Two kings might enter a peace treaty. Two families might establish a lasting alliance. Both parties accepted obligations and were responsible for keeping the covenant.

2. King & Servant Covenants (Suzerain-Vassal)

A powerful king entered a covenant with a weaker ruler. The greater king promised protection. The lesser king promised loyalty and obedience. Many scholars see this reflected in portions of the Mosaic Covenant.

3. Royal Grant Covenants

A king could grant land, blessings, inheritance rights, or privileges to a faithful servant. The Abrahamic Covenant shares similarities with this type because many of God's promises are given as gifts rather than earned rewards.

The Four Elements of a Covenant

1 Parties

God and Noah • God and Abraham • God and Israel •
God and David • God and believers under the New
Covenant

2 Promises

Noah: never destroy by flood • Abraham: land,
descendants, blessing • David: everlasting kingdom •
New Covenant: forgiveness and eternal life through Christ

3 Signs

Noah — the rainbow • Abraham — circumcision •
Moses — the Sabbath • New Covenant — communion

4 Sacrifice

Covenants were often ratified with blood. Blood
represented life. The shedding of blood testified that the
covenant was binding unto death.

Why Is It Called "Cutting" a Covenant?

The Hebrew phrase literally means: "To cut a covenant." Animals were sacrificed and divided. The participants then walked between the pieces.

"May what happened to these animals happen to me if I break this covenant."

Visualizing the Ceremony

Imagine a large open area. Several animals are slain and divided.

One half is placed on one side. The other half placed directly opposite.

A pathway forms between the pieces.

The covenant participants walk through the bloody corridor.

"I am staking my life on this covenant."

The emphasis was not the pattern of the walk — but the seriousness of the oath.

Genesis 15 — The Shocking Difference

Abram would have recognized this ceremony immediately.

He knew what was being prepared.

He would have expected both covenant partners to walk through the pieces.

Both parties accepted responsibility. Both parties took the oath. Both parties walked the path.

But something astonishing happens.

God causes Abram to fall into a deep sleep.

A smoking furnace and burning torch pass between the pieces.

Abram never walks the path.

God alone passes through.

"Abram, the fulfillment of this covenant ultimately rests upon Me."

The covenant is secured by God's faithfulness rather than Abram's ability.

Why Covenants Matter

Noahic Covenant — Preserves humanity

Abrahamic Covenant — Creates a chosen people

Mosaic Covenant — Reveals God's holiness

Davidic Covenant — Promises a King

New Covenant — Fulfills them all through Jesus Christ

A covenant is a binding relationship established by oath, confirmed by sacrifice, and secured by faithfulness. When God makes a covenant, He is binding Himself to His Word.

Ancient Hebrew Pictograph — Covenant (Berith)

בְּרִית — Berith (beh-REETH) | Covenant. Treaty. Binding agreement.



Bet

House, family, household



Resh

Head, chief, leader, person



Yod

Hand, work, deed, action



Tav

Mark, sign, covenant mark

Possible Word Pictures:

"The leader of the house extends his hand and establishes a covenant mark."

"A household is bound together under the authority and mark of a covenant."

"The hand of the leader establishes a binding covenant relationship."

The Significance of the Tav

In ancient Paleo-Hebrew, the Tav was often written as a cross-shaped mark.

- A mark
- A sign
- Ownership
- Identification
- Covenant relationship

Every covenant leaves a mark.

- Noahic — the rainbow
- Abrahamic — circumcision
- Mosaic — the Sabbath
- New Covenant — the Holy Spirit

Connection to Genesis 15

Abram was looking for assurance. God responded by making a covenant.

God did not merely repeat the promise. He marked the promise with a covenant.

The promise spoke to Abram's ears.

The covenant spoke to Abram's heart.

Every covenant leaves a mark. The question is: Whose mark do we bear?

Commentary + Cross References

Chuck Missler: *Abram would have fully expected both covenant participants to walk between the pieces.*

Michael Heiser: *The ceremony establishes a legally binding covenant framework recognizable throughout the ancient world.*

CROSS REFERENCES

Jeremiah 34:18–19 — *The covenant walk between the pieces.*

Hebrews 9:18–22 — *Without the shedding of blood there is no remission.*

Leviticus 17:11 — *The life of the flesh is in the blood.*

Genesis 3:21 — *Animal skins — the first sacrifice.*

Hebrews 9:22 — *"Without shedding of blood there is no remission."*

Abram understands exactly what is being prepared.

This is not a mysterious ritual to him.

It is a covenant ceremony.

The divided animals form a pathway that covenant participants would normally walk together.

Yet before the covenant is finalized, Abram spends hours driving away vultures from the sacrifice.

The animals themselves are not random.

Long before Sinai and long before the priesthood, God selects animals that will later become associated with sacrifice, cleansing, substitution, atonement, and covenant.

Abram is participating in something that reaches far beyond his own lifetime.

The covenant structure was already familiar throughout the ancient world, but God takes a familiar form and fills it with divine meaning.

Human covenants were built on mutual obligations.

God's covenant with Abram will soon reveal something entirely different.

Even the pictographs of Berith provide a beautiful teaching picture of a household, a leader, an extended hand, and a covenant mark.

The promise was already given in verses 1–6, but now God is giving assurance.

The promise spoke to Abram's ears; the covenant speaks to his heart.

The entire scene points forward through every covenant in Scripture until it ultimately reaches Christ, where the final covenant is ratified not by the blood of animals but by the blood of the Son of God Himself.

APPLICATION: Protect God's promises from the vultures of doubt and distraction. Continue studying the difference between merely believing a promise and resting in the covenant faithfulness of the One who made it.

Genesis 15:12–16

The Deep Sleep and Divine Revelation

Genesis 15:12-16

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.

"Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.

And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.

But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

◆ **HIDDEN GEM**

*God reveals redemption before bondage ever begins.
Before Israel ever enters Egypt, God already reveals the Exodus.
Before the trial arrives, God already sees the deliverance.*

God does not merely promise blessing; He reveals history.

Israel's future slavery, oppression, deliverance, and inheritance are all declared before any of them happen.

The deep sleep reminds us that Abram is not directing this covenant.

God is.

The same word used when Adam slept now appears again as God performs a work beyond human participation.

The darkness Abram experiences reflects the weight of what is being revealed.

Yet even here God's sovereignty shines.

Egypt will come. Bondage will come. Affliction will come.

But deliverance is already written into the story before suffering ever arrives.

The hidden gem is that redemption appears in the prophecy before the bondage even begins.

Many believers panic when they enter difficult seasons because they assume hardship means God has abandoned His promise.

Genesis 15 reveals the opposite.

God may fully know the hardship that lies ahead and still be completely committed to the promise He made.

APPLICATION: God never discovers your future. He already stands in it. Trust the God who sees the deliverance before you see the difficulty.

Genesis 15:17

God Passes Through the Pieces

Genesis 15:17

And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.

This is the moment everything has been building toward.

Abram prepared the sacrifice.

Abram guarded the sacrifice.

Abram received the revelation.

But Abram never walks through the covenant pieces.

God alone passes through them.

Every person in Abram's world would have expected both covenant partners to participate.

Instead, the smoking furnace and burning torch move between the pieces without Abram.

◆ **HIDDEN GEM**

Abram never walks through the pieces. This is the shock of Genesis 15.

Everything about the ceremony would have led Abram to expect both parties to walk between the animals.

But Abram never walks. Only God does

The message could not be clearer.

The fulfillment of this covenant ultimately rests on God's faithfulness rather than Abram's ability.

This is why Genesis 15 is so powerful.

God takes a familiar covenant ceremony and transforms it into a revelation of grace.

Abram contributes nothing to securing the covenant.

God binds Himself to His own promise.

Hebrews later explains that God swore by Himself because there was no greater authority.

The covenant stands because God stands.

APPLICATION: Your confidence should rest more in God's character than your consistency.

Genesis 15:18–21

The Covenant Confirmed

Genesis 15:18-21

On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying:

"To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates:

**the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,
the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."**

The chapter closes with God defining the inheritance in specific terms.

This is not vague spirituality.

This is covenant reality.

The same God who promised the seed now promises the land.

The covenant rests upon the same foundation as Abram's justification: God's faithfulness.

Throughout history nations rise and fall, borders change, kingdoms appear and disappear, yet God's covenant remains intact because it was never secured by human strength.

It was secured by the God who walked through the pieces alone.

The detailed boundaries remind us that God's promises are not abstract ideas.

They are real promises rooted in real history.

The covenant remains secure because its foundation is the character of God rather than the performance of man.

APPLICATION: God's promises remain secure because they are anchored in God's unchanging character.

CLOSING — ANSWERING THE OPENING QUESTION

How can I know God's promises are secure when my circumstances still seem uncertain?

Genesis 15 answers the question with remarkable clarity.

Because God's promises ultimately rest on God.

Abram believed in verses 1–6. Now God shows Abram why that faith is safe.

The covenant does not rest on Abram's strength.

The covenant does not rest on Abram's consistency.

The covenant does not rest on Abram's future performance.

The covenant rests upon the God who walked through the pieces alone.

Abram came into this section asking: **"How shall I know?"**

God answered by giving him a covenant. Not merely a promise. Not merely a reassurance.

The promise spoke to Abram's ears. The covenant spoke to Abram's heart.

Every covenant in Scripture moves the story forward until it reaches Christ:

Noahic — preserved humanity • Abrahamic — created a chosen people • Mosaic — revealed holiness

Davidic — promised a King • New Covenant — fulfilled them all through Jesus Christ

At the cross another covenant was cut.

Not through the blood of animals.

Through the blood of the Son of God.

**Stop measuring God's faithfulness by your
circumstances
and start measuring your circumstances by God's
faithfulness.**

Trust the God who keeps covenant.

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