

God's Big Promises

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Preacher: Dave Abraham

[0 : 0 0] Well, good day everyone, keep your Bibles open, Genesis 15. There's an outline in the bulletins and this chapter is one which just, as Roy said, is a foundational passage of God's Word and it gives us a real understanding of the scope of God's promises and as we look at it, my prayer is that we will just be reminded of or see for the first time perhaps just how we fit into God's big overarching promises.

So let's pray that now. Father, we thank you so much that you're a gracious God, a God who binds yourself in covenant with sinful people.

We thank you that we are included in these promises and we pray that as we look at your Word together now, you'll teach us, you'll encourage us, you'll help us to see just the massive scope of your promises.

Amen. And just on that, when I'm at youth group, one of the classic prayers of a teenager is, please God, help me with my exams.

Now, that is a fine prayer, right? If you've got exams coming up, you should ask God to help you with them and He will. But it might be that you actually need to do more study and failing this exam will help learn to study for the next one.

[1 : 2 6] But God will help, you ask Him, He'll help. But it also says something about what's on our minds when we pray a prayer like that, doesn't it? Like, this is the big looming thing in front of me, this is what I'm going to pray for, this is kind of the horizon of my thinking.

It's a fairly small prayer in the scheme of things, right? And that's fine. Now, for some of the teenagers, it's because they have a small, but growing, faith.

It's a kind of faith that says something along the lines of, you know, Jesus died for me, so I can be forgiven and I can live with Him forever and so I trust Him. And that's wonderful and true and awesome.

And it kind of doesn't appreciate the whole big picture of the scope of what God has done and is doing in the world and how we fit into that. And some of these teenagers just don't have that understanding and don't have that scope of faith yet, which is fine, they'll grow.

But there really is this big picture, this big salvation plan that God has for the whole world and we fit into that. And so actually having, how do we fit into God's plan, just anchors us and gives us a sureness to our faith that is much bigger than just, oh, you know, Jesus lets me into heaven and so that's why I trust Him and can be a little bit small, a little bit self-centered.

[2 : 5 0] This passage in Genesis really helps us to zoom out and see that we are part of something massive. That helps shape our prayers, that helps shape our faith, that helps gives us that certainty in the God that we have and what He's doing in this world.

So, as we look at it, let me just tell you about the structure. You've got, God makes two I Am statements and He makes these two promises with Abraham, so verse 1 and then verse 7.

And then both times, Abraham then questions God and he starts off with, O Lord God. And then both times, God answers his questions and gives him a sign.

And right in the middle of these two promises is verse 6, where we see Abraham's response of faith. So, we're going to look at the first promise of many offspring and then we're going to look at Abraham's response of faith.

We're going to particularly spend a bunch of time in Romans, chapter 4, and then we're going to look at God's second promise of land. And all this, we'll see just the huge scope of God's promises and what it means for us.

[4 : 01] So, as we jump in verse 1, first thing to note is just the context of war. The extent that this war theme pervades this section of the Bible. So, chapter 15, 1, after these things, after what things?

After Abraham has just defeated five kings in battle and rescued all the people and all the loot that had been captured from four kings. Sorry, he defeated four kings who had previously defeated five kings and got all their loot.

Then, king of Sodom had said, you know, keep all the reward, keep the stuff, just give him back the people. And Abraham had spurned that, deliberately distancing himself from Sodom.

He's shown himself, Abraham, to be this major person on the stage of kings. Pharaoh has noticed him and is not particularly happy with him.

Now, there's a bunch of other kings who aren't going to be particularly happy with him, or their successes, perhaps. And the king of Sodom's pride has just been rebuffed. Abram is potentially stacking up enemies and becoming a target on the geopolitical scene.

[5 : 11] But God comes to him and speaks to him in a vision. Verse 1, after these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. Fear not, Abram. I am your shield.

Your reward shall be very great. So, fear not. First thing he says. And there's a lot to fear from the nations that are now noticing Abram. Why not fear?

Because I am your shield. Which is exactly what he needs, isn't it? Not human might, but God has a shield of protection over him. And then, secondly, your reward shall be very great.

He's just burned the king of Sodom's reward, trusting in God's provision instead. Melchizedek's come and blessed him. But God says that he will be the one who will provide a very great reward.

But Abram questions God. Verse 2. But Abram said, O Lord God, what will you give me?

[6 : 11] For I continue childless. The heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus. And Abram said, behold, you've given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir. Now, notice that his response starts with this, O Lord God.

And here you've got God, G-O-D in capital letters. What's going on here? Literally he's saying, O Lord or O Master, O Ruler.

Yahweh, so G-O-D in capitals is God's personal name. And so other translations might have O Sovereign Lord with Lord in capital letters.

But it's this idea of him saying, you know, you are the ruler, Yahweh. I'm addressing you. So he's addressing him from a place of faith and trusting God as that ruler.

Not a questioning of rebellion. What are you even going to do? But, you know, I know you are the Sovereign Lord. What can you give me? Right?

[7 : 10] He's held all the booty of four kings and all the nations they'd conquered in his hand. And yet he's not claimed it. Right? He's this mighty warrior, conquered kings and nations.

But so what? What use is more riches? Abram understands that life is more than wealth. One day he's going to die and then what? How does that kind of thing compare with our prayers?

Do we just ask God to help us with exams? Or to get through the next rough week? Or whatever it might be? Would we be content if God simply gave us all the riches of Abram?

All the material blessings of wealth and victory? But Abram has all those and he knows, what can you give me, God? This isn't a reward.

He remains childless and Eliezer of Damascus will inherit all his stuff. Now, notice it's not Lot, his own, you know, kinsman and nephew that's going to inherit. When they separated in chapter 13, they separated.

[8 : 18] Lot and his descendants have no claim in Abram's inheritance. So Abram's big complaint to God is, you have given me no offspring. God had promised to make him a great nation.

He's promised already to make his offspring like the dust of the land. And yet, here's Abram, somewhere between the ages of 75 and 85, his wife is barren. God has made him big promises.

Abraham has acted in faith on those promises and yet God's delivered nothing. So the word of the Lord comes to him a second time, verse 4.

This man, Eliezer of Damascus, this man shall not be your heir. Your very own son shall be your heir. Here's the promise made specific for the first time.

This great nation that God is going to make of Abram, it's not about him getting an army together and taking over other kings and getting all their stuff and that's kind of how the big nation will be.

[9 : 16] The many offspring won't be adoption or people from his household growing into this great nation. It will literally be his child. And where it says there, your very own son, you can see there's a footnote in the Bibles that the Hebrew literally says, what will come out of your own loins shall be your heir.

Fairly earthy way of God really spelling out what he's promising here, isn't it? And then God shows him a sign. Verse 5. Brought him outside and said, look toward heaven and number the stars if you're able to number them.

Then he said to him, so shall your offspring be. Abram's already been given the promise of children like dust of the land and this time God has given him promise of offspring like stars.

Totally innumerable. Might not seem like such a big deal from Brisbane when we look up, right? Three, five stars maybe. But before electric lights, on a clear night, millions of stars, vast toward this huge gathering of individual lights that fill the sky from one end to the other.

Abram's already got the promise of children like dust of the land. This time God's given this promise of offspring like stars. Totally innumerable.

[10 : 39] When God promises, he goes big. He's promised the utterly impossible. You know, what can you give me for I continue childless? An old man, a barren wife, a land on his own.

And God promised him offspring enough to cover the land and blanket the sky. What a huge, impossible promise. And yet, as we know, God keeps it.

Spoiler alert. He is keeping it. You and I, being here today, are a direct result of the promise that God made nearly 4,000 years ago to Abram on a particular night when he was looking at stars.

We are its fulfillment. And so we need to have this large view of what God is doing in the world. We're here because of this promise.

Millions of other Christians around the world are gathering because of this promise. God is still in the business of fulfilling this promise. God promises the impossible and Abram believes it.

[11 : 47] Verse 6, And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness. Now, this is an absolutely key verse in the whole scheme of the Bible and our understanding of faith.

It's key for us understanding how we're made right with God. God counted Abram's faith as righteousness. And Paul picks this up a couple of times in the New Testament. We're going to spend a bit of time in Romans chapter 4 before we come back to Genesis 15.

So flip to Romans chapter 4 now. And we'll spend some time there. As we go there, some definitions are going to be helpful as we look at Romans chapter 4.

So the first one is righteousness. What is that? Just means being right with God. This is what everyone needs most in life. What none of us can get by ourselves because of our sin.

And secondly, justified. What does justified mean? That's the process of becoming right with God. You could say righteousified. So righteousness and justified, it's the same Greek word.

[12 : 52] So righteousness, being right with God, justified is the process of becoming right with God. Or another way of remembering that one is where justified never sinned, declared innocent, declared righteous.

So Romans chapter 4, let's have a look. Starting verse 1. What then, shall we say, was gained by Abraham, our forefather, according to the flesh?

For if Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God. For what does Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due. And to the one who does not work, but believes in him, who justifies the ungodly, which is what Abraham's done, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works. Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

[13 : 58] And so Abraham is justified as a gift. His faith, his trust in God, is counted as righteousness. Abraham is a sinful man, yet he's blessed, because the Lord has forgiven his lawless deeds, covered his sin, not counted it against him.

On what basis? Because Abraham trusted God's promise. That's it. He didn't deserve the righteousness, he didn't work for it, he didn't earn it, God just counted it to him.

God considered Abraham to be in a right relationship with him. And what was the promise that Abraham trusted? Well, that he would have innumerable children.

And this is a big deal, because look at what Paul says about it next, in verse 9. Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, that's Jews, or also for the uncircumcised, Gentiles who are not related to Abraham?

For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he'd been circumcised?

[15 : 08] It was not after, but before he was circumcised. Alright, so, Genesis chapter 15, Abraham is counted righteous. It's not until Genesis chapter 17 that Abraham is circumcised.

Alright, so then verse 11, he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. And the purpose, alright, so this is important, get this, the purpose, Abraham was made righteous first and circumcised second.

The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so the righteousness would, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised, who are not merely circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

So, what was the purpose of declaring Abraham righteous before he got circumcised? The purpose was to make him the father. The father of whom?

Of all who believe without being circumcised, and those who are circumcised, who both walk in Abraham's faith. Or to put it another way, Abraham was the father of faithful Israelites, who trust God, and the father of faithful Gentiles, who trust God.

[16 : 35] So, who are the children of Abraham? Who are the fulfilment of this promise, as innumerable as stars? It's not the physical Israelites, but it's those who believe, whether circumcised or not, whether physically descended from Abraham or not.

It doesn't matter if your last name is Abraham. How is all this possible? Because Jesus is the true offspring of Abraham.

And we've seen this as we looked at Galatians. He is the true inheritor of the promises. In Galatians 4, verse 4, it says this, Galatians 4, 4, when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law, so we might receive adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So you're no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

So Jesus, the true son of Abraham, the heir of the promises, those who trust in Him, through Him, we have been redeemed and adopted.

[17 : 45] Adopted into God's family and then made heirs. Heirs of this promise was made to Abraham. When our sons of God, with the Spirit of God, and sons of Abraham, heirs of that promise.

So then, we are the fulfillment of this promise that Abraham believed through Jesus Christ. We are the dust of the land, the stars of the sky, the innumerable offspring, and there's more to come.

There's more nations to make disciples of. There's more people to hear the good news and believe. To trust God's promise just as Abraham did. To be children of Abraham, redeemed by Jesus.

Adopted by God. Counted righteous as he numbered the stars. And God is on mission to fulfill this promise. And He'll do it. And so are we.

We're on this mission too. A little bit later in Romans 4, Paul unpacks this counting as righteousness very clearly and very specifically for us.

[18 : 50] And so have a look at this at the end of the chapter, verse 23. But the words, it was counted to Him, were not written for His sake alone, but for ours also.

And it will be counted to us who believe in Him, who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Do you see that?

Genesis 15, 6 was written for our sake. People, this side of Christ, righteousness will be counted to us who believe in Him, who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who believe He was delivered up for our trespasses, that He died as that sacrifice to bear our sins, that He was raised alive now as Lord forever, He's defeated death on our behalf, He can raise us up to everlasting life, so that we might shine like the stars forever and ever.

And so these are the promises of God. Jesus has died for your sin. He's been raised to defeat death. Do you believe it?

Do you trust that? That faith is counted as righteousness, just as it was for Abraham. Even though you and I are rotten sinners, God counts faith as righteousness and we're declared right with God just by trusting in that promise that Christ has died to rescue us.

[20 : 28] We've been justified, counted as if I've never sinned, just if I'd never sinned, justified. The guilt that we have for our failures, our sin, our shameful behaviour, is taken away on the cross.

Do you believe it? You're a child of Abraham through faith in the risen Christ and inherited the promises to Abraham. This passage in Genesis 15 is for us.

God has massive promises for the whole world and we're part of it. There really will be this innumerable number of inheritors of Abraham's promise gathered before God in glory.

He's still fulfilling as the Gospel continues to all nations, He's still saving a people for Himself and as we proclaim this Gospel and people believe it, then another offspring of Abraham is born through the Lord Jesus saving another soul.

Another little part of this promise is being fulfilled and it's not just through us, it's all over the world. Next week we're recommissioning Rachel to head off to a new part of Eurasia to proclaim the risen Jesus.

[21 : 38] Liam's heading over to Kenya to consider mission over there and what it might look like and thinking about translating the Bible so others might hear this word and his mission happening all over the world that more and more offspring of Abraham might be born again, that they might be there in that eternal gathering before the Lord Jesus.

God promises what seems absolutely impossible and look now what he's done. He's raised the dead and he's given us this promise that we are righteous before him and we'll live with him in glory with many, many, many, many others.

Praise God. Flip back to Genesis 15 and we're going to look at the second promise. So God has promised descendants enough to blanket the sky and Abraham has believed God and God has counted that as righteousness and they pick it up in verse 7 and he said to him I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.

God initiates with that I am statement again it's about who God is and again Abraham questions God using that same phrase O Lord God O sovereign Yahweh how am I to know?

you've promised to shield me to reward me to give me many descendants in the face of having no children living in this land that's not mine potentially with many enemies now you've promised this whole land how will I know that's true?

[23 : 20] because this land is filled with other nations it's not empty when God makes this promise it's another seemingly impossible promise how can this be? it's this promise of unbelievable conquest bloodshed might driving out lots of other nations that are already there like what?

and God answers Abraham's question with a sign Abraham fetches the animals God mentions and chops them in halves and puts the halves on either side and drives the birds away and so on and in verse 12 as the sun goes down you've got this deep sleep falls down on Abraham and then this dreadful and great darkness falls down right there's this great darkness that's kind of repeated these three times this dread and presence of God and God says to Abraham in verse 13 know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and they will be servants there and they'll be afflicted 400 years but I'll bring judgment on that nation that they serve and afterward they shall come out with great possessions so firstly God gives his word know for certain then he gives him a very specific prophecy doesn't he your offspring will be afflicted and enslaved 400 years referring to their time in Egypt and they'll come out with judgment upon that nation and with great possession now notice that God here is promising like incredible defeat and shame for Abraham's offspring after he's just made this huge promise he's like oh yeah your people are going to be like crushed 400 years see the scope of God's promise here this is no kind of instant coffee kind of a promise is it he's not promising

Abraham you know your direct son is going to have this mighty nation that's going to become this huge thing here it's not going to be Isaac who does all this God's just told Abraham his offspring aren't getting this land until after they've been enslaved for 400 years this is a slow big long term promise that's being made and isn't that kind of classic God isn't that how he works isn't that how we're living now this side of the cross that Jesus promised he'll come back and we're working toward the fulfillment of the gospel going out to all nations those nations being discipled and we're awaiting the return of the Lord at whatever time he chooses verse 15 as for you you shall go to your fathers in peace you shall be buried in a good old age this promise is for after Abraham's death he'll live long and prosper and die in peace he'll be gathered again with his fathers like Noah and Methuselah and so on the affliction the deliverance of his offspring will all happen after he's gone verse 16 they shall come back here in the fourth generation for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete why is it so slow why is it so long why is it going to be this well because the people who are here in this land are not ready for judgment yet

God's people would come to claim back the land of the Amorites and I'll take it the Amorites here are mentioned as a stand-in for all the ten nations that are mentioned in verses 19 to 21 it's a promise that shows Abraham God is in for the long haul God is going to stick with them through the hard times and God is going to bring justice on the nation that afflicts them and will use them as this hammer of justice for the Amorites it also shows God's character God does not do pre-emptive strikes God doesn't judge people for sin they haven't committed yet Egypt wasn't ready for judgment until the end of that 400 years when God brought his people out the Amorites are not ready for judgment yet until God brings his people back but there will come a day when they've heaped their sins up to the limit and God will bring that judgment and we see in just a couple of chapters on

Sodom is like that where they are ripe for judgment and in our day as we see in 2 Peter God is patient not wanting anyone to perish but all to come to repentance but there is a day coming where people's sins will be heaped up to the limit and God will bring judgment against the wicked while establishing his people and then after making this promise when the sun's gone down and it's dark God shows Abram a sign with these chopped animals this smoking fire pot and flaming torch passed between them symbols of God's awesome presence but what's it doing going between these chopped up animal carcasses Jeremiah helps us here so Jeremiah 34 18 sheds some light on what is going on here God is cutting a covenant with Abram and in Jeremiah's day we see a similar kind of covenant so some people obeyed God and they made a covenant to actually set their slaves free as God had commanded them to do but then they broke their covenant and re-enslaved those people and so this is what God says to them in Jeremiah 34 18 the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant they made before me

[29 : 14] I will make them like the calf that they cut into and pass between its parts so the idea is that the cutting a covenant you chop the animal up you walk between its parts and it's this graphic picture of the consequences of breaking the covenant you will be like that animal if you try and break this you will be broken and here is Abram in this deep sleep and God himself is passing through God is making this solemn oath stating retribution upon himself should he break this covenant this is about as solemn as you can get how should Abram know that he'll possess the land because God has just bound himself in deadly covenant that's the character of our God isn't it he didn't need to do that he was under no obligation but the one who cannot be faithless has just bound himself in covenant to sinful people who are continually faithless and he's bound himself to us hasn't he in covenant to count us as righteous for ultimately

Abram's sin was only taken away on the cross of Christ and though he was counted righteous for his faith it was only because Christ would one day bear his sin God bound himself to us in a new covenant not that of passing between broken animal bodies but through the body of his own son broken for us his blood poured out for us his life to pay for our sins his resurrection to justify us and God promises this land to Abram through this covenant this will surely happen and the land is described in two ways geographically so from river to river and then kind of politically so the land currently is held by ten different other nations this is the land from the river of Egypt to the river in the south to the river Euphrates in the north so the river of Egypt could possibly be the brook of

Egypt which is kind of like a water you drive river bed that when a little bit of rain upstream just turns into a raging river and that was at the southern border of the land and then Euphrates right up in the north and under Solomon Israel does control all that land but the bigger issue is this land is actually already under the control of ten different nations Abram can't have the land now because their sin is not complete but by the time God leads people back under Joshua their sins are heaped up they are ripe God's people are to be the agent of God's righteous justice against them and then God will keep his enormous promise and give them this land it's a promise of judgment on the wicked it's a promise of establishment of Abraham's descendants and God keeps his promise and people take this land they live in it as

Deuteronomy and Nehemiah and so on talk about they find all kinds of wells vines they didn't plant and houses they didn't build and they live in this good land and God keeps his promise to them and for us the descendants of Abraham through Jesus Christ we are promised a land too in Hebrews it says that Abraham was seeking a better country a heavenly one and it pictures us in Hebrews 3 as heading towards our promised land God's rest we're told elsewhere that the heavenly Jerusalem is above we belong to one day the city of God will come down and God will dwell with his people in the new heaven and the new earth where righteousness dwells so we will live with God on the new earth forever and there won't be any more sin and there won't be any more wicked there but it will only happen at the removal and at the judgment of all the wicked who are currently in the land who at the time when

Jesus comes back their sins will be complete the promise of blessing to the whole world will be fulfilled at Jesus return so we have on view in this chapter God making impossible seeming promises don't we this one old man who's been told he will get land and descendants that just seems absolutely incredible he questions God and he listens to God's answers and he believes God counts that faith as righteousness God is faithful God is a shield God has a plan for this whole world and we're part of it that Abraham's offspring will be as innumerable as the stars in the sky and Christ died and rose again that we might be those offspring through faith we're part of something huge the Old Testament is not just history of some people way over there this is our history we are part of this promise it's not just

[34 : 48] Jesus and me my faith and get me to heaven but we're part of this promise that actually stretches back nearly 4,000 years stretches forward until the nations the disciples and the Lord Jesus returns then God's people will be established on earth for all eternity the wicked that currently inhabit it will be driven out before us it's a huge promise we're part of it our faith is not just you know God help me with exams and my troubles and that's that's kind of all I have with God but our faith is in a God who's changing the whole world bringing blessing bringing grace through the Lord Jesus Christ that people might repent now while there is time that they might inherit the promises of Abraham too that we many offspring of Abraham we can trust God and that faith in God's promises is counted to us as righteousness praise God let's pray father we thank you for these promises that you made to

Abraham so long ago we thank you that you're a God who is utterly faithful that you kept those promises to him you brought Jesus Christ through whom we too can be part of these promises we thank you that our faith is counted as righteousness we thank you that you are still at work still bringing these promises about and one day all your promises will be completely consummated in the Lord's kingdom as he rules in righteousness forever and ever will establish us forever in his presence amen