

Faith and God's Unconditional Promise

Genesis 15

God has promised Abram he will become a great nation, but he has no son. Abram struggles with his faith. Perhaps that has happened to you. *God strengthens Abram's faith*: He affirms His promise to him, then *guarantees* it with an unconditional covenant.

Scene 1: God clarifies and affirms His promise to Abram. (1-5)

God assures Abram he will have a son...and descendants that number like the stars.

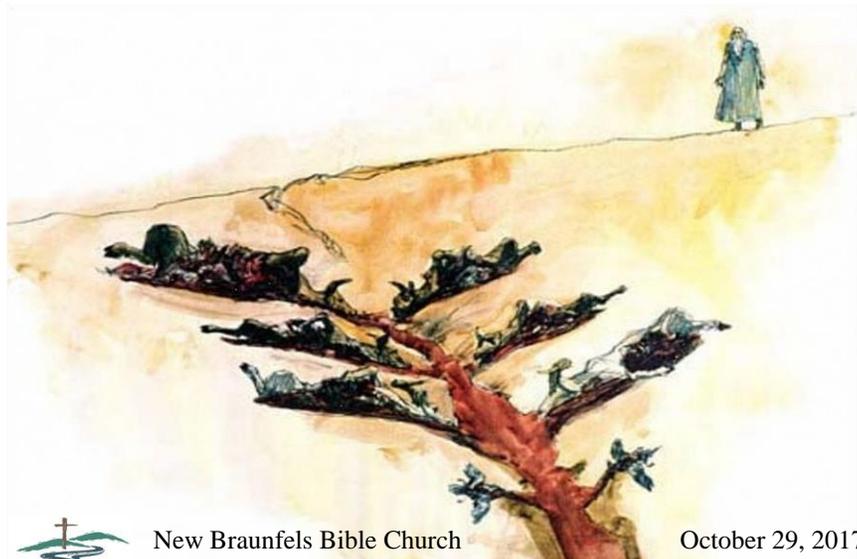
Parenthesis: Abram the believer was declared righteous by faith (6)

Scene 2: God guarantees the promise by His covenant (7-21)

Despite great suffering and oppression, Abram's descendants will one day live in the Promised Land.

Lessons for Today

- We are often impatient when it comes to God's promises.
- God wants to reassure us when we doubt His promises.
- God's promises don't depend on us, but on Him alone.

**Digging Deeper**

1. Genesis 15 records two significant encounters between Abram and God. The first, in verses 1-5, clarifies and reaffirms God's promise that Abram's descendants would be very great. At the outset, God tells Abram not to fear, perhaps assuring him that just as He had given him victory over the Mesopotamian kings (ch.14), so He would always protect him. But Abram expresses a different fear in verses 2-3: His 'heir' is not a child of his own, but a *servant* born in his home. According to ancient custom, if a man died childless, his household servant (business manager) became his heir. Abram is experiencing inner conflict: Can you discern the issues which are distressing him? How does God's response in vv.4-5 clarify Abram's doubts? What new questions would it have raised in his mind (as ch.16 reveals)?
2. In virtually *every* English Bible translation, it seems that v.6 is a response of Abram to God's promise at the end of v.5 (check your translation; most begin v.6 with "And" or "Then"). This is *not* the way the Hebrew reads. In fact, it is written in a way that requires a break; this is not Abram's response to what God told him in the night. Instead, it tells us something about Abram: *He was a believer*. When did Abram first *believe God* (Heb.11.8)? Now – for *extra credit*, considering that Abram was a believer at this point, why might God have caused the inspired author to insert this reminder of that fact *at this point*? What is the result of believing in the Lord? Is this true today? (See Rom. 4.1-5.)
3. Abram's second encounter with God in Gen.15 – like the first – begins with a statement by God (7) followed by a question from Abram (8). What is Abram's concern? What might have caused his anxiety (see vv.19-21)? What is going on in vv.9-10 and 17? (You can find an explanation in a Bible commentary dictionary.) Why did God tell Abram his descendants would be enslaved for 400 years? Why did God pass between the halves of the animals alone? Centuries later, as the nation of Israel came out of Egypt and approached the Promised Land, how would this event have strengthened their faith?