



## 'The God of the promise'

### Genesis 15.1-21

#### Background

Although this is a 'one-off' study, it's not entirely unrelated to the present series on Paul's letter to the Romans. The passage in Genesis will repay careful study as a 'complement' to the text of Romans.

Genesis 15 is particularly pertinent to Paul's argument in chapter 4 of Romans where he was at pains to underline that the gospel of grace (rather than 'works') is a thoroughly and consistently biblical message. Hence his directing his readers right back to Abram and the promise made to him, insofar as the promise made to Abram in [Genesis 12.1-3](#) (itself an expansion of the original gospel promise in [Genesis 3.15](#)) was always viewed as the foundational promise. It's for that same reason that Matthew, for instance, writing with a Jewish readership particularly in view, begins his gospel with a genealogy which traces the descent of Jesus from Abraham.

Genesis 15 is thus a repetition of the promise first made to Abram in Gen.12.1-3, and also an expansion of that promise. It's seen to be a promise of both a 'line' (to a man who was without children and whose wife, Sarai, was 'unable to conceive' – [Gen.11.30](#)), and a 'land' to a man who'd left his own home and had lived an essentially nomadic, and fairly vulnerable existence.

The chapter is bookended with the reality of God's promise: it begins with a general word of re-assuring promise and it ends with the detailed formality of the 'cutting' of a covenant. Between these two, Abram's two probing questions ('What can You give me?' and 'How can I know?') prompt the Lord to spell out in expansive terms the promise which He is making.

This two-fold promise finds its truest fulfilment in Jesus – the promise of a 'line' (a life of blessing [see [Gen.1.28](#)] which is immensely fruitful), and a 'land' which will be later described as 'good and spacious' and will be the 'home' to which Jesus will bring us (see [Ps.23.6](#) and [Jn.14.2](#)).

And central to the whole chapter – certainly for the argument of Paul in Romans! – is the key statement in v.6: 'Abram believed the LORD, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' It is by grace, through faith, that we are saved.

Read the whole chapter and start with **'days' (2), (5), and (7)**.

## 1) Monday 27<sup>th</sup> May – Do not be afraid

Read [Genesis 15.1](#)

“.. After this the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision ..” (Gen.15.1)

The events of the previous chapter were momentous. Powerful kings confronted. His nephew Lot rescued. The priest of God Most High encountered. The king of Sodom snubbed. Exercising boldness in faith can be draining. The Lord is quick to encourage.

Read [Gen.14.1-24](#): why would Abram have needed the assurance the Lord gave him in the aftermath of these events?

How, and in what circumstances, has the Lord brought His word of reassurance to you?

*Prayer: How careful and quick You have been, O Lord, to encourage me when I am faint-hearted! Make me mindful of the needs of others; help me to encourage them.*

## 2) Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> May – delivering on the promise

Read [Genesis 15.2-3](#)

“.. Sovereign Lord, what can You give me since I remain childless ..” (Gen.15.2)

The promise of God (v.1) was little comfort while the problem Abram had remained: he was childless, and God’s promise (12.2) to make him into a great nation seemed emptier by the day. God’s promise holds good though: and He will come good for you.

How should believers cope when they are disappointed by God’s failure to act or are perplexed as to why what they’d expected from God has not happened?

Abram poured out his heart to the Lord: in what ways does this encourage you and how does it challenge you?

Abram would subsequently (Gen.16) take matters into his own hands: and yet we’re told that ‘faith without works is dead’ ([Ja.2.17](#)): how do you tell whether you should leave it to the Lord, or take steps to bring something to pass?

Looking beyond your own lifetime, what are the matters which most concern you?

*Prayer: Hitherto, Lord, You have helped me. Grant me grace to trust You for the future, too. May there be fruit from my living which will glorify You beyond my own lifetime.*

## 3) Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> May – the sky’s the limit!

Read [Genesis 15.4-5](#)

“.. Look up at the sky and count the stars .. so shall your offspring be ..” (Gen.15.5)

The promise which God had made to Abram in general terms (12.1) is now repeated and indeed expanded. It's staggering in its scope, indicative of the truth that He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or think ([Eph.3.20](#)). How great is our God!

Is it valid to understand v.4 as pointing forward to Jesus as the 'heir' of that original promise, and one who would be his 'won flesh and blood'?

God gave Abram enormous reassurance here in this word spoken to him: in what ways and circumstances has the Lord spoken words of reassurance to you?

***Prayer:** How lavish are Your promises, O God! How generous is Your love! How mighty is Your hand to save! May my heart be filled today with wonder at all You promise us.*

#### **4) Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May – by grace, through faith**

Read [Genesis 15.6](#)

*".. Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness .."* (Gen.15.6)

One of the Bible's key verses, a statement which Paul picks up in [Romans 4.3](#) to stress that it is *by grace*, and not by any meritorious works on our part that we are saved by God. Abram trusted the God who had promised that He would do what was needed.

Why was the fact that 'Abram believed the Lord' credited to him as righteousness?

How does this verse help you understand the nature of 'saving faith'?

***Prayer:** I have no other hope, my Lord, other than the promise You have made, that in Christ there is forgiveness and renewal: thank You that in Him You give us all things.*

#### **5) Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May – assurance**

Read [Genesis 15.7-11](#)

*".. Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I shall gain possession of it .."* (Gen.15.8)

The promise of a 'line' to Abram was matched by the promise of a 'land'. Both must have seemed so improbable (if not impossible) – little wonder Abram wondered how he could be sure of it. Salvation is one thing: assurance of salvation is another.

**What answer would you give to those who asked you how they could know that what God has promised us in Jesus will indeed be theirs?**

Read [Luke 1.4](#): how can we come to enjoy a growing 'certainty' in regard to all that we have been taught?

Is it valid to ask God for signs – and to expect such signs – in confirmation of His promise?

The sacraments are more than *just* 'signs', but they're certainly not less: in what way are they meant to be, and do you find them to be a 'means of grace'?

*Prayer: You are so patient with us, Lord, eager to encourage and reassure our hearts. Make me mindful today of those who may need such encouragement and assurance.*

## 6) Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> June – He will do it!

Read [Genesis 15.12-16](#)

".. Abram fell into a deep sleep .." (Gen.15.12)

Abram was effectively 'anaesthetized' by the Lord: the grace of the gospel lies in the fact that the Lord Himself undertakes to do all that is needed to secure our truest welfare. He acts on behalf of those who wait for Him ([Is.64.4](#)). Trust Him for that!

Read [1 Thess.5.24](#): what has been your experience of the truth which Paul sets out in this verse?

Have there been times when the Lord has given you a sense of what the future will hold?

*Prayer: You do nothing, Lord, without first revealing Your plans to Your servants the prophets: help me to face the future in the confidence that nothing will surprise You!*

## 7) Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June – cutting a covenant

Read [Genesis 15.17-21](#)

".. on that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram .." (Gen.15.18)

Covenants were 'cut': animals were cut in half and the parties walked between the pieces to affirm that 'may it be so to me if I fail to fulfil what I have promised.' Abram is put to sleep: the Lord alone passed between the pieces. He will pay the price for us.

Why is reference made to the setting of the sun (see vv.12 and 17) and darkness having fallen?

How is this narrative reflected in Jesus' words to His disciples when He says of the wine at the 'last supper' that 'this is My blood of the covenant' [[Mt.26.28](#)]?

The path of those in covenant with God will not always be easy (vv.13-16): in what ways does God's covenant with you sustain you through hard times?

Verses 16-21 designate a huge area promised to the descendants of Abram: how valid is it for Jews today to plead this promise?

*Prayer: With all my inmost being I will praise Your holy Name, O Lord, as I remember afresh all Your benefits. How great has been Your mercy towards me in Jesus Christ!*