



**Study # 17**

**Genesis Chapter 15**

**Summary of the passage:** After defeating Lot's captors and refusing the king of Sodom's support, Abram must have felt exposed as a pilgrim in a foreign land. At that time the Lord came to Abram with several reassurances regarding his future. God, Himself promised to be his protector and his friend. God promised Abram multitudes of heirs according to the number of the stars.

Abram responded to God's word with a clear expression of faith. He took God at His word and God bestowed upon him the gospel blessing of imputed righteousness.

Abram became a prototype of all who would be justified by faith alone. The covenant promise of gospel righteousness was ratified by the blood of five different sacrifices. God assured Abram of the possession of the land of Canaan by His people after 400 years in Egypt.

**Key verse:** "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." Genesis 15:6

God's way of justifying Abram was on the basis of faith in the gospel of God, whereby he chooses sinners by grace and declares them righteous by faith. The instrument of receiving the righteousness freely offered is faith alone.

See the New Testament citations of this text: Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6, James 2:23.

**Observations on this chapter:**

- 1. Abram had refused the gains of war, yet gained the presence and protection of His God.** There is a definite connection between God's "fear not" to Abram (ch. 15:1) and Abram's war with the Kings of the east, along with his policy of separation from the king of Sodom. By rescuing Lot, he had made earthly enemies and became a target while a pilgrim in a strange land. When the word of the Lord came to him saying, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and exceeding great reward" (Ch. 15:1), Abram was more than compensated for the loss of earthly friends. The Lord's words, "I am" meant that Jehovah would be with him, both now and always. The words "I am thy shield," meant that God was his impregnable defence. That would have relieved his fears of reprisals his enemies. The words, "I am ... thy exceeding great reward," meant God's personal friendship. God Himself is His people's best reward. His friendship exceeds all other earthly riches or worldly comforts. As a pilgrim, Abram dwelt in tents and had no continuing city, but enjoyed God's abiding presence.  
**Application: How does this apply to me?** Every Christian is called to a life of self-denial. We are called to cease pursuing the lusts of the flesh and live godly in this present evil world. Our compensation is to have the indwelling of God by His Spirit. What ever losses or crosses we must endure for Christ's sake and for testimony's sake will be amply repaid in multiplied blessings. Our first and foremost blessing is to have the Lord Himself constantly with us. Our cry is, I must have the Saviour with me, for I dare not walk alone.
- 2. God promised Abram offspring as many as the stars.** Abram lamented that he was childless and, that upon death, according to the law of that time, his estate would transfer to Eliezer the steward of his house (v2). God promised Abram a son who would be his heir (v4). Along with that forthcoming miracle God pointed Abram to the greater miracle of a seed as many as the stars, "So shall thy seed be" (v5). This promise had a physical and a spiritual fulfilment. God promised that Abram would have a natural son and become the father of a great nation. God's purposed to also bring forth peoples of every nation who through faith would be sons and daughters of Abraham (Ch. 17:5, Romans 4:17). By showing Abram the stars, which God had created and placed in their orbits, God demonstrated that he had all power to bless him with offspring.

**Application: How does this apply to me?** The essence of faith is in the power of God to deliver on His promises. When we doubt God's word, we doubt God Himself. Unbelief is the enemy of fellowship with God and the cause of our backslidings. We must keep up strong faith. We must pray against our lapses into unbelief, like the father who prayed, "Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

**3. Abram was justified, or declared righteous, by faith in God's promise, "So shall thy seed be" (Ch. 15:5).**

Abram took God at His word. His faith was in the God of the word and the word that God had spoken. It is important to note, "The word of the Lord came unto Abram..." (Ch. 15:1). God spoke to Abram throughout this chapter (v1, 2-5, v9, v13-16, v18 – 20). The promise of a seed, or offspring, contained the hope of eternal life through Christ, the promised Saviour (John 8:56). The apostle Paul gave his own commentary on the nature of Abram's justifying faith (Rom. 4:16-22).

Note the words, "And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform, and, therefore, it was imputed to him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:20-22). Abram believed in the God of the promise as well as the promise itself for, "He believed that God was able to perform." John Calvin pointed out in his commentary on this event that, "Abraham was counted righteous as he was reconciled to God, because he embraced God as his Father."

His faith was counted to him for righteousness. God was the object of His faith. The transfer of righteousness to his account was the result of his faith.

**Application: How does this apply to me?** We cannot go wrong by following the apostle Paul's application of this account of Abraham's faith (Romans 4:23-25). New Testament believers are saved by faith in the same God, and in the same Saviour, who died and rose again for our justification.

**4. God confirmed His promise to Abram through a covenant made by sacrifice (Ch. 15:9-11).**

Five different sacrifices were to be offered suggesting that this covenant was costly. Except for the birds, the sacrifices were divided into halves. This displayed the two parties of the covenant, God and Abram. These blood offerings were a confirmation to Abram of God's covenant with Him. God moved between the sacrifices (v17). Abram did not. This displays that it is an unconditional covenant. God would keep the word of His promise even if Abram failed, thus it is a covenant of grace. Note that God initiated the covenant with Abram, "The Lord made a covenant with Abram" (v18). This confirms that our God is a God of grace.

**Application: How does this apply to me?** God's salvation is all of grace. It is not dependent upon the believer's performance. Christians sin every day and we will not be perfected until we are in heaven. The covenant of grace to sinners includes our sanctification as well as our justification. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us continually (1 John 1:7- 2:1).

**5. The four hundred years of Egyptian bondage were foretold in the covenant made with Abram.**

God's longsuffering to the wicked is stated as the reason for the delay in possessing the land, "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (v16). God shows himself to be truly longsuffering to the wicked Amorites and the other nations listed in v 19 – 21. God was also longsuffering with the wicked in Noah's day giving them 120 years to repent while the ark was being built. God is slow to wrath and swift to bless. This is God's character.

**Application: How does this apply to me?** God's merciful nature toward sinners is the basis of the gospel. God gives men opportunity to repent. He calls and persuades His people to turn unto Him. He effectually calls sinners to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel is good news to sinners. God is full of mercy. It also carries a warning that God will not always strive with man. The day of grace will end and then the door of salvation will shut.

**Things to do in light of this study:**

- Look up a Bible map and outline the borders of the land given to Abram. It stretches from the Nile to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18).
- Write out a short definition of saving faith as exercised by Abram.
- Look up and learn the shorter catechism's answer on, Question 33: What is justification?
- Explain how God displayed the ratification of his covenant with Abram?