

Abraham's Faith
Genesis 15:1–21
September 6th, 2026

3 assurances that correspond to the 3 promises of Genesis 12:1–3:

1. A direct word of affirmation concerning the promised _____ and wealth. (15:1–5)
2. A narrative sidenote indicating how God would fulfill the promised _____ of the nations. (15:6)
3. A divine guarantee and prophecy concerning the promised _____. (15:7–21)

Questions for Discussion/Reflection

1. Review Genesis 12:1–3. Which of God's original promises to Abraham are most evident in Genesis 15? Which are less evident and why do you suppose that is?
2. There are 3 passages in the New Testament that directly quote and argue from Genesis 15:6 (Romans 4:1–25; Galatians 3:5–14; James 2:14–24). Answer the following questions for one or all of these passages:
 - a. What evidence does this passage offer in favor of the idea that the author had a natural and coherent understanding of Genesis 15?
 - b. What is this passage arguing for or against and how does Genesis 15:6 support that argument?
3. Prior to consideration of this passage, what has been your view on the way that the New Testament writers viewed and used the Old Testament? Did you suppose that they read it naturally and honored what the original author intended or have you supposed that they often import a deeper meaning to the OT text that could not otherwise be discovered?
4. In Romans 4:23–25, Paul states that the truth relayed in Genesis 15:6 was written not just for Abraham's sake but for the sake of all believers. On what theological grounds could Paul make that claim? How are the promises given to believers after Christ similar and distinct with the promises given to Abraham? What are those promises (see Romans 4:25)?
5. Why are the person of God and His promises both essential objects of our faith? What happens if one of those objects is neglected or lost? How do these essential objects help us identify and reject common counterfeit "faiths"?
6. In as few words as possible, how have believers been blessed by Abraham?

Promise	Genesis 12	Genesis 15
Land	12:1	15:7–21
Descendants, Wealth, Fame	12:2	15:1–5
Blessing of the Nations	12:3	15:6

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Introduction

There is a popular church camp song that goes something like this “Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had father Abraham...Can you finish the rest?...I am one of them and so are you so lets all praise the Lord...(something about body movements)”

I remember singing that song at camp when I was a kid. I also remember thinking: “Am I a son of Abraham? The song says it, but I really don’t know what that means.”

Galatians 3:7 states “be sure (or know!) that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.”

What does it mean to be a son or a child of Abraham? What does it mean to be of faith? I hope to answer that for you today.

Lets leave aside the camp songs for now.

This message is intended to be a defense from Scripture of the doctrine of *Sola Fide* (faith alone). That’s what I intend because this passage is the very source of that doctrine.

Sola Fide is a Latin phrase that was popularized during the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s. There were 5 Sola’s (5 alones) in total, each essential to the Protestant argument.

You can connect them something like this:

Scripture alone is our ultimate authority and it teaches that a person is saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone—all this resulting in glory to God alone.

I bring up the Protestant Reformation for a reason. You see, many today accuse us of being followers of ideas that Martin Luther invented.

- “Your church and your traditions are new, they say, our church and our traditions are old.”
- I am of course thinking about the claims of the Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy.

I am asking you to make a choice today:

- Were your beliefs invented 500 years ago? Or were they revealed 4000 years ago?
- Are you a child of Martin Luther? Or are you a child of Abraham?

Here is my plan for this morning:

- First, I will read and give an exposition of Genesis 15.
- Second, we will evaluate and test the importance of verse 6 to the doctrine of *Sola Fide*
 - I hope to show you that this one particular verse is like a tightly compressed spring. Small but powerful. In fact, it is so loaded with potential and so critical to our understanding of salvation that it makes it difficult to merely teach the text and leave it at that.

I'll state it here at the beginning, I am not under the impression that this is THE way to teach Genesis 15. But it is one way.

Read Genesis 15

3 Assurances in Genesis 15 that correspond to the 3 promises given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3:

Promise	Genesis 12	Genesis 15
Land	12:1	15:7–21
Descendants, Wealth, Fame	12:2	15:1–5
Blessing to the Nations	12:3	15:6

You are welcome to find that chart as I read Genesis 12:1–3 to orient ourselves.

1. A direct word of affirmation concerning the promised **descendants** and wealth. (15:1–5)

- a. The account opens on the heels of Abraham's victory over Chedorlaomer and his cronies in chapter 14. Following the victorious rescue mission, Abraham refused the captured material goods that the King of Sodom offered to him. It may be reasoned from these events that the material blessing and fame promised to the patriarch had been fulfilled to a degree. After all, he was able to lead out 318 trained men who were born in his house (Genesis 14:14). By defeating the armies of multiple kings, he had made an increase in his fame, though not all attention is good attention. Thus, following Abraham's victory and refusal of goods, the LORD appeared to Abraham in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield

- to you; your reward shall be very great.” From this we learn that God saw fit to reassure His chosen man at that time.
- b. In the remainder of Genesis 1–5, God clarified and reassured the downcast Abraham of His promise of progeny. The friend of God rightfully acknowledge that the blessing of material goods is of little value if there was no blood heir to pass them down to. In verbalizing his complaint to God, he received clear confirmation that an heir would come from his own body (Gen. 15:4), complete with a visual aid corresponding to the promise of innumerable descendants (Gen. 15:5).
 - c. In 1995 a man named Robert Williams pointed the Hubble Space Telescope at a spot in the sky that appear to all previous technologies to be completely devoid of light.
 - i. After 100 hours of light collection, the resulting image revealed more than 3,000 galaxies that had never before been seen. This event was a significant step in our understanding of just how vast the universe is
 - ii. Though Abraham didn’t have an electronic telescope at his disposal, I am sure the upward facing view of the night sky was just marvelous. No light pollution, just countless sparkling stars shining down on him.
 - 1. Abraham was very old, near 100 years. Its not surprising that he was in doubt that he would ever have a child. God assured him that he would, and eventually he and Sarah did.
 - d. This brings us quickly to the second point:

2. A narrative sidenote on Abraham’s faith indicating how God would bring about the promised **blessing** of the nations. (15:6)

- a. It is common to take verse 6 along with the first 5, but there are good reasons why it stands alone.
 - i. I will give you one reason based on grammar
 - ii. And another reason based on its literary nature.
- b. Grammatical – Allen Ross in Creation and Blessing “A close study of the Hebrew construction “and he believed” reveals that the writer did not intend this verb to be understood as a result of the preceding section. The construction is not the normal sequential construction...if the writer had wished to show that this verse followed in sequence the preceding, he would have used the normal structure for narrative sequence...We must conclude that the narrator did not want to show sequence in the order of the verses; rather, he wished to make a break with the narrative in order to supply this information about the faith of [Abraham].
 - i. Interesting, isn’t it.

- ii. This was not the first interaction between God and Abraham, nor was it the beginning of Abraham's believing.
 - 1. No, He clearly believed God when he obeyed the call to leave his family and travel to a land that he had never visited.
 - a. Ken Mathews in His commentary on Genesis: Recognition of Abram's faith at this point is the story should not be taken as the initiation of his faith. Abram had already responded earlier to the call and promise of God's word (12:1-3). Just as the covenant ritual of Chapter 15 does not initiate God's commitment but formally ratifies it, so the narration affirmation of Abram's faith in v. 6 declares the faith Abram has exercised from the outset. The verbal construction "believed" (v.6) and reference to a past event at Ur (v.7) substantiate that Abram already exhibited faith. The syntax of the verb *wehe'emin* diverts from the typical pattern found in past tense narrative. The force of the construction conveys an ongoing faith repeated from the past."
- c. Literary – Verse 6 is different from the rest of the narrative account. It doesn't describe a word spoken or an action performed, but rather an internal, unspoken exchange between man and God.
 - i. A "mental occurrence"
 - ii. Something that happened on the "internal-psychological level"
 - iii. A "theological observation"
 - iv. An "appended editorial opinion"
 - v. A parenthetical remark
 - vi. An authorial intrusion
 - vii. Therefore, there is good reason to see 15:6 as standing on its own.
- d. Abraham "believed in the Lord"
 - i. Means to place trust in someone with confidence
 - ii. Here Abram's trust is placed in the Lord, whom he believes will carry out His promise.
 - iii. The term "credited," "Reckoned," or "counted" means "to assign value"
 - 1. God assigns faith the value of "righteousness"
 - iv. Righteousness is the state of having your sins forgiven and being in right standing with God.

- e. Verse 6 appears to us as the author's sidenote, what does that fact teach us about faith?
 - i. Its not words that make a person righteous
 - ii. Its not an action that makes a person righteous
 - iii. No, its something that goes on internally
 - 1. We wouldn't even know about it if it was not specifically pointed out.
 - iv. Faith is internal and quiet
 - 1. That is exactly why we needed Moses's editorial note to point it out. To say, "yes, there it is, that is faith. That very thing, though subtle and silent, is what it takes to be right with God."

3. A divine guarantee and prophecy concerning the promised **land**. (15:7–21)

- a. Though this is the largest section of Genesis 15, we will not spend long on it.
- b. Verse 7 onward comprise what is often called the Abrahamic covenant.
- c. God made a formal covenant with the man
 - i. He "cut a covenant" with Abraham
- d. What motivated God to take this action? It seems to be Abraham's desperate plea for assurance found in verse 8.
 - i. As in the first section of our Chapter, God speaks His promise to Abraham in verse 7 about the land
 - ii. In verse 8 Abraham shows that he seeks assurance of the promised land
 - 1. "O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?"
- e. God directed him to bring a variety of animals
 - i. Because God was going to "cut a covenant" with Abraham
 - ii. This much seems to have been clear to Abraham, because he prepared the animals without being directly instructed to do so.
- f. This final section goes on to describe
 - i. A solemn revelation about Abraham's descendants (v. 12–16)
 - ii. A one-sided covenant (v. 17–21)

So what? Does it really matter?

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g. The Eiffel Tower standing upside down

- i. The New Testament writers base their argument for salvation by faith alone on Genesis 15:6
 1. James quotes it in James 2
 2. Paul quotes it in Galatians 3
 3. The author of Hebrews doesn't directly quote but argues from the account
 4. And finally, Paul quotes it 3 times in Romans 4
- ii. Hu...how does it stand up? Why does it not fall?
 1. Like two forks and a toothpick balanced on the edge of a cup
 - a. That might be the very question that we are afraid to ask
 - b. But we must ask it
- iii. Why does it stand? The answer is that the actual tip of the spire is anchored deep into God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham.

Can we really connect Genesis 12 and 15? I know it seems to work out but is there actually good reason to do so?

- There is, the Apostle Paul indicates that he made the same connection in Galatians 3:5–9.

I don't understand why we need to make the connection between the NT passages on faith and Genesis 15. Why not just use Romans 4 and avoid the issue altogether?

- The doctrine of salvation by grace through faith loses its Abrahamic anchor
- If you don't, you will not arrive at the level of clarity that God intends you to have
 - James 2 is a challenge to understand
 - Galatians 3 and Romans 4 have their own difficulties also
- Genesis 15 aims the whole argument in a specific direction. God declares righteous those who believe. God assigns to faith the value of righteousness before works and obedience are ever a part of the discussion.
 - So, if you come across teaching that asserts that James teaches that a person is declared righteous by faith + works, then you should realize immediately that something is amiss.

- Shooting a bow and Arrow
 - The arrow goes where you point it
 - If there is an arrow that lodges into a tree opposite the direction you are shooting, then you can be sure someone else shot that arrow
 - This isn't Wii bowling, little guy is lined up on the lane and then, oops you let the ball go too soon and it goes behind you and all the little legless people jump and shout in unison.
 - Pastor Dan gave a great message on James 2 that can be found on our website.
 - When Abraham lifted the knife to sacrifice his only son, we know for certain that He truly believed. Thus, Abrahams works verified his faith.
 - Let me put it another way... By Genesis 21 we are assured that Genesis 15:6 was not a lie.

What is at stake?

- If the NT arguments cannot be supported by Genesis 15:6, entire doctrine of *Sola Fide* crumbles.
 - So, we must protect it.
 - Yet I fear that Genesis 15:6 is undervalued and unprotected by the church today. Let me show you.
- In 1968, Meredith Kline wrote an article in the Westminster Theological Journal entitled "Abram's Amen."
 - Mr. Kline was a protestant scholar writing for a protestant journal.
 - Before you misunderstand me, I take Mr. Kline to be a fellow brother In Christ, now in the presence of His beloved Lord Jesus.
- In His article, he argued that the 2 verbs in Genesis 15:6 are delocutive verbs, or verbs that are in themselves a vocal response.
 - He translated "and he believed" as "he amenated"
 - And "it was credited to him as righteousness" as God stating "you are in the right."
 - He was wrong in that he applied a grammar principle farther that it ought to be applied.
 - This happens all the time with Bible word studies
- Mr. Kline thought the was solving a problem. But really, he was introducing one.
 - In His article on Genesis 15:6 he wrote: "We need no longer assume the anomaly of a formularized analysis of the inner spiritual-judicial workings of salvation presented at the earliest stage of that revelation. We may rather see

in Genesis 15 the descriptive account of a historical episode, the theological implications of which were only later, according to the normal order of Scripture, articulated by inspired prophets and apostles.”

- I don’t think Mr. Kline realized it, but he was beginning, at least in some areas, to operate out of the secular worldview.
 - Secular scholars (Higher critics as they are often called) reason this way. If Moses really did write Genesis, then he, by necessity, had to rely on oral tradition. And if he had to rely on oral tradition, then a narrative sidenote like Genesis 15:6 is pure speculation (on Moses’ part or a storyteller who came before him) and must be rejected.
 - In his own words, “For while Abram would know his own psychological reaction to God’s word of promise and could have introduced an observation concerning his belief into the tradition, this seems improbable. Moreover, even Abram would not have known about an unexpressed, purely “mental” divine reckoning of righteousness to him. And to assume that such an unexpressed response of God to the faith of Abram on this occasion was later communicated to either a traditionist or to the author of Genesis by a special revelation appears too artificial a reconstruction of the course of the inspired recording of the history.”
 - “Too artificial?” by whose standard?
 - God used the inspired authors to write statement that they had no way of knowing otherwise.
 - And so we get things like the narrative sidenote of Genesis 15:6
 - And we get statements like “And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed...” In Acts 13.
 - Let me read the first quote one more time: “We need no longer assume the anomaly of a formularized analysis of the inner spiritual-judicial workings of salvation presented at the earliest stage of that revelation. We may rather see in Genesis 15 the descriptive account of a historical episode, the theological implications of which were only later, according to the normal order of Scripture, articulated by inspired prophets and apostles.”
 - What happens if we accept this proposed change to Genesis 15:6?
 - The doctrine of *Sola Fide* crumbles

If we give up the uniqueness of Genesis 15:6, the “anomaly” so called, then we force Paul into inspired mind reading or pulling out deeper meanings that could not be gleaned from the Old Testament passages themselves.

- That would be especially the case with Genesis 15:6.
- You may say, I’m ok with that. The NT writers were helped by the Holy Spirit after all.
 - This concession will cripple your belief in the clarity of scripture (perspicuity).
 - Can Scripture actually be understood?
 - Did God intend the Bible to be understood?
 - By whom did God intend the Bible to be understood?
 - I’m going to tell you, I think that the clarity of Scripture (perspicuity) is the primary battle that the Church faces today
 - “Yeah...but there are different interpretations of that verse.”
 - Translation: The Bible is unclear and I am free to derive truth from some other source (reason, feelings).
 - This concession will introduce inconsistencies into the way that you interpret the Bible.
 - What is the Bible’s teaching on how to interpret the Bible?
 - Inconclusive?
 - Varied? Depending on if you are an inspired writer or not?
 - If we aren’t clear on this our trust that we will begin to doubt that Scripture can ever be understood.

To conclude, how can you know for certain that faith alone makes a person right and righteous before God?

- Because Abraham’s example is and always has been God’s great plan to bless the peoples of the earth.
- Because Paul, the author of Hebrews, and James all looked back on Abraham’s account and agreed that forgiveness and perfect righteousness come by faith alone.
- After all is said, let me end by reading Romans 4:13–25

Communion

1 Corinthians 11:23–26