

**GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Lesson 13. (Gen 15:1-21). For lesson copies, go to <http://www.montgomerychurch.org/resources8.html>**

**Overview:** Beginning with Genesis chapter 12, the primary principles permeating the story of Abram and his descendants are that God’s “*promised land*” will be given to the “*promised seed*,” who will become a *great nation* and thus a *blessing to the nations* – even though the “Canaanites” (social designation meaning “commercial traders”) now possess the land (12:6; 13:7) and Sarai is barren (11:30)! Clearly, Abram began his journey well. He *trusts* (believes God’s Promises as evidenced by his attitude and actions), and *worships* the God who is the Promise maker (particularly in the promised land as he strategically places altars throughout). He falters initially in his brief sojourn out of the promised land to Egypt (12:10-20), appearing unsure of God’s protective power. Instead, he chooses to “trust” to his own devices as he lies to Pharaoh about his wife, Sarai, in order to protect her. This ultimately results in *affliction* to Pharaoh and Egypt rather than being *blessings* as God intended. Abram’s actions in chapters 13 and 14 as he allows Lot first choice of land, and his subsequent rescue of Lot and the encounter with Melchizedek show growing maturity in his “*trust*” (faith) in the Promises and his understanding of God who has called him (14:22).

**Read 15:1-21 completely through:** As you read, remember that chapter 14 closed with Abram rightly declining any “*reward*” from the king of Sodom (14:21-24), apparently beginning to understand that his riches come only from the LORD, not any earthly king. As you begin chapter 15, notice how God is now going to add to that understanding as He will *offer/gift* to Abram a “*reward*” far beyond anything Abram can imagine (15:1). Watch for the chapter’s internal structure that continues the overarching themes we have been following. Verses 1-6 appear to deal with God’s Promise of “*seed*” or “*descendants*” couched in the vocabulary of “*gift*.” Verses 7-21 deal with the issue of “*land*” couched in the vocabulary of “*gift*” and “*knowledge*.” In both panels God will not only speak but will take actions – actions that differ significantly.

- **Re-read 15:1.** In what way does God appear to Abram and when does it happen (re-read 14:17-24 for context)? What does God say to Abram at this time? Do you think that God’s use of the phrase “*Fear not*” has particular significance with regard to Abram’s journey in “*trust/faith*”? Discuss.
- **Re-read 15:2-6.** This panel deals mainly with God’s Promise of “*seed*” or “*descendants*.”
  - 15:2-3: Abram has already taken several actions after hearing about and embracing God’s initial call with the promises (chapters 12-14). In 15:2-3, what does Abram say in response to God’s Word of a gifted reward (15:1)? What do you think Abram’s response indicates regarding his “*understanding*” of God’s “*gift*” of “*seed*” or “*descendants*”? Discuss.
  - In 15:4-5: What does God say in return to Abram’s query about what God will “*give*” him? What action does God take to help Abram “*see*” that His gift of “*seed*” will actually occur? [Note: God’s action here differs significantly from the action He will take in verses 9-21 in response to Abram’s query to “*know*” how he will possess the promised land].
  - Re-read 15:6. After “*seeing*” what God reveals, Abram’s response is significant – a response that has been adopted by New Testament writers (Romans 4:3, 13-24; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23) as the Christian appropriate response to our Promise-making and Promise-keeping God – a response that embodies what Scripture means by “*faith*.” The language is important. What do you think is meant by “*righteousness*”? [Keep in mind that Scripture appears to use the term primarily as a term of relationship; not a moral designation]. What do you think Scripture means by God “*counting*” or “*reckoning*” Abram’s “*belief*” as “*righteousness*”? Discuss.
- **Re-read 15:7-8.** Now Scripture turns to God’s Promise of “*land*” and Abram’s desire to “*know*” how he can possess it. Note the dialogue between Abram and God which will immediately be followed by very specific actions by God to “*cut*” or “*make*” the *Covenant* (relationship based on promise) with Abram. What do you learn about God and about Abram’s “*faith*” in these verses?
- **Re-read 15:9-21.** In contrast to a fairly benign Divine action where an awake and alert Abram views stars in the sky in order to help him “*see*” the realization of God’s promise to him of “*seed*,” God now acts much more dramatically in His response to Abram’s desire to “*know*” about the land.
  - In verses 15:9-11, what does God instruct Abram to do? [Note: what is transpiring is part of the accepted ritual of “*cutting*” or “*making*” a covenant. Animals are literally split in half (see Jer 34:18-20 for a similar description). In a covenant between equals, both partners stand in 2 walls of blood & walk through in a “*figure-8*” symbolizing a walk thru death, i.e., dying to their individual rights to life. If they break the covenant, they are saying in effect: “*may what happened to the animal happen to me.*” The ceremony demonstrates that what has been divided now is considered as one].
  - In verses 15:12-21, what does God do and how does He do it? What does Abram learn? What lesson do you draw from all this?