



If I were to talk to people in their teens and twenties, many of them will say that one of their desires in life is to just get married. They may want a job and want to have a car and other nice things, but to be married seems to be the goal in life. “I just want to get married.” If that’s you, I want to correct you. You *don’t* just want to get married. Please don’t let that be your goal in life. That’s too low of a standard. If God has called you to marriage, then yearn for a godly relationship with a spouse. I’ve known many people who are just married. It’s sad. They’re just married, but they don’t have a relationship that is healthy and good.

Now, I bring this up here to help illustrate what we’ve been going through in Genesis, and to especially highlight the chapter we’re in right now. So, let’s take a few moments to try to connect the previous messages with this one. In Genesis 15, God emphasizes his covenant, his promise, to Abram. But why does this covenant matter? If you think that, I think you might fall prey to the same mindset as young people saying, “I just want to get married.” There are many people who seem to talk about God like young people might talk about marriage. They just want to make sure they’re “right” with God, but they don’t really develop or pursue or even want to grow in relationship with God. Is that “right” with God? No. What healthy marriage functions like that?! But, maybe that’s you here. You don’t really commune with the Lord. You don’t love him and have a healthy relationship with him. I’m here, on the basis of God’s truth, and Genesis 15, to say, “Don’t settle for so little.”

What we saw last week was that Abram genuinely trusted the Lord, and we see that trust in the Lord is counted as righteousness. Just as a side note, I believe that Abram trusted the Lord before this, but for Moses’ purposes in the writing of Genesis, he puts this statement here in chapter 15. Why? I think to emphasize the progression of what’s taking place in the reiteration of the covenant. Abram is reconciled with God, but what does that mean practically? The promise didn’t matter without Abram having God himself. So, **reconciliatin with God includes being made right with God – being declared righteous**. But there’s more. In our text today, we see that **those reconciled to God are also given a new home**. Let me go back to the marriage example. When Adam and Eve are married, Moses writes: <sup>24</sup>Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.<sup>1</sup> The covenant means there’s a unifying of two people in a relationship, and it also means that there’s a new home.

What if you met someone who said they were married to someone else, and they’ve been married for 10 years, they have a great relationship, but the relationship is all online, and they’ve never actually met in person? Wouldn’t you find that incredibly concerning? I would, too. I know that in a covenant like marriage, I often yearn to simply be in the presence of Tracy. When I’m away from her, I’m homesick. Home is where *she is*.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 2:24.

So, let me ask you: **how do you treat God? Do you want God or do you just want God's stuff? And, if God gave you what you thought were blessings, but you really didn't have *him*, would you be content or would you yearn for him? Do you see God as your home?**

I think the text we will look at today emphasizes the supreme value of God himself. If Abram knows God and also knows God is with him always, then he can endure difficulties and doubts and yet still have hope and joy because he knows God – and he knows God is good. God is Abram's assurance. The Lord is Abram's comfort and hope. And so it is for all who, like Abram, have faith in the Lord. The Lord himself is our comfort and assurance – come what may. With this understanding, let me share the main idea of the sermon today: **The Lord is the believer's assurance, even in the face of doubts and destruction.** Let's break this down, and see these realities in Genesis 15:7-21.

### 1. The Lord. . . (v. 7).

Look at verse 7 with me again: <sup>7</sup>And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."<sup>2</sup>

Who is the Lord? If the Lord is our assurance, we need to know if he's actually trustworthy. What kind of God is he? What we see in verse 7 is that he's a rescuing God. After God reaffirms his promise of Abram having an offspring, he moves on to also stating that Abram will have land. Since God's punishment to Adam and Eve, he has promised that there was going to be a seed of the woman, a serpent crusher to come. This serpent crusher is going to reverse the curse, reconcile people back to the Lord. But again, to what end? What's the point? To bring us back to communion with the Lord, and bring us home.

Years ago, I remember reading from a man named Randy Alcorn, who wrote that humanity was made for a person and a place: Jesus is that person, Heaven is that place. This is what I think of here. God promised the serpent-crusher. Through Abram's line, Jesus is coming. But God is also promising a place, a home.

Can you imagine how Abram yearned for "home?" He left the land he grew up in. And the author of Hebrews wrote that Abram knew that even this land of the Chaldeans was just a shadow of the home he was looking for: **...he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.**<sup>3</sup>

He was looking forward. He was anticipating. His eyes were on a day when he'd be home with the one who made a covenant with him. Do you see what God is doing here? He's saying, "Abram, you're right with me, and Abram, I'm leading you home to be with me."

I also believe this is what the Lord is emphasizing with the wandering Israelites, too. They're the original audience of Genesis. The wording of verse 7 is almost identical to God's wording in the Exodus when he says that he brought them out of the land of Egypt. Why did God do that? He did that to prove that he is the God who saves, and he is bringing Israel *home* to be with him. He's rescued them from slavery so that they can experience the freedom in a covenant with the Lord.

And as we read this, we who are followers of Jesus ought to think differently. The Lord doesn't rescue us just so that we can get out of Hell. He rescues us to restore us – to declare us righteous in his sight and

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 15:7.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 11:10.

to bring us to the home our hearts were made for – himself! He rescues to restore to himself. This is the Lord.

Now, with this, Abram ought to say, “On the basis of what God has done in the past, I can be confident he’ll be faithful in the future. Again, this is how God speaks to the Israelites in the exodus, too. But we humans have many experiences where someone might be faithful for a long time and then, for whatever reason, are unfaithful. Or, they just don’t continue to do the same things. It’s nice they did stuff in the past, but that doesn’t guarantee they’ll do it in the future. So, while we can look back on God’s faithfulness, we can also wonder, “Will he continue in the future?” This is exactly where Abram goes in the next verse:

## 2. . .in the face of doubt. . .(v. 8)

Read verse 8 with me: <sup>8</sup> But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?”<sup>4</sup>

Some people might want to think that Abram’s question is faithless. But I don’t think we should think that way. We’re just told in verse 6 that he believes God. Asking questions of God doesn’t necessarily mean you’re faithless. It can mean that you have faith, but you’re wondering how he’s going to do what he says. Abram has been waiting for a while, and he wants reminders. What’s beautiful is that the Lord doesn’t reprimand Abram for asking the question. God wants to reassure Abram.

Did you hear that? God wants to reassure his children. Do you know that? If you are God’s child, God isn’t annoyed with your questions. Instead, he wants to reassure you. This makes me think of last week’s sermon where Mark brought out God’s statement to Abram to “Fear not.” That’s the most often repeated command in the Bible, did you know that? I find that so incredibly comforting. God doesn’t say, “Ugh! When are you going to not deal with fear?!” Instead, he keeps reassuring his children. How glorious. In the face of doubt, God is Abram’s assurance. In the face of our doubts, God comes to us through his Word, through various means of grace, to remind us that he is with us and loves us. But not only is God Abram’s, and our, assurance in the face of doubt. God is our assurance in the face of destruction.

## 3. . .in the face of. . .destruction (vv. 9-16).

Verses 9-16 gives us a scenario that includes situation that’s prophetic and is explained in a dream. Let’s read it and then expound on it a little more: <sup>9</sup> He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” <sup>10</sup> And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. <sup>11</sup> And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. <sup>12</sup> As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. <sup>16</sup> And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 15:8.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 15:9–16.

Being people who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this situation sounds so weird because it's so foreign. But I think Abram knew exactly what was taking place here. A covenant ceremony was taking place. A promise was being made. In the ancient world, one way to make a covenant would be to kill animals and put their parts on the ground, making an aisle of sorts between the animal parts. Then, the people making the covenant would walk between the dead animals. Why so gruesome? Well, it signified that if you didn't keep your part of the covenant, you could expect to suffer the same fate as the animal.

There's actually an 8<sup>th</sup> century BC Assyrian text that talks about a covenant ceremony like this between a god and the people. And part of the text says, "If Mati'lu sins against this treaty, so may, just as the head of this spring lamb is torn off, . . . the head of Mati'lu be torn off, and his sons" (as quot. in Walke, *Genesis*, p. 245). Again, I believe Abram is picking up on what God is doing here. Abram asks a question, and God is answering with a covenant promise. So, Abram gets all these animals (which, by the way, are all animals that ancient Israel would sacrifice in the sacrificial system). Then Abram sacrifices the animals – making an aisle with the body parts, and the birds. Then at some point, birds of prey (which were considered unclean animals) came down on the carcasses. And Abram drives them away.

Why does Abram drive them away? Why does this story include birds of prey coming down to eat the carcasses? That's where Abram's dream becomes very important. Have you ever had a nightmare or a dream where you may have even been willing yourself to wake up to get out of the dream? In verse 12, we're told that Abram falls into a deep sleep, and a "dreadful and great darkness fell upon him." He must have felt terrified. This doesn't make sense. God is making a covenant to comfort Abram, but know he's terrified? Why?

Well, in verse 13, we see that the Lord says to Abram, "Know for certain. . . ." In verse 8, Abram asks how he will know. And now in the dreadfulness, God is giving Abram assurance. Know for certain that Abram's offspring will be sojourners and will be afflicted for 400 years. Wait a second! God has been reaffirming his promise to Abram. Abram's in a right relationship with God. God then reaffirms the promise of land. But then emphasizes that this promise is going to take a long time to come to fruition.

Now, how is this comforting to Abram? How is this comforting to the Israelites who are wandering in the wilderness. Well, God tells Abram and his people that there's going to be destruction before there's fulfillment. A nation, like the unclean birds of prey, are going to try to thwart God's covenant promise. And, the Israelites in Egypt could wonder if God has forgotten them or given up on them. The Israelites in the wilderness could wonder if God doesn't care any more. But now they read that no nation will thwart his plan. While it's going to seem and feel to Abram's offspring like God has forgotten them, God hasn't.

This ought to bring comfort and assurance to Abram and his offspring. God hasn't forgotten about Israel. And, God hasn't forgotten about Abram. God says that Abram will live and die in a good old age. God knows and declares Abram's future. There's comfort for Abram. God is with him, and God will bring him safely *home*. And God also knows and declares Abram's offspring's future. God knew the destruction and persecution they'll endure before it all happened. He hasn't forgotten them. It's all a part of his good plan. But you could say, "Good plan?! Seriously? Why would he do this? This seems so unnecessary." But do you see the reason God gives for the delay? Look at verse 16 again: And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 15:16.

I believe the term “Amorites” is an umbrella term referring to all the people groups in the Promised Land. God isn’t going to punish the people in Canaan until they are completely saturated in their sinfulness. Get this point. Some people might think that God’s judgment on Canaan through the Israelites was arbitrary or mean. It’s like God just wanted the Israelites to have land and so God says to Israel, “Kill the people so you can have the land.” Wow, that doesn’t sound like actions from a loving God. You’re right. In Genesis 15, God says to Abram that he will wait *hundreds* of years to punish the people of Canaan because God’s pattern is to completely punish once a people group is totally saturated in their sinfulness. One commentator wrote the following based on this verse: . . . **it is not until the nations become totally saturated with iniquity that God dispossesses them (Lev. 18:24-28; 20:23). So also he does not send the Flood until the earth is fully corrupt (Gen. 6:5, 12), and he does not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah until he has satisfied himself that not even a quorum of righteous are left in the city. Israel’s conquest and settlement of Canaan is based on God’s absolute justice, not on naked aggression. Later, when Israel’s iniquities have become full, God will drive even his elect nation from the land (Deut. 28:36-37; 2 Kings 24:14; 25:7) [Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 244].** This commentator goes on to state that there was an ancient text from the 1400’s BC that was discovered in 1929 that documented the sins of the Amorites, detailing that the gods they worshiped led them to horrific violence and sexual promiscuity.

So, God says that he will stay with Abram’s offspring. They will have the land. But there’s delay. He’s waiting for the people of Canaan to be saturated in their sin. But why? Does God want people to continue in sin? No. We find a pattern with the Lord. He is patient in order to give people opportunity to repent. We’re told from the apostle Peter that Noah warned people about the flood and judgment. We know that God offered rescue to Lot and his family from Sodom. We know God was even very patient with his own people when they were in rebellion, calling them back to himself. This is God’s intent, I believe, with the Amorites as well. He’s giving them time to repent. Even if that means that Israel suffers in Egypt. But their suffering is providing more time for people to turn – even while more people dig deeper into their sinfulness. What a merciful God we have! And what a just God we have. We’re told God will also judge the nation that enslaved Israel. And we know that happened with Egypt.

Now, after this dream, we read what happens next in verses 17-21: <sup>17</sup>When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. <sup>18</sup>On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, <sup>19</sup>the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup>the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup>the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”<sup>7</sup> It is here that I think we see even more clearly how

#### **4. The Lord is the believer’s assurance. . . (vv. 17-21).**

It’s dark and all that can be seen is a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch. Smoke and flames is symbolic in Israel. God revealed his glory to Moses through a fiery tree. God revealed his glory on Mount Sinai and in the Tabernacle with Smoke and light and flames. Here, the fire pot and flaming torch represent God in his glory because we’re told that the Lord made a covenant. But notice here, Abram doesn’t walk through. God does. Abram cannot keep the covenant. He cannot ensure that the offspring, the seed of the woman, the serpent crusher, will come. He cannot ensure that he and his offspring will make it to a city whose builder and maker is God. Only God can ensure all of this. So, God holds himself accountable. God makes a promise on the basis of himself! That’s the strongest promise because there’s nothing or

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<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 15:17–21.

no one greater than God. How will Abram *know* that God will do this? God promises on the basis of himself.

And so, God says that to Abram's offspring, he will give the land. God gives the general area. God speaks of all the people groups that live in that land. And God promises it'll all **go to Abram's offspring until the seed of the woman comes**. Do you see how this text points to Jesus? And when that seed of the woman comes, he will then bring a new land – whose builder and maker is God. Abram's assurance is God. Israel's assurance is God. What about you?

We know more of God's saving plan. Jesus is the offspring of Abram. And then, in Galatians 3, we read that **"if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."**<sup>8</sup> If you have turned to Jesus, the Priest and Mediator, for forgiveness of your sins and reconciliation with God, you have been declared righteous, and you are now part of God's family. How can this be? Because even though God never broke his promise, Jesus came to this earth to take the punishment as if he did break God's covenant. Jesus' body was torn, being treated as a rebel. But we were the rebels. Why did he do this? To take our rebellion on himself. And in taking our rebellion, he gives his righteousness to any who turn from their sins and turn to him! As a result, you too are freed in communion with God and long for *home*.

First, have you turned to Christ for forgiveness and mercy? If not, why not today? Second, if you have turned to Christ, do you continually turn to the Lord as your assurance and comfort even in the face of doubts and destruction? Did you know that Jesus told us that in this life we will have tribulation? In Romans 8, we read this: <sup>16</sup>**The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,** <sup>17</sup>**and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.** . . . Right here we want to stop. It's so glorious! We are Abram's offspring. We are children of God. We have reconciled with God, and we have a home to look forward to. God will keep his promises. He's given us himself as our assurance. This is glorious, but let's not miss the rest of the verse: **provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**<sup>9</sup>

Too many times, people think that Jesus saves us to give us an easy life. Or, sometimes we think that whenever there are trials in life, God is against us and doesn't love us. But from the beginning that's never been the case. We live in a broken, sinful world, and God is patient with the world. Like the people of Israel, we're on a journey to the New Heaven and New Earth. And there's suffering on this journey. And, in part, the reason we are here is because God is calling more people to himself. The apostle Peter writes this: **The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.**<sup>10</sup> He calls us to be in this world and reveal to this world that God is worthy of all. When the world sees us go through trials and pains and we still say God is worthy, then they really are confronted. And even though the world is becoming more saturated in sin, there clearly are still more people yet who will believe! Are you living with this reality in your mind? I don't believe we will live this way if we do not believe that God truly is our prize and reward and assurance. He's made a covenant with us. Are you simply satisfied with being "married" to him or are you reveling in the reality that he knows you, and you can know him more! Do you know God is at work and hasn't forgotten you and that Jesus is with you and drawing you closer and closer to himself and he's leading you to our eternal home?

Truly, **The Lord is the believer's assurance, even in the face of doubts and destruction.**

<sup>8</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ga 3:29.

<sup>9</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:16–17.

<sup>10</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Pe 3:9.