

The Covenant

THE STORY #3 - Pastor Gary Combs - February 15, 2026 - Genesis 15

INTRO: Good morning church! We're continuing with part two of our series called THE STORY: How the Bible Explains Everything. We're taking a 12-week journey through the meta-narrative of Scripture. We'll see that the Bible is one unified story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. From creation to consummation, the Bible tells one great story of a good and holy God rescuing His broken world through Jesus.

Today, we're going to be looking at the story of the covenant that God made with Abram. But to understand the weight of this moment, we have to remember where we've been.

In Sermon #1, **The Creation (and the Fall)**, we saw that God made a good world, made humanity in His image, and gave us purpose. But sin entered the story. Fellowship was broken. Death spread. Yet even in Genesis 3, God promised a coming Seed who would crush the serpent.

In Sermon #2, **The Catastrophe**, we saw how human wickedness multiplied until judgment came through the flood. Yet even in judgment, God showed mercy. He preserved a remnant through Noah and made a covenant promise never again to destroy the earth by flood.

Now, in **The Covenant**, we see God moving from "preserving a remnant" to "preparing a Redeemer." Today we come to the moment where God narrows the story to one man, Abram, and binds Himself by covenant to accomplish His redemptive plan. But what is a covenant? And how is it different than a contract?

A Contract is a "transaction": You sign a contract with your cell phone provider. If you stop paying, they stop providing. It's a trade of services. It involves lawyers. It's temporary and conditional.

A Covenant is a "transformation": You enter into a covenant in marriage. It's not "I'll be a good husband if you are a good wife." It's "I am yours, for better or worse." It's permanent and unconditional.

Need: Because we live in a "contract world," we often treat God like a "contract God." We feel that if we have a bad week or a season of doubt, the deal is off. We live in fear that we've broken the contract and God is going to "evict" us from His grace. We default to "earning" rather than "receiving." So we wonder, "Am I really right with God?" "Can I truly trust in His saving promises?" "What if I fail or doubt or wander astray?" We need assurances.

Trans: Genesis 15 gives us assurance. It shows us that God Himself secures His saving promises.

BODY: In Genesis 15, Moses recorded how the LORD reassured Abram by declaring him righteous through faith and by unilaterally making a covenant in blood, guaranteeing the future fulfillment of His redemptive promises. We can live with confident assurance of God's redemptive promises. How can we live with confident assurance of God's redemptive promises? The text gives three assurances that secure our confidence in God's redemptive promises.

Text: Genesis 15:1-21 (ESV) 1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." 2 But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." 4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." 5 And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. 7 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." 8 But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9 He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon." 10 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. 11 And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. 13 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. 14 But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. 16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." 17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 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, 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites and the Jebusites."

THREE ASSURANCES THAT SECURE OUR CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S SAVING PROMISES:

1. The assurance of justification.

EXP: (1-6) When God spoke to Abram in a vision, Abram was struggling. He'd been following God for years but had no heir. God took him out under the night sky and tells him to "number the stars." In v6, Abram simply believes God, and God "counts" it as righteousness. God counts him just.

"Word of the LORD" (1) (דְּבָרֵי יְהָוָה, *dābār Yahweh*) - speech, word, speaking; utterance

"Vision" (1) (מִזְרָח, *maḥāzēh*) - vision (in the ecstatic state)

"Fear not" (1) (אַל-תִּירָא, *'al yārēh*) - to not fear, revere, be afraid

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"Your reward shall be very great" (1) (שָׁכֶר, sâkâr) - compensation, benefit, price, reward, wages, worth.

"Lord GOD" (2, 2x) (אֱדֹנָי יְהוָה, 'ădōnây y'hwâ) - Adonai YHWH. Double honor.

"Childless" (2) (עָרֵרִי, 'ărîrî) - stripped, childless, bare of children

"Heir of my house is Eliezer" (2) (מִשְׁקָה, mešeq) - acquisition, possession, son of possession, heir

"No offspring" (3,5,13,18) (זֶרֶע, zera') - Lit., "seed." offspring, son. Masculine singular.

"Your very own son shall be your heir" (4) (מַעַה, mē 'ē) - Lit., "out of thine own bowels." From your seed.

"Number the stars" (5) (סִפְר, sâp̄ar) - to count, recount, relate; to number

"So shall your offspring be" (5) (זֶרֶע, zera') - same as verse 3. Paul tells us this Seed is Christ...

Galatians 3:16 (NKJV) Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say,

"And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.

"He believed" (6) (אָמַן, 'āman) - to support, confirm, be faithful, uphold, nourish

"Counted" (6) (חָשַׁב, hâšab) - to be accounted, computed, be reckoned; to be imputed

"Righteousness" (6) (צִדְקָה, s̄idqâ) - justice, righteousness (of God's attribute)

ARG: Paul connects Genesis 15:6 to the doctrine of justification:

Romans 4:3-5 (ESV) ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness

What is the biblical definition of justification? A legal act of God in which He declares a guilty sinner to be "not guilty" and "perfectly righteous" based solely on the work of Jesus Christ, applied by grace and received through faith.

Justification by faith alone is the declarative act by God the judge that we are forever wrapped in the everlasting righteousness of Christ! His record is now your record!

Romans 5:1 (ESV) Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

ILL: It's like Mark Twain's story of the "Prince and the Pauper," where the prince swaps identities and clothes with a beggar. We often think God just lets us off the hook. But justification is much more than a pardon. It's a change of clothes. It's the Prince of Heaven taking your rags and giving you His robes. You didn't just have your sin debt cancelled; you had His trillion-dollar 'righteousness' deposited into your name.

APP: We don't have to strive to earn God's approval. Indeed, we can't by our own effort. Rest in Christ's righteousness. Your assurance in God's saving promises begins with justification by faith.

2. The assurance of substitution.

EXP: (7-17) This strange ritual, splitting animals in half, was the ancient way of making a covenant. Usually, both people walked through. But God put Abram in a "deep sleep." God walked through alone, while Abram took a nap. God was saying, "If this covenant is broken, let ME be the one who bleeds and is torn apart."

"Brought you out" (7) (יָצַא, yâšâ) - to be brought out or forth; to deliver

"To give you this land" (7) (נָתַן, nâtan) - to give, bestow, grant, permit, ascribe, employ, devote

"How am I to know" (8,13) (יְعַדָּה, yâda') - to know, be certain. God uses the same word (13).

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"Heifer... goat... ram... turtledove... pigeon." (9) - clean animals used in sacrifice and covenant-making. Marty Solomon calls it the "Blood Path," similar to a Betrothal Covenant. Abram would've recognized this ritual. A Suzerain-Vassal Covenant.



"Cut them in half" (10) (בָּתָר, *bātar*) - to cut in two; divide; similar to the idea of covenant

"Deep sleep" (12) (תַּרְדֵּמָה, *tardēmā*) - deep sleep, trance. Again, God puts man under a deep sleep to bring about a covenantal change that involved cutting like the one with Adam in bringing Eve (Gen. 2:21).

"Dreadful and great darkness" (12) (אִימָּה, *'émā*) - dread, fear, horror, idol, terrible, terror.

"Will be afflicted for four hundred years" (13) (עֲנָה, *ānâ*) - to afflict, oppress. 400 years in Egypt.

"I will bring judgment on the nation" (14) - to execute judgment. The Ten Plagues.

"Shall come out with great possessions" (14) (רְכֹוֹשׁ, *rəkōš*) - property, goods, possessions

"You shall be buried in a good old age" (15) (שִׁבְּהָה, *shibbâh*) - age, gray hair, hoary head, old age

"Iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (16) (שָׁלֵם, *shālēm*) - complete, full. "As the chief and leading tribe, they are used here for all the Canaanite nations." (Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers)

"Smoking fire pot...flaming torch (17) - These are images that bring to mind the Exodus picture of God's leading by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21).

ARG: In Galatians 3, Paul connects Christ's crucifixion to the Blood Path of Genesis 15.

Galatians 3:13-14 (ESV) ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— ¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

700 years before Christ, Isaiah prophesied of His substitutionary death in our place.

Isaiah 53:5-6 (ESV) ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Paul described Christ's substitutionary offering: He became sin that we might become righteous.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

ILL: The judge whose son appears before him with a traffic ticket. The judge fines him, but then pays himself.

APP: When doubt whispers, look to the cross. Christ already paid the "covenant-breaking penalty" Himself on the Cross. Your security is anchored in Christ's sacrifice. Your assurance rests in His substitutionary blood.

3. The assurance of inheritance.

EXP: (18-21) God defines the boundaries of Abram's inheritance: "from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates" (18). He names the nations. He gives a timeline. This is a title deed. The "Story" isn't just about "going to heaven"; it's about God reclaiming the heavens and the earth for His redeemed people.

"Covenant" (18) (בְּרִית, *bərīt*) - Lit., "cutting." A covenant, agreement. In Genesis 15, God effectively says, "If this covenant fails, may I be torn apart." At the cross, He is.

"From the river of Egypt" (18) - Many see this as the Nile River, though some as the Wadi el-Arish.

"The river Euphrates" (18) (פְּرָת, *pərāt*) - the largest and longest river of western Asia; rises from two chief sources in the Armenian mountains and flows into the Persian Gulf

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"The land of the ..." (19-21) - The promise looks impossible: Abram is childless, the land is occupied, the tribes are numerous and established. You could frame it this way:

- God promises offspring when Abram has none.
- God promises land that is fully occupied.
- God promises victory over ten established peoples.
- And Abram is taking a nap when the covenant is ratified.

The Story screams: **This will only happen if God does it.**

ARG: Paul describes Abraham's inheritance as "heir of the world," not just Israel.

Romans 4:13 (ESV) For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ

ILL: Your offer on a house has been accepted. The closing date is set. But you haven't been given the keys yet.

APP: If you are in Christ, you are an heir to the King. The ending of your story is already written, and it ends with you reigning with Him.

CONCLUSION: How can we live with confident assurance of God's redemptive promises?

Today, we've seen three assurances that secure our confidence in God's redemptive promises:

- 1) Justification: We are right with God through faith.
- 2) Substitution: Christ took the penalty of our sin, which is death.
- 3) Inheritance: Our future with God is secured in Christ Jesus.

As I was studying for this sermon, Chris Tomlin's song, Amazing Love, came to my mind:

I'm forgiven	Amazing love how can it be
because you were forsaken	that you my king would die for me
and I'm accepted	Amazing love I know its true
you were condemned	and it's my joy to honor you
I'm alive and well	In all I do
your spirit is within me	I honor you
because you died and rose again	

The Story began in a Garden, it was preserved through a Flood, and it was secured through a Covenant. In Genesis 15, Christ walked the path of blood, making an unconditional covenant with all those who would by faith believe in Him as Lord and Savior. The Story, the grand meta-narrative of the Bible is really all about Jesus.

Will you trust Him today?

Let's pray.