

Genesis 15 - Teacher's Notes

Faith, Questions and God's Covenant

Detailed verse-by-verse teaching commentary for Genesis 15:1-21

Central teaching emphasis

Faith is not the absence of questions. Faith brings its questions to God without abandoning trust in God. Genesis 15 shows God reassuring Abram, clarifying His promise, receiving Abram's faith, and then binding the promise to His own covenant faithfulness.

Teacher Resource | Word Alive Chapel Bible Study

How to Use These Teacher's Notes

These notes are designed for the teacher or study leader. They are intentionally fuller than the public Bible Study webpage. Use them to prepare, clarify the flow of Genesis 15, answer likely questions, and decide which details to emphasise in the live study.

The public study page can remain concise: a short introduction, key lessons, discussion questions, practical application, prayer points, closing thought, and links to resource files. The detailed exposition stays here in the Teacher's Notes.

Genesis 15 is not merely about God repeating a promise to Abram. It is about God entering into covenant with Abram and placing His own faithfulness behind what He has promised.

Teaching flow

Reassurance (v.1) -> honest questions (vv.2-3, 8) -> clarified promise (vv.4-5) -> faith counted as righteousness (v.6) -> covenant preparation (vv.7-12) -> prophecy and waiting (vv.13-16) -> God passes between the pieces (v.17) -> covenant assurance and inheritance (vv.18-21).

Genesis 15:1 - Fear, Shield and Reward

God begins with reassurance: Abram is told not to fear. The command addresses a real human condition, not an imaginary one. Abram has just come through conflict in Genesis 14 and has also refused the king of Sodom's reward. God presents Himself as Abram's protection and reward.

The order matters. Before God explains the future, He speaks to Abram's fear. God's presence and character are the foundation on which the promise rests.

Teaching emphasis: believers may face uncertainty even after acts of faith. God often answers fear first by revealing who He is.

Genesis 15:2 - Abram's First Question

Abram responds, in effect, "What can You give me while I remain childless?" The question does not cancel faith; it exposes the tension between promise and present reality.

Abram does not turn away from God. He brings the unresolved matter directly to God. That distinction is important in teaching about questioning God.

Teaching emphasis: asking God for understanding is different from rejecting God in unbelief. Honest questions can exist within a life of faith.

Genesis 15:3 - The Visible Alternative

Abram names the practical outcome he can currently see: a household servant appears likely to become his heir. He is reasoning from the evidence available to him.

The verse shows how delay creates pressure to interpret God's promise through visible circumstances. Abram has not yet seen the promised son.

Teaching emphasis: when fulfilment is delayed, the visible alternative can begin to look like the final answer. Faith must remain open to God's clarification.

Genesis 15:4 - God Clarifies the Promise

God explicitly rejects Abram's assumed solution. The heir will come from Abram himself. The promise is narrowed and clarified.

God does not rebuke Abram for asking; He answers the substance of the concern.

Teaching emphasis: questions brought to God can become occasions for clearer revelation rather than evidence of rebellion.

Genesis 15:5 - The Stars and the Scale of Promise

God takes Abram outside and directs his attention beyond the limits of his tent and immediate circumstances. The stars become a visible sign of a promise much larger than Abram's present experience.

The point is not that Abram can calculate the future, but that God is able to fulfil beyond what Abram can presently count or produce.

Teaching emphasis: God sometimes enlarges faith by changing what we are looking at.

Genesis 15:6 - Belief Counted as Righteousness

This is the theological centre of the early part of the chapter. Abram believes the LORD, and that faith is counted to him as righteousness.

The sequence is significant: Abram has asked questions in verses 2-3, yet verse 6 still identifies him as believing. The presence of questions did not automatically mean the absence of faith.

The New Testament returns to this verse in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 when explaining justification by faith.

Teaching emphasis: faith rests on the trustworthiness of the One who has spoken, even when fulfilment is still future.

Genesis 15:7 - Remembering Past Faithfulness

God identifies Himself as the One who brought Abram out from Ur to give him the land. Present assurance is connected to remembered history.

Abram is not being asked to trust an unknown God. The God who promises is the God who has already acted.

Teaching emphasis: when the future is unclear, remembering God's past faithfulness strengthens trust.

Genesis 15:8 - Abram's Second Question

Abram asks how he will know that he will possess the land. This is another direct question, and again the narrative does not present a rebuke.

The question leads into the covenant ceremony that follows. God answers not merely with more words but with covenant assurance.

Teaching emphasis: God is not threatened by sincere questions. The issue is the posture of the heart - whether the question seeks understanding or resists trust.

Genesis 15:9 - Covenant Animals

God instructs Abram to bring specified animals. The scene moves from verbal promise into covenant enactment.

In the ancient world, covenant-making could involve sacrificial animals and solemn symbolic actions. The ceremony communicates seriousness, binding obligation, and the costliness of covenant.

Teaching emphasis: God is moving Abram from promise heard to promise solemnly confirmed.

Genesis 15:10 - Cutting the Covenant

Abram divides the larger animals and lays the pieces opposite each other. This provides the pathway between the pieces.

The Hebrew expression often translated "make a covenant" is literally associated with "cutting" a covenant. Jeremiah 34:18-20 provides an explicit biblical parallel in which covenant-breakers had passed between the pieces of a calf.

The symbolism carries a self-maledictory force: covenant violation deserves judgment. This makes what happens in verse 17 especially important.

Genesis 15:11 - Birds of Prey and Persistence

Birds of prey descend on the carcasses, and Abram drives them away. The covenant preparation involves waiting, interruption, and persistence.

The text does not present preparation as instant or effortless. Abram remains at the place of obedience while the process unfolds.

Teaching emphasis: waiting on God often includes guarding what He has placed before us from distraction or interference.

Genesis 15:12 - Deep Sleep and Dread

As the sun is setting, Abram falls into a deep sleep and experiences great darkness and dread. He is not the active covenant performer at this point.

This prepares for the striking feature of the covenant: God, represented by the smoking fire pot and flaming torch, will pass between the pieces.

Teaching emphasis: the covenant assurance rests fundamentally on God's action, not Abram's ability to guarantee the promise.

Genesis 15:13 - Promise Includes a Difficult Future

God reveals that Abram's descendants will live as strangers in another land and experience oppression for a long period.

This corrects any assumption that divine promise means an uninterrupted path of ease. The covenant is certain, but the route to fulfillment includes suffering and delay.

Teaching emphasis: difficulty does not necessarily mean the promise has failed.

Genesis 15:14 - God Will Judge the Oppressor

The nation that oppresses Abram's descendants will itself be judged, and the descendants will come out with possessions.

The verse anticipates the Exodus and shows that God's covenant faithfulness includes deliverance and justice.

Teaching emphasis: God sees oppression even when deliverance is not immediate.

Genesis 15:15 - Abram's Personal Horizon

Abram is told that he himself will die in peace at an old age. Not every aspect of the promise will be completed within his lifetime.

The covenant therefore stretches beyond one generation. Abram must trust God for outcomes he will not personally witness in full.

Teaching emphasis: faith can embrace promises whose fulfillment extends beyond our own lifetime.

Genesis 15:16 - God's Timing and the Amorites

The descendants will return in a later generation because the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

This verse reveals a moral dimension to divine timing. The delay is not arbitrary. God is working with justice, patience, and a timetable Abram cannot see.

Teaching emphasis: what appears to us as delay may involve purposes and moral realities beyond our immediate knowledge.

Genesis 15:17 - God Passes Between the Pieces

After darkness falls, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch pass between the divided pieces. These signs represent the divine presence.

The remarkable point is that God passes through while Abram does not. In the covenant symbolism, God places His own faithfulness behind the promise.

This is why Genesis 15 is such a strong chapter of assurance: the ultimate guarantee is not Abram's performance but God's commitment.

Teaching emphasis: the covenant rests on who God is and what God binds Himself to do.

Genesis 15:18 - The Covenant Is Declared

The text states that the LORD made a covenant with Abram and identifies the promised land in broad terms.

The earlier promises are now covenantally confirmed. God has moved from promise, to clarification, to solemn commitment.

Teaching emphasis: assurance comes from God's covenant faithfulness, not from the absence of delay or difficulty.

Genesis 15:19 - The Kenites, Kenizzites and Kadmonites

The named peoples begin to define the real historical land into which Abram's descendants will eventually come.

The promise is not abstract spirituality. It is located in history, geography, peoples and generations.

Teaching emphasis: biblical promises often have concrete historical settings that should be respected when interpreting the text.

Genesis 15:20 - More Peoples Named

The Hittites, Perizzites and Rephaim continue the list of peoples occupying the land.

The accumulation of names underlines the scale of the future inheritance and the fact that fulfilment will involve circumstances far larger than Abram can presently control.

Teaching emphasis: God's promise is not limited by the size of the present obstacle.

Genesis 15:21 - The Promise Reaches Its Full Geographic Statement

The Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites complete the list. The chapter ends with the land promise fully stated.

Abram still owns no kingdom at the close of the chapter, yet he leaves with something deeper than immediate possession: covenant assurance.

Teaching emphasis: faith can leave a meeting with God without possessing the final outcome yet still possess strong assurance because God has spoken and bound Himself to His word.

Key Teaching Themes for the Teacher

- 1. Faith and questions can coexist** - Abram asks God serious questions in verses 2-3 and 8, yet verse 6 explicitly says he believed. The teacher should distinguish honest inquiry from unbelieving resistance.
- 2. Faith rests on God's character** - The chapter begins with who God is - shield and reward - and ends with what God binds Himself to do in covenant. The centre of assurance is God, not Abram.
- 3. Waiting is part of covenant life** - The promise includes delay, generations, oppression and timing Abram cannot control. Waiting is not evidence that God has forgotten.
- 4. God's timing includes unseen purposes** - Verse 16 makes clear that moral and historical factors lie behind the timing of fulfilment. Abram does not see the whole picture.
- 5. Covenant assurance is stronger than visible circumstances** - Abram has no child at the start of the chapter and no possession of the whole land at the end, yet he receives covenant assurance grounded in God's own faithfulness.

Closing thought for the teacher

Faith does not mean knowing every detail of tomorrow. Faith means knowing Who has spoken. Abram teaches us to bring our questions to God, receive His clarification, and keep trusting while His promise moves toward fulfilment.

Useful Supporting Scriptures

- **Romans 4:** Paul's use of Genesis 15:6 in explaining justification by faith.
- **Galatians 3:** Abram's faith and the promise in the wider biblical theology of blessing.
- **Jeremiah 34:18-20:** Biblical parallel for passing between the pieces in a covenant ceremony.
- **Hebrews 11:8-16:** Abraham as one who lived by faith while awaiting promises not fully possessed.
- **Habakkuk 3:17-18:** Trusting God when visible circumstances do not yet reflect hope.