

ABRAM WAS ASSURED OF GOD’S COVENANT: REASSURED FAITH — HOW TO OVERCOME FEAR AND DISAPPOINTMENT

GENESIS 15:01–21

Introduction

Fear and disappointment — for some reason these two emotions gripped the soul of Abram.

- => Did Abram have a close call — was he almost killed — in the attack against the invading army from the east? (See outline and notes, Gen 14:1-16.)
- => Did Abram fear retaliation from the four nations whose army he had defeated?
- => Was Abram questioning (regretting) the unusual decision he had made: not to follow the law of conquest which gave all the spoils to the victor? If he had kept the spoils, he could have probably secured the loyalty of the rescued prisoners, mobilized them under his rule, and taken control of the promised land, at least much of it. He could have possibly become king himself, king of the city-states he had rescued. Could it be that he had missed God’s way for him to secure the promised land? Had he missed his opportunity to possess the land? After all, he had been in the land of Canaan for over ten years and he owned no land, and even more disappointing, he had no children. Not even a single child had been born to him. None of God’s promises had even begun to be fulfilled. Perhaps God had meant for him to secure the loyalty of the rescued people and take possession of whatever land he could.
- => Was Abram just feeling emotionally and physically drained after the excitement of the battle? The strain of duty after a big event always leaves a person emotionally and physically drained. At such times, the person often wonders and questions things. Was Abram just so drained, so let down, that he began to feel uneasy and to question whether he would ever have a son (the promised seed) and inherit the promised land? After all, he was living in a lawless and dangerous area, and it had been over ten years since he had arrived in Canaan. He and Sarah were aging, and not a single promise from God had yet been fulfilled. Was there a chance — did he fear — that he had misread and misunderstood the promises of God?
- => Did Abram just fear that he would forever be childless and never inherit the land?

Scripture does not say why Abram feared and felt disappointment. Perhaps all of these possibilities played a part in the emotional strain he was experiencing.

Note the words “after these things”— after the battle — Abram’s soul was gripped by fear and disappointment, so much so that God gave Abram a vision and reassured him of the great promises of God. This is the subject of this great passage: *Abram was Reassured of God’s Covenant: Reassured Faith — How to Overcome Fear and Disappointment*, Genesis 15:1-21.

- I. Abram heard and believed God's Word, God's assurance not to fear: God is the believer's Shield and Great Reward (v. 1).
- II. Abram heard and believed God's Word: God's promise to give the promised seed (vv. 2-6).
- III. Abram heard and believed God's Word: God's promise to give the promised land (vv. 7-21).

I. *Genesis 15:01 God's Word of Assurance*

Hear and believe God's Word: fear not, God is the believer's shield and great reward. God knew Abram's heart, his fears and disappointments. Years before, Abram had turned his life over to God. He had trusted God to guide him, to look after and to care for him. Therefore, in this moment of great fear and disappointment, God acted to help Abram. Note several facts.

1. God gave Abram a vision and spoke directly to him. Abram's fear and disappointment were so stressful that they caused a real crisis in his life, a crisis so painful that God actually gave him a vision and spoke to him.

Note: This is the first time in the Bible *the Word of the Lord* is mentioned. It is also the first time *vision, shield* and reward are used. It is also the first time that Scripture uses the great "I AM" phrase. (See "*It is I*", Jn. 6:20; see Exo 3:14-15.)

2. God called Abram by name. The tenderness of this act no doubt brought Abram prostrate before God and encouraged him beyond all measure. When God called Abram's name, Abram knew, above all else, that he truly belonged to God. God was looking after him and caring for him.

Isa 43:1 "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine."

3. God gave a threefold message to Abram.
 - a. "Abram, do not fear." This is the first time we find this great encouragement in the Bible. Note who speaks the words: God. There is all the difference in the world who the speaker is. Too often, we look to businesses and governments to ease our fears, but only God can truly remove the great fears of life: the fears...
 - for safety and security
 - of sickness and death

Isa 35:3-4 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."

Isa 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isa 43:1-2 *But now, this is what the Lord says he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze".*

Isa 44:8 *"Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."*

Isa 51:7 *"Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults."*

Mat 10:28 *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*

- b. "Abram, I am your shield." A shield *protected* and *defended* a person. (See note 3, *Shield*, Gen 15:1.) Note that God Himself is the believer's shield: his protector and defender. God Himself shielded Abram...
- from being hopelessly discouraged and giving up
 - from denying the faith and the promises of God
 - from being defeated by the enemies of life
 - from losing his soul to the spiritual enemies of God
 - from losing heart in the face of weakness, temptation and trial

Thought 1. God and God alone can shield the believer throughout life. This is the promise of His Word. It was the promise to Abram, and it is the promise to us.

2 Sam 22:2-3 *He said: "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my saviour — from violent people you save me."*

Psa 33:20 *We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. (see vv. 18-22)*

Psa 84:11 *For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favour and honour; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.*

Psa 115:11 *You who fear him, trust in the LORD — he is their help and shield.*

Prov 30:5 *"Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him."*

- c. "Abram, I am your great reward." Again, God Himself is the believer's reward: his provision, supply and source. Abram had returned all the goods — valuables and gold, livestock and possessions — to the people he had rescued. All the wealth was rightfully his by *the law of conquest*, but he had returned all and kept nothing for himself. Despite his large herds and his wealth as a businessman, he only leased land

for his herds to graze upon. He owned no land, not even a small plot. Was he to ever possess it? Was he to ever bear a son to be his heir?

God assured Abram that he would be rewarded, richly rewarded.

=> Abram was to be rewarded by *God Himself*. He had no need that God was not going to meet.

Mat 6:33 *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

Phil 4:19 *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

Heb 11:25-26 *He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.*

1 Pet 5:7 *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Psa 16:5 *LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure.*

Psa 31:19 *How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.*

=> Abram was to be rewarded *with God Himself* with all that God is within Himself — within His very nature. Abram was to receive God's very nature, be conformed to His image, possess the love, joy, peace — all the fruit of God's Spirit — which are the most valuable possessions a person can have.

Gal 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

Eph 4:24 *And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

GENESIS 15:01 THE SOLDIER'S SHIELD

*After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” **Genesis 15:01***

The shield has been used by men to *protect and defend* themselves from earliest history. Note these facts about shields.

=> Shields were part of the soldier's armour

=> There were both small and large shields

=> The small shields were held by soldiers in one hand and a sword in the other hand. Sometimes the shield was strapped to the soldier's arm

- => The large shields were large enough for soldier's to squat behind and protect their whole body. (See note, Eph 6:14-17, pt. 4.)
- => Shields were made of animal skins, wood, or some metal.
- => Shields were made in all shapes and forms: square, round, oblong, and oval.
- => Shields were used to *protect and defend* the soldier against sword, arrow or some other missile hurled against him such as rocks. □

II. *Genesis 15:02-06 God's Assurance of the Promised Seed*

How can we overcome fear and disappointment? Hear and believe God's Word, in particular His promise concerning *the promised seed*.

1. Abram was disappointed — extremely disappointed — to the point that he feared having no child. Apparently, this was the primary reason for his disappointment and fear: he was childless. His nephew, Lot, whom Abram had reared and loved like a son, had chosen to follow after the world instead of God. He was living a worldly life seeking after the bright lights, pleasures and possessions of the world. Therefore, he was unfit to be the heir. Moreover, Abram and Sara were reaching an age when childbearing would be impossible. If Abram died without a son, the consequences could be catastrophic:

=> the heir of his estate would not be a descendant from his own body. It would be the steward of his household, Eliezer of Damascus.

=> the promises of God would not be fulfilled.

What about the situation? Childless. Reaching the age beyond childbearing. About ten years in the land of Canaan and nothing to show for it: no promised son and no land, not even an acre. Spiritually all alone; very few believers upon earth. Had he misread, misunderstood God? Was he failing, coming short of what God expected? Was he hindering God's working through him? What did God expect? How much longer would it be before God would bless him with a child?

Apparently Abram was almost in despair. In his mind, God's promises were not being proven, not taking effect, not being fulfilled in his life. The unfulfilled promises of God were straining his thoughts and weighing heavily upon his heart. Note that Abram states the case three times to God.

=> I am childless (v. 2).

=> You have given me no son, no seed (v. 3).

=> My heir is not my own son, but the steward of my household (v. 3).

Abram was wondering, questioning. As stated, he was apparently almost in despair. But note what happened.

2. God spoke to Abram to reassure him. God corrected Abram: the steward of his household would not be his heir, but a son would come from his own body to be his heir. The promised seed was sure, absolutely sure: the promise of God would be fulfilled.

Now, note what God did, remembering that God was giving Abram a vision of all this. God took Abram outside — which means that Abram was inside his tent — and told him to look up and count the stars. So would his seed (descendants) be. They would number as the stars of the sky. What a glorious encouragement! In the future, every time Abram looked up at the stars, he would think of the great promise of God and be encouraged and strengthened in his faith. What a glorious moment this must have been for Abram. Most likely, as God does with all his dear servants in moments of crisis, God broke Abram prostrate upon the ground and made this a most humbling and worshipful experience. Just imagine this moment within the vision: God quickening Abram's mind to see the innumerable stars of the sky and telling him — giving him the deep sense within — that his seed (descendants) would number as the stars of the sky. A glorious reassurance and relief must have swept across Abram's heart as he probably wept sorrowfully before the Lord. God was going to fulfil His promise: he, Abram, would bear *the promised seed* of God Himself.

Thought 1. Just like Abram's experience, emotions can fall apart; darkness can sweep over our souls; trials can sap our strength; temptation can cause us to question and doubt God's promises. In fact, times do arise when we need a fresh experience with God, a brokenness, a deep sense of His presence, a special reassurance from His Word. It is in such moments of need that God always comes to us to meet our need, and the depth of the experience with God always matches our need. The experience of His presence and power, of His Word and assurance, are always just what we need. This was the case with Abram, and it is always the case with the genuine follower of God.

Exo 33:14 *The LORD replied, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*

Psa 28:7 *The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.*

Psa 40:17 *Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer: O my God, do not delay.*

Isa 41:10 *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Isa 42:6 *"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles*

Isa 43:1-2 *But now, this is what the LORD says he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when*

you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Isa 45:2 I will go before you and will level the mountains ; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.

Heb 13:5-6 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

3. Abram believed God's Word: believed God and was counted righteous (v.6). This is one of the most important verses found in all of Scripture. Its great importance is seen in that it is discussed at length in the New Testament (Rom 4:1- 25; Gal 3:1-29; Jas 2:14-24). The verse covers the great doctrine of justification, the great teaching that a person can become right with God *by faith*. This verse above all others reveals a fact that man must heed: from the beginning of human history there has been *only one way* to get right with God: *justification by faith*. When a person believes God — truly believes — God takes that person's faith and counts it as righteousness. This was true of Abram and the believers of old, and it is true of us today. Note two extremely significant facts.

- a. This is the first time the word *believe* is used in Scripture. The Hebrew word actually means "Amen, it will be so; it is so. " *To believe* means to rest upon, to lean upon, to be sure of, to have complete and full confidence in. (William Wilson. *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*. McLean, V A: MacDonald Publishing Company, n. d, p. 85).

When God spoke to say that Abram's seed would number as the stars of the sky, Abram's heart swelled with praise and thanksgiving to God. His heart said, "Amen! It will be so, yea, it is so." Abram's heart...

- rested upon God's promise
- leaned upon God's promise
- was sure of God's promise
- had complete and full confidence in God's promise

Abram believed God, that God was going to do exactly what He had promised.

- b. Now, note a second significant fact: God took Abram's faith and *counted or credited* it to him for righteousness. No person is righteous before God. Godly righteousness means perfection, that a person is perfect, perfectly right before God. No person is perfect; consequently, no person is righteous before God. This is the great problem of mankind: How can a man become righteous before God? The answer must be found, for no person can live with God unless he is righteous. This is the great message of this verse: it tells us exactly how we can become righteous before God.

Note the word *counted or credited* (hasab). It actually means counted and credited, reckoned and imputed. It is an accounting word. For example, when a person deposits

his money in a bank, the bank credits the money to his account. When Abram deposited his faith with God — laid his life into the hands of God — God credited his faith as righteousness. But as stated, no person is righteous. When a person truly believes God, truly casts himself upon God, trusting God to take care of him, God does just that: God takes care of him. God counts him as righteous. He is not righteous, but God credits his faith as righteousness.

But note this: it is critical to remember just what Abram believed. He believed God's promise that He was going to give *the promised seed* to the world through him...

- the promised seed meant a new nation — a new race — of people who would be God's people upon earth. (See note, Eph 4:17-19.)
- the promised seed meant the Saviour who would provide salvation for the whole world, the Saviour through whom "all the families of the earth would be blessed" (see Gen 12:3b).

The promised seed has a double meaning throughout Scripture. It means both a nation of people and the Saviour promised to Abram. God included both when He first gave the promise to Abram (see outline and notes 2 and 3, Gen 12:2-3; 12:3). This tells us why Abram wanted a son so much: to bear a nation of people, yes; but he also wanted a son so that his line of descendants could continue and bear the promised seed, the Saviour of God Himself. Thus, what Abram believed was this: Abram believed the LORD, His promise to give the promised seed — both a nation of people and the Saviour — to the world through him.

=> It was faith in the LORD's promise to send the Savior that was credited to Abram as righteousness.

Thought 1. Note a significant fact: the way of salvation is the same for all men throughout history, the same for Old Testament believers and for New Testament believers. We secure a right relationship with God in the very same way that Abram did: faith in the promised seed, the Saviour of the world. Note four significant facts.

(1) The great need of people today is righteousness.

Rom 3:10 *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one"*

Rom 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Isa 64:6 *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*

(2) Abram was saved by believing in the coming Saviour; we are saved by believing in the Saviour who has come.

(3) Abram was credited with righteousness by believing in the coming Saviour; we are credited with righteousness by believing in the Saviour who has come.

(4) It was Abram's faith in the promised seed who was yet to come that justified Abram; it is our faith in the promised seed who has come that justifies us.

Isa 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Rom 4:3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (see Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23).

Rom 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Cor 5:21 God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Acts 13:39 Through him [Christ] everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

GENESIS 15:02 LORD GOD (ADONAI YAHWEH)

But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"

Genesis 15:02

This is one of the double names used to describe God throughout the Bible. Believers often address God by using a double name for this very purpose: to describe Him and their relationship to Him. For example, believers often refer to God as *Almighty God* or *Most High God* or as Abram does in this passage, *Lord God*.

1. *Lord* (adon or adonai) means *Master*. The title has been used to refer to both men and God down through history. Slaves have always referred to their owners as masters or lords, and in certain societies wives have called their husbands *my lord* or *my master*. But note this: when a man is addressed as *lord* or *master*, the first letter is never capitalized in the English translation of the Bible. However, when God is addressed as *Lord* or *Master*, the title is always capitalized.
 - a. When the title *lord* or *master* was used to address men, at least three things were meant.
 - => It was a title of authority: the king held authority over the citizens; the land owner had authority over the slave (Gen 45:8).
 - => It was a title of submission: the citizen was subject to the king, and the slave was subject to the land owner (Gen 24:9-12).
 - => It was a title of honour: the title showed respect and acknowledged a person's position or achievement (Gen 18:12; 32:18).

b. When the title *Lord* or *Master* was used to address God, at least four things were meant:

=> First, *God's sovereign position*. The Lord is the Sovereign Ruler and Supreme Master of the universe. He is the Lord who holds the highest position within the universe: He is before all, above all, and over all. He (Adonay) is "God of gods, and Lord of lords" (Deu 10:17). He is "the Lord of all the earth" (Jos 3:11; Psa 8:1).

=> Second, *God's supreme authority*. The Lord is the Supreme Master over the whole universe. He rules as He wills, rules according to His own purposes and pleasure. The Lord does not hold authority just like all other authorities upon earth and throughout the universe. The Lord is the *One Supreme Authority* who rules, governs, and executes justice as He sees fit, rewarding the obedient and punishing the disobedient (see Hos 12:14).

=> Third, *God's right to demand submission or obedience*. The Lord is the *Supreme Master* over all beings — the Creator and Sovereign LORD over all — both visible and invisible. Therefore, He alone has the right to demand obedience and submission. We owe our lives to the Sovereign LORD and Supreme Master of the universe; consequently, we should give our lives to Him, totally subject ourselves to His control and rule (Isa 6:8-11; Jos 7:8-13).

=> Fourth, *God's power to provide*. The LORD is the One who can provide all things for His servant; the One who can meet all the needs of His dear follower, both his spiritual and physical needs (see Gen 15:2; 44:10-12).

When Abram addressed God as "Lord God," he was declaring that God was his Lord. Abram was acknowledging...

- God's sovereign position as Lord
- God's Supreme Authority over all his affairs
- God's right to his life and obedience
- God's power to provide for him and to meet all his needs

2. God (Yahweh or Jehovah): see note 2, Gen 2:4; note 1, Gen 2:7. □

III. *Genesis 15:07–21 The Promised Land*

Hear and believe God's Word, God's promise to give the promised land. Note what now happened in the vision of Abram.

1. God reminded Abram of a very significant fact: God saved him for the purpose of giving him the promised land (v. 7). Note how God identified Himself: "I am the LORD (Jehovah, Yahweh), the God of redemption and salvation, the God who establishes a personal relationship with people and enters the covenant of redemption with them. I am the LORD who saved you — called you out of Ur of the Chaldees —

for the very purpose of giving you this covenant, the covenant which includes both *the promised seed* and *the promised land*. Simply stated, God was declaring that the promise given to Abram in Ur of the Chaldees included not only *the promised seed* but *the promised land*.

2. But note: the fear and disappointment of Abram had been so frightening that he asked God for more and more assurance (v. 8). He wanted his faith to be strengthened — so rooted and grounded — he would never again question God's promises. Thus, he asked God for a specific sign that would absolutely confirm the promise (covenant) of the promised land.
3. God heard Abram's request. God moved to give him a visible sign that would establish the covenant forever in Abram's mind (vv. 9-11). What would do this? A human covenant: using a human covenant with which Abram was familiar, a covenant that was used by people of that day to seal contracts. If God established the promise of the promised land with a human covenant — with a contract agreement — Abram would understand exactly what God was doing. Again, remember: all this was taking place in a vision that God was giving Abram.
 - => Note the animals used: an heifer, a goat, and a ram, all three years old, which meant they were grown or mature. Also used were a dove and a young pigeon (v. 9).
 - => Note that the covenant ceremony involved cutting the larger animals into halves and laying each piece opposite each other with a walking path between them. The dove and pigeon were left whole and one laid at the end of one row and the other at the end of the other row. The idea of the covenant was this: each party entering the covenant (contract) was to walk down the path between the pieces of sacrificed animals. While walking, they were to declare this promise: if they failed to keep the covenant then they deserved the same fate as the animals (Jer 34:18-19). Just what happened between Abram and God will be seen in a few moments.
 - => Note that God did not appear just yet to take part in the covenant ceremony. Thus Abram had to drive off the vultures that kept sweeping down to consume the carcasses. (Do the vultures foreshadow the evil one, Satan, trying to destroy every attempt of God to establish and fulfil His covenant with man?)
4. God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Abram: assured him of the promised seed's triumphant future down through the coming ages (vv. 12-16). As the sun was going down, God put Abram into a deep sleep. Again, remember that Abram was lying prostrate upon the ground receiving a vision from God. Lying there, deep in sleep, a thick darkness moved in upon him, and some sense of horror and dread began to strike his heart. The Hebrew is continuous action: the horror and dread kept falling upon him as God continued to unfold the message He was about to give Abram. What was the message? It was a prophecy foretelling the triumphant future of the promised seed. The outline of the Scripture covers the prophecy well.

- a. The promised seed shall enter a foreign land to be oppressed and enslaved for a period of 400 years (v. 13). This was a prophecy of the Egyptian enslavement (see Gen Chs. 46-50; Exo Chs. 1-2).
- b. The promised seed shall be delivered from the oppressing nation (Egypt), and when they are delivered they will have great possessions (v. 14; see Exo Chs. 3-12).
- c. The believer (Abram) will join his fathers in peace (v.15). *Going to his fathers* meant joining them in heaven. At that time Abram would have peace — eternal life and peace — but that day was not to come until he reached a good old age.
- d. The promised seed shall *return to the promised land* after 400 years (v. 16). Why 400 years? Because God had to allow the sin of the Amorites to reach its full measure; that is, He had to give them as long as He could to repent. He had to wait until they were well beyond any chance of ever repenting and turning back to God. He had to delay His judgment that long. The process would take about 400 years.
5. God gave Abram a deep experience of His holy presence (v. 17). Now God appeared to Abram and completed the covenant ceremony. He had delayed His arrival so he could give Abram the dream foretelling the history of the promised seed and the promised land. But note how God appeared to Abram: God's presence was symbolized in a smoking fire-pot with a blazing torch. God has often symbolized His presence by using fire:
 - => God appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exo 3:1-6).
 - => God appeared to Israel in a pillar of fire throughout the wilderness wanderings (Exo 13:21).
 - => God appeared as a consuming fire to Israel on Mt. Sinai (Exo 19:16f).
 - => God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, came upon the disciples of Christ as tongues of fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

Note that the fire-pot with the blazing torch passed down the path between the pieces of sacrificed animals. This symbolized God completing the covenant. And note: Abram had no part. God alone passed between the parts of the sacrificed animals. God alone was making promises to Abram and assuring the covenant with Abram. Abram was not making promises to God nor making a covenant with God. He — just like all other people — could never keep his promise and covenant with God, not perfectly. Therefore, if the covenant of the promised seed and the promised land was to ever be established and fulfilled, it had to be established by God and by God alone. The covenant had to be by grace and by grace alone. This is so critical to understand that it needs to be repeated: the covenant of *the promised seed* and *the promised land* was by grace and by grace alone.

Thought 1. A person is saved — receives the promised seed (Christ) and the promised land (heaven) — by grace and grace alone.

Eph 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Acts 15:11 *No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.*

Rom 3:24 *And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

Titus 3:7 *Having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

6. God reaffirmed His covenant with Abram (vv. 18-21). This is an expansion of the covenant given earlier by God: here the actual boundaries of the promised land are given. The promised land will stretch from somewhere close to the great Nile River to the great Euphrates River. Note: at that time there were apparently ten significant tribes of Canaanite people occupying the land. The Amorites were the largest, and the name Amorite was sometimes used to refer to all the Canaanite people (see v. 16 above).

Note: it seems that Israel possessed all the land for a brief time during Solomon's reign (1 Kng 8:65), and again under Jeroboam II (2 Kng 14:25). (Henry M. Morris. *The Genesis Record*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976, p. 328)

Thought 1. The way to overcome the fears and disappointments of life is to hear and believe God's Word, His wonderful promise to give us *the promised land*, to give us heaven itself. This is the very reason God saves us, to give us the promised land of heaven, the glorious hope of living together in fellowship with Him forever and ever. This hope — the hope of heaven — helps to erase fear and disappointment. For we know that whatever happens to us — even if someone kills our bodies — our souls will live on and on forever with God.

Mat 10:28 *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

John 14:1-3 *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*

2 Cor 4:17 *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

Heb 11:8-10, 13-16 *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose*

architect and builder is God....All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Heb 13:14 *For here we do not have an enduring city [a perfect, heavenly city], but we are looking for the city that is to come.*

1 Pet 4:12-13 *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

2 Pet 3:10-13 *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives. As you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Rev 21:1-4 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ■*