

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Can We Talk?

Genesis 15:1–6, 18–21



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Wealthy Abraham could have been known for the size of his treasury, the land he owned, or even the greatness of his fame. However, his legacy is faith . . . and not just faith in words but in action. Abraham shod his faith with shoe leather when he journeyed to a land he'd never seen. He clothed it with generosity when he divided his portion with Lot, and he paraded it as courage when he defeated Kedorlaomer's army. Regarding the outworking of Abraham's faith, James commented, "His actions made his faith complete" (James 2:22).

Etched alongside *faith in action* on Abraham's memorial is *friendship with God*—as James also noted, "he was even called the friend of God" (2:23). Abraham and his Lord spent time together and knew each other well. They shared openly, were committed to one another, and cultivated trust over time—just as best friends do.

We all yearn for an equally close relationship with God, don't we? And so, we gather under the great Patriarch's shadow to learn from his example. In this study, let's listen in on one of Abraham's conversations with his divine Friend, and we'll discover the secrets of intimacy with the Almighty.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The goal of Bible study is to spiritually nourish ourselves. We become self-sustaining physically when we fix our own meals and feed ourselves. Sustaining ourselves spiritually requires a similar process. By following the *Searching the Scriptures* method, we feed ourselves on the Word of God. And then as we live out what we've learned from the Bible, the Spirit of God empowers and changes us.

With this goal in mind, let's follow the steps of Bible study: observation, interpretation, correlation, and the all-important final step of application.

Quotable

*God is in our past,
He is in our future,
and He is certainly
in our present.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observation: What Do You See?

What do you see in the text? Does the author use connecting words that offer clues about what he was emphasizing? Pay attention to details, as if you were looking for clues to solve a mystery. Look for repeated words, commands, questions, emphatic statements, images, or figures of speech. Make your notes specific as you examine the passage.

Personal Conversation—Genesis 15:1–8

Genesis 15 records a personal conversation between God and Abraham. Read Genesis 15:1–8. What do you notice about the tone of the interchange?

Best friends know when each other is up or down, relaxed or pensive, confident or concerned. When the Lord read Abraham's emotions, what did He see? What do you think prompted His heart-to-heart talk with His friend Abraham?

Notice the flow of the dialogue:

- “The LORD spoke” (Genesis 15:1)
- “But Abram replied” (15:2)
- “Then the LORD said” (15:4)
- “Then the LORD took” (15:5)
- “And Abram believed” (15:6)
- “Then the LORD told” (15:7)
- “But Abram replied” (15:8)



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The Lord opened the conversation by speaking directly to Abraham's fears, "Do not be afraid," and then He reassured him, "I will protect you, and your reward will be great" (Genesis 15:1). What do these tender words reveal about the heart of God?

Like a counselor's opening comment in a therapy session, the Lord's words created a safe space for Abraham to share his deepest thoughts and feelings. Notice Abraham's frankness in Genesis 15:2–3. Keep in mind that about ten years had passed since Abraham left Haran (12:4). Abraham was now 85 and Sarah was 75—and still no children!

What was Abraham's complaint? What emotions do you sense in his words? What was really behind his offer to "fix" God's problem of not giving him an heir?

The Lord's no to Abraham was firm. The Hebrew word for *no* in Genesis 15:4 begins the sentence to emphasize it. Yet the Lord was sensitive too. What did God say and do to shore up Abraham's faith (15:4–5)? What similar object lesson did God give Abraham previously (13:16)?

As the old man gazed at the night sky, he must have imagined his offspring shining like stars and in numbers that took his breath away. And that's not all. He saw his Friend, the Creator, dazzling him with His



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power and glory. At that moment Abraham's fears melted, and he "believed the LORD" (Genesis 15:6). What did the Lord do in response?

This event marked a milestone in redemptive history. The moment Abraham believed, God declared him righteous ("justified"). *By grace, God credited righteousness to Abraham's account.* Hold on to this thought. We'll come back to this point when we interpret the passage.

Next, God restated His promise to Abraham of a homeland: "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession" (15:7). Although Abraham believed in God, he still could be honest with his questions . . . and so can we. What did Abraham ask (15:8)?



Correlation: Review of the Abrahamic Covenant

Here is a good place in our study to compare Genesis 15:1–8 with God's original promises in the Abrahamic Covenant. Read Genesis 12:2–3, 7. What were these promises?

Abraham had been enjoying God's blessings of wealth and fame, but ten years had passed and he still had no offspring or homeland. We can understand Abraham's questions in Genesis 15:2 and 15:8! Asking questions doesn't imply a *lapse* in faith; rather, asking questions represents a *longing* to strengthen our faith.



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Prophetic Revelation—Genesis 15:9–21

Now let's look at the second part, Genesis 15:9–21. In this section, the dialogue shifts to a monologue with the Lord leading Abraham through a ceremony unfamiliar to us but very familiar to Abraham: "cutting" a covenant. Read Genesis 15:9–21. Write down the actions you observe, and make a mental note of the statement in verse 18: "So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day."

This bloody scene is dark and strange to our modern-day senses. What could it all mean?



Interpretation: What Does the Text Mean?

Take a moment to look at the chart, "A Patriarch in Panorama—The Life of Abraham," in the first study in our series. As you can see, the Abrahamic Covenant was affirmed in Genesis 12:1–3, reaffirmed in Genesis 13:14–17 after Abraham separated from Lot, and in Genesis 15 it is reaffirmed again. How is this reaffirmation of the covenant different than the others? Why was a covenant ceremony with an oath important for Abraham?

The Hebrew words for "made a covenant," *kharat beriyt*, literally mean "to cut a covenant," in reference to the cutting and distribution of sacrificial meat used in the ceremony. The ceremony corresponded to the ancient custom

of slaughtering animals when concluding a covenant, and after dividing them into pieces, of laying the pieces opposite to one another, that the persons making the covenant might pass between them. . . . God condescended to follow the custom of the Chaldeans, that He might in the most solemn manner confirm His oath to Abram the Chaldean.¹

In the ancient custom, both parties walked between the sacrificial pieces to express their oath to keep their side of the covenant. However, in this ceremony, Abraham fell into a deep sleep, and only God—represented



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by the smoking firepot and flaming torch—passed between the carcasses (Genesis 15:12, 17). What did this mean to Abraham? (Hint: Recall the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant.)

An interpretation rule of thumb always involves seeking to understand the meaning that the original audience would have understood. Read Genesis 15:13–16, and write down the meaning of this prophecy to Moses' audience—the newly liberated Hebrews entering the Promised Land.

Now let's return to the theological center point of the passage, Genesis 15:6: "Abraham believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith." How does each of the following passages add meaning to this crucial text?

Habakkuk 2:4; Galatians 3:11

Romans 4:1–5



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Through our faith in Christ, God credits us with His righteousness. It's as if God writes out a check and deposits righteousness into our spiritual account—not because we've earned it but because we have faith in Jesus who bore our sins on the cross. Close this portion of the study by meditating on Paul's powerful words:

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. (Romans 3:21–25)



Application: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

In his message, Chuck Swindoll offered the following principles—five secrets of intimacy with the Almighty—based on his *Searching the Scriptures* study of Genesis 15:

- *God calms our fears and understands our questions.* You can feel safe with your divine Friend.
- *Don't consider a delay a cancellation.* You can wait on the Lord as you rest in His arms.
- *God loves it when we believe Him.* Trust is as essential to your relationship with God as breathing is to being alive. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart" (Proverbs 3:5).
- *Even when it's dark, we can see the light.* In the middle of your darkness, focus on God who is the "flaming torch" to light your way (Genesis 15:17).
- *Our future is as clear to God as our past is clear to us.* You can rest because God knows what's ahead.

Which of these principles can you apply right away? How?



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Close your study by having a talk with your divine Friend. Share your deepest thoughts and feelings, and hear His voice in the words of Scripture.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, calm my fears and quiet my heart as I rest in You, my shield and defender . . . regardless of what tomorrow may bring, I believe in You, my Father, Savior, and Friend. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1872), 214.



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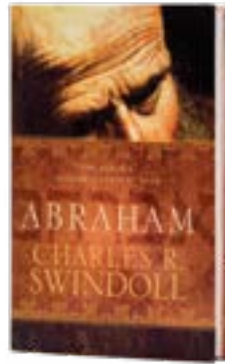
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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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