



We Are
Abrahams
Seed

The Family *of* Promise

We are Abraham's Seed

**A Study on the life of Abraham in relation to the current day
Christian**

Class 4 The Covenant

Genesis 15

Where we have been

- Gen 1-11 is the prologue to the rest of Scripture
 - The promise of a seed
 - The result of rebellions, and exile of the nations
 - God's mishpat (justice) and tzedakah (righteousness) are working together
- Abram is called to be a blessing
 - Called to leave land, kin, home
 - God will give him nationhood, blessing, a great name
 - Yet in time of crisis (famine) his trust wavers and he fails
- Abram becomes a blessing
 - Avram retraces his steps to the beginning
 - He and Lot separate
 - The promise is restated
 - Power through conquest is refused and we see the encounter with Melchizedek

Where we are going

- God's promise clarified
 - Faith counted as righteousness
 - Covenant ceremony
 - Prophecy of exile and return

Within this scene we only have Abram and God talking to one another, a unique narrative within the Abraham narrative and yet, we will still see how life within the triangle is working

Living within the Triangle

CHESED

Covenant loyalty · steadfast love · faithful kindness

- Relational faithfulness, not sentiment
- Love that acts for the good of the other
- Loyalty that persists even when undeserved
- God's commitment to remain present and faithful
- The covenant bond that holds relationships together

THE MOTIVE:
Love that refuses to abandon



SHALOM

Wholeness · flourishing · restored life

- Life lived without fear
- Restoration of a right relationship
- Life as it is meant to be, flourishing
- Harmony between God, people, and creation

THE RESULT:
The world put back together



MISHPAT

Justice · right ordering · accountability

- Restrain what causes harm
- Restoring order and protection
- Setting things right when order is broken
- Impartial justice that protects the vulnerable

THE DISCERNING JUDGEMENT:
Justice that confronts disorder and names it



TZEDAKAH

Right relationship · faithful action · doing what is needed

- Giving what is needed, not earned
- Acting rightly within relationships
- Trust expressed through obedience
- Faithfulness expressed in concrete action
- Doing what restores dignity, life, and relationship

THE ACTION:
Doing what needs to be done for the sake of the other person

THE PATH OF GOD – LIVING WITHIN THE TRIANGLE

Chesed sustains relationships • Mishpat confronts disorder • Tzedakah embodies faithfulness

Shalom emerges when all three are lived together

What to look for

- How does Abram choose trust over control? (Mishpat)
- Where does God restore Abram's dignity and future? (Tzedakah)
- How does God refuse to abandon the promise-partner? (Chesed)
- Where does this covenant create durable peace instead of anxious grasping? (Shalom)

Who is the Heir?

^{15:1} After these events, YHWH's word came to Avram

In a vision saying:

Fear not, Avram,

I am a delivering shield to you

Your reward is exceedingly great.

² Avram said:

My Lord (*Adonai*), YHWH,

What would you give me?

For I am going to my end **childless**,

The steward of my house is Damascan Eliezer.

³ and Avram said,

Here, to me **you have not given seed**,

Here, a member of my household must be my heir!

Do Not Fear

15:1 After these events, YHWH's word came to Avram

In a vision saying:

Fear not, Avram, (what is Abram not to fear, this is both backward and forward looking)

I am a delivering shield to you (protection from the kings)

Your reward is exceedingly great. (provision for an heir)

² Avram said:

My Lord (*Adonai*), YHWH,

What would you give me?

For I am going to my end **childless**,

This has been an underlying fear since the beginning, Sarai is barren, and who is the heir

In response to the reward comment - Abram goes right to the fact he is childless

The Real Fear

² Avram said:

My Lord (*Adonai*), YHWH,
What would you give me?
For I am going to my end **childless**,
The steward of my house is Damascan Elizer.

*Pause - I asked a question and now I am waiting for an answer, and yet no answer
Is coming, so I will press the point...*

³ and Avram said,

Here, to me you **have not given seed**,
Here, a member of my household must be my heir!

Seed of Abram

4 But YHWH's word came to him saying

 This one shall not be heir to you

 Rather,

The one that goes out from your own body

 He shall be heir to you.

5 He brought him outside and said:

 Pray look toward the heavens and **count** the stars,

Can you **count** them?

And he said to him:

 So shall your seed be.

God says, '**Count** the stars'—not for a number, but as a repeatable sign. Every time Abram looks up, he can **rehearse/retell** God's promise

What is Righteousness?

6 Now he trusted (*he'emin*) in YHWH

And YHWH regarded his trust as tzedakah.

He trusted in Yahweh,
And he deemed it as faithfulness on his part
J. Goldingay - The First Testament

He believed in Adoni,
And he credited it to him as righteousness.
D Stern - Complete Jewish Bible

And because he put his trust in the LORD,
He reckoned it to his merit.
N Sarna - JPS Commentary

He believed in the Word (Memra) of the LORD, and
it was reckoned to him as righteousness, because/
since he did not argue (dispute) before Him.
Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

What is Tzedakah

Then he believed in the LORD; and He credited it to him as righteousness. (NASB)

Traditional rendering, for us often is reduced down to only a change in status, unrighteousness to righteous
What the passage is saying is that Abram's trust is the action of righteousness (*tzedakah*)

His action of trust is the appropriate response to the promise of God, God makes a promise, the right thing to do is to believe that promise, that is tzedakah

Faith is not Versus Works

James 2:20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified (shown to be tsadiq) by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ²² You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “**And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as tzedakah (righteousness),**” and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a man is justified (shown to be in the right) by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ In the same way, was not **Rahab the harlot** also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

John 8:39 They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, **you would do the deeds of Abraham.**

Not because deeds earn sonship, but because deeds reveal who you belong to.

Counted as Righteousness

Implicitly Abram has been living by trust since leaving Haran, but this is the first time the point is explicit. And “he counted that as rightness/faithfulness” (šēdāqâ; Gen 15:6). **The idea is not that by a kind of legal fiction Yhwh decides to treat Abram as a righteous man when he is not, imputing righteousness to him.** It is rather that **Abram demonstrates the kind of attitude to God that makes a relationship possible**, for relationships are based on trust. **And šēdāqâ is a relationship word.** It signifies that things are right between two parties. The weaker party trusts the stronger party, and the stronger party does the right thing by the weaker party. (*J. Goldingay, Old Testament Theology - Israel's Gospel 2010*)

An alternate reading

He trusted in YHWH, and he reckoned it to him as *tzedakah*.

- Many see that the person who does the trusting is also the person who does the reckoning.
 - In that sense Abram trusts that God will be faithful to his promise, God will show tzedakah.
 - God will do the right thing to Abram in their relationship.

Phinehas acts with faithfulness

Ps 106:28 They yoked themselves to Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods.

29 So they provoked the LORD to anger with their deeds, and a plague broke out among them.

30 But Phinehas stood and intervened, and the plague was restrained.

31 **It was credited to him as righteousness (tzedakah)** for endless generations to come.

Deut 6:25 It will be righteousness (**tzedakah**) for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God, just as He commanded us. (NASB)

Is this Doubt?

⁷ He said to him:

I am YHWH
Who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans
To give you this land
To inherit.

⁸ but he said:

My Lord (*Adonai*), YHWH,
By what **shall I be assured** that I will inherit it?

The Cutting of the Pieces

⁹ He said to him

Fetch me a calf of three

A she goat of three

A ram of three

A turtle dove

And a fledgling.

¹⁰ He fetched him all these.

He clove them through the middle,

And set each his part opposite the other,

But the birds he did not cleave

¹¹ Carrion birds descended upon the carcasses,

But Avram drove them back.

A deep slumber

¹² Now it was,
When the sun was coming in,
That deep slumber fell upon Avram –
And here,
Fright and great darkness falling upon him

Gen 2:21 So YHWH, God, caused a deep sleep to fall upon the human,
so that he slept

He took one of his sides and closed up the flesh in its place

²² YHWH, God, built the side that he had taken from the human into
a woman

Foretelling the Future

¹³ And He said to Avram:

You must know, yes know

That your seed will be sojourners in a land not theirs:

They will put them in servitude and afflict them

For four hundred years.

¹⁴ But the nation to which they are in servitude –

I will bring judgement on them

And after that they will go out

With great property.

¹⁵ as for you

You will go to your fathers in **shalom**:

You will be buried at a good ripe age.

¹⁶ but in **the fourth generation** they will return here,

For the iniquity of the Amorite has not reached full measure heretofore.

Levi - Kohath-Amram-Moses

The Cutting of the Covenant

¹⁷ Now it was

When the sun had come in,
That there was night blackness, and **here a smoking brazier,**
A fiery torch

That passed between those parts.

¹⁸ On that day

YHWH cut a covenant with Avram,
Saying
I give this land to your seed

From the river of Egypt to the Great River, the river Euphrates

¹⁹ the Kenite and the Kenizzaite, and the Kadmonite

²⁰ and the Hittite, and the Canaanite, and the Gergashite

And the Yevusite.

Bilateral or Unilateral

- Most teach this covenant is unilateral, Abram has no obligation, he just stands there
- It is true that Abram does not pass through, only God
- However, Abram acts in obedience by preparing the animals and guarding the site, indicating his willingness to enter into this covenant
- So what is the covenant for?
- To reassure Abram of the promise of land, but land is meaningless without an heir.
 - The fear of Will there be an heir?
 - The fear of Will there be a place?

Bilateral in Expectations

- **God commits to:**
 - Make a nation (seed)
 - Give land as inheritance (place)
 - Bless the nations through Abram (mission)
- **Abram commits to:**
 - Be a blessing (vocation)
 - Faithful trust (relationship with God) currently, and later clarified as:
 - Walk before me in loyal trust (Gen 17)
 - Circumcision (sign and guard of the covenant) (Gen 17)
 - Guard the path by doing mishpat and tzedakah (Gen 18)

Threats to the Covenant - The seed

- Currently there is no seed - Sarai barren and both are getting old
- Threats from outside powers
 - Famine and Egypt
 - Powerful rulers who endanger the line
 - War/empires who invade
- Threats from internal fracture
 - Family strife (Sarai and Hagar)
 - Family conflict (brother stories)
- The seed keeps dying - it is perishable
- The seed may not remain faithful

Threats to the Covenant - The Land

- Currently a sojourner - the land is occupied by others
- Assimilation through intermarriage, patronage local norms
- Disobedience which leads to exile

Threat to the Covenant - The Mission

- Idolatry to local Gods - misplaced trust
- Becoming a curse instead of blessing - becoming known for harm, compromise, injustice
- Moral failure that contradicts the vocation with deception, grasping, anti-shalom

So how will the Covenant Stand

- God alone walks the blood path
- The covenant is **unilateral** in who bears the cost - God alone
- God guarantees the promise - Abram is to live the vocation
- God keeps the promise moving forward
 - If the seed is threatened - God preserves it (remnant)
 - If the mission falters - God reforms it (prophets, exile, Jesus embodies it)
- God refuses to abandon the promise

God's Commitment

- Should Abram or his seed fail - I will walk the blood path - in order to secure the covenant
- This is not a prophesy of the cross but it does help us understand a fundamental reason for the cross
- God voluntarily has placed upon himself the cost of the covenant rather than let the promise die

How we view the cross

- This is a foundational lens through which we understand the cross
- It is God at that moment, walking the blood path to secure the covenant:
 - A seed that is imperishable
 - A land that encompasses the whole world under Gods eventual reign
 - A mission that is to restore all nations to be a blessing to all through the Spirit
- Genesis 15 doesn't say all that yet—but it sets the pattern: God preserves the promise when humans can't

Covenant as Assurance

- In future years, Abram can look back to this moment to be assured of God's promise
- This is a gift from God to assure Abram, based on God's chesed and tzedakah
- Do we experience anything similar?
- Baptism is a gift that allows us to look back on a moment to be assured of God's promise
- It reminds us of God walking the blood path, and being raised as an imperishable seed

Abram could look back to a God-given sign that anchored the promise;
baptism is our God-given sign that anchors the promise in Christ.

Not because baptism earns the promise, but because God uses concrete signs to strengthen trust.

Therefore...

1. God is not asking for perfect performance—He's forming **covenant trust**.
2. Faith is not a feeling; it's **loyal trust made visible**.
3. Covenant people become a **blessing** (triangle-shaped lives).

Blessing is what shalom looks like when chesed, mishpat, and tzedakah stay in balance.

Which corner is God calling you to practice this week?

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Class 4 — The Covenant (Genesis 15)

Take-Home Summary

Where We Are in the Story

Genesis 15 follows Abram's early tests: leaving home (Gen 12), fear-driven compromise in Egypt, and the rescue of Lot (Gen 14). Abram refuses to build his future through conquest or patronage. Now God meets Abram at the pressure point beneath the whole story: Will the promise of seed and land hold?

Genesis 15 in One Pass

- God names Abram's anxiety: "Do not fear... I am your shield."
- Abram voices the real wound: "What will you give me... since I remain childless?"
- God points to the stars and promises an heir from Abram's own body.
- Abram trusts YHWH, and it is "regarded/collected/credited" as tzedakah (Gen 15:6).
- Abram asks for assurance about the land; God answers with a covenant-cutting ritual.
- Abram prepares and guards the pieces; God passes between them in fire/torch imagery.

What God Is Doing

In this chapter God:

- Invites honest prayer instead of hiding fear.
- Gives embodied reassurance (stars, ritual, spoken promise).
- Binds himself to keep covenant - God will bear the cost to preserve what he promised.

What God Is Forming in Abram

Abram's growth here is covenant trust, not perfection:

- From fear to honest prayer (bringing the true question into the relationship).
- From grasping control to receiving assurance and waiting in trust.

Key Ideas (plain language)

- Believe/trust (Heb. 'aman): to lean your weight on something reliable - related to "amen" (firm/true).
- Righteousness (tzedakah): covenant-rightness - faithful relationship that restores what is fitting, the appropriate covenantal response.
- "Cutting" a covenant: a solemn self curse; the ritual says, "May I bear the consequence if I break this."
- The covenant is bilateral in expectations, unilateral in cost-bearing: Abram is called to faithful walking, but God guarantees the promise.

Why Genesis 15 Matters for the New Testament

Genesis 15:6 is directly quoted in Romans 4, Galatians 3:6, and James 2:23. The New Testament returns to Abraham's trusting faithfulness as a model for belonging: faith is loyal trust made visible over time, and Abraham's family is defined by shared trust in God's promise.

A Covenant Lens for the Cross (foundational lens)

Genesis 15 is not a direct prophecy of the cross, but it gives a covenant logic that makes the cross coherent: God binds himself to preserve the promise and to bear covenant cost when the human side falters.

- It is not God needing to be persuaded to be merciful, but God acting in covenant mercy to rescue.
- It is not payment extraction (substitutionary sacrifice) as the center, but God bearing covenant cost to restore a people and their vocation.
- It is not private guilt-management only, but the restoration of shalom through chesed, mishpat, and tzedakah.

For Our Own Walk (this week)

- Where do I need God's reassurance rather than more of my control?
- What would loyal trust look like right now (a next step, not a perfect plan)?
- Who around me is vulnerable - and what would mishpat and tzedakah look like in my choices?

Key Takeaway

Genesis 15 teaches that God is forming covenant trust, not demanding flawless performance. Abram participates willingly, but God himself guarantees the promise - and that covenant faithfulness becomes a powerful lens for understanding why the cross makes sense.