

Genesis 15:17-20 - Why Is It So Important That Salvation Is An Unconditional Promise

Memory Verse

Genesis 15:6 NLT—*Justification by faith*

And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

Outline (Genesis 15:2-20)

1. God makes an unconditional covenant with Abram concerning his descendants inheriting the land. (vs 9-12, 17-20)
2. Exploring the most important unconditional covenant—Justification by faith, Genesis 15:6

Genesis 15:1-20 NKJV

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

² But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”

⁴ And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” ⁵ Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

⁶ And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

⁷ Then He said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.”

⁸ And he said, “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?”

⁹ So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” ¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹ And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. ¹⁴ And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

¹⁷ And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.

¹⁸ On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying:

“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—¹⁹ the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

1. God makes an unconditional covenant with Abram concerning his descendants inheriting the land.

Abram asks God for confirmation of His promise that he will inherit the land of Canaan

Genesis 15:7-8 NKJV

Then He said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.”

⁸ And he said, “Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?”

As we covered previously, Abram is still learning to trust God’s promises. He is seeking assurances from God that God will indeed keep His promises to him. Our whole life is a process of learning to put more and more trust in God’s promises—we learn to trust in what we cannot see (God), and that it will be best for us if we do. As we can see, God loves it when we express our weaknesses to Him and ask for strength and seek reassurance.

Hebrews 11:6 NLT

And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

Genesis 15:9-10 NKJV

So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” ¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

This is the ancient practice of “cutting a covenant”. We studied this previously. Humanly speaking, this was the most legally binding, convincing, incontrovertible, and incontestable way of two people demonstrating that they were really serious about keeping their side of a covenant, promise, or agreement. God here is relating to Abram, in a way that he can understand, that He is deadly serious about keeping His promise to Abram to inherit the land.

Genesis 15:11 NKJV

And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

Here again, Abram is demonstrating faith. God said that He would come, and Abram believed Him. They could not “cut a covenant” together if all the meat was picked off the bones of the carcasses. So Abram kept driving away the vultures all the day long. This is a beautiful picture of Abram trusting that God would come through eventually—trusting that what God said He would do He would actually do.

Habakkuk 2:3 NLT

This vision is for a future time. It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed.

v 12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram: This is not what Abram expected. Put yourself in Abram’s sandals. God has said that He was going to confirm His covenant with Abram by cutting a covenant with him. But instead of both of them walking through the middle of the carcasses, God puts Abram to sleep and goes through the middle of the carcasses all by Himself. What Abram sees next is most likely a dream because he was asleep. But Abram would have woken up to find the carcasses all burned up, and would have known that what he dreamed had actually happened.

Genesis 15:17 NKJV

And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. ¹⁸

On the same day the LORD made [cut] a covenant with Abram, saying:

“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—¹⁹ the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girdashites, and the Jebusites.”

v 17 **A smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces:** Here we see that God didn't come in human form to confirm or cut this promise. Instead, God represented Himself by two emblems—a smoking oven and a burning torch.

“The smoking oven reminds us of the pillar of cloud representing the presence of God (Exodus 13:21–22), the smoke on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18), and the cloud of God's Shekinah glory (1 Kings 8:10–12).

The burning torch reminds us of the pillar of fire representing the presence of God (Exodus 13:21–22), of the burning bush displaying the presence of God before Moses (Exodus 3:4), and of the fire from heaven that sometimes consumed sacrifices God was well pleased with (1 Kings 18:38, 1 Chronicles 21:26, 2 Chronicles 7:1).” (David Guzik)

v 18 **On the same day the LORD made [cut] a covenant with Abram:** God, His glory and holiness expressed by the smoking oven and the burning torch, passed through the animal parts all by Himself. This is a unilateral covenant or promise. This is where one party guarantees that they will do something, no matter what anybody else does. Literally, God signed the covenant for both of them in this powerful ceremony.

What does Abram have to do? Nothing! What responsibilities does Abram have? None! Is there anything that Abram can do to stop God from fulfilling His promise? No!

Initially, Abram may have been disillusioned or disappointed by the fact that he never got to have anything to do with this promise, other than be the underserving recipient of it. But, think of the upside—the certainty of the promise or covenant that God made with Abram is solely based on who God is and what God would do, and not on who Abram is and what Abram would do. I don't think it would have taken Abram long to realise that, if he himself had been given any responsibility at all to fulfil, then the promise would have been in great jeopardy. Think of it. Abram has been slow to obey, weak in faith, has ditched his wife so he could live a more comfortable life, and as we look ahead in Abram's life, there will be other failings. Surely, after thinking about it, Abram would have been relieved that he had no responsibility to fulfil in order for God to keep His promise to give to Abram and his descendants the entire promised land. What a weight off Abram's shoulders as he realises that all he and his descendants must do is simply believe and receive what God has promised—“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates” (v 18).

“For a very brief time, under Solomon (1 Kings 8:65) and possibly again under Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25), the children of Israel ruled all this territory, as a token of the final and permanent possession they will have in the future.” (Morris)

Application: Understanding why us sinners can't keep our promises perfectly (from Jon Courson's Application Commentary)

When Abram awoke, he saw that the meat on either side of him was barbecued. God had been there—not meeting Abram halfway as was the custom—but walking the entire length alone. This is still the way of God. But why?

We hold rallies and sign pledges; we make vows and make promises. But, because “in our flesh [sinful nature] dwells no good thing” (Romans 7:18), we are absolutely unable to keep any promise to be good.

Although numbering over one million in attendance, the Promise Keepers rally in Washington, DC was not the biggest Promise Keepers convention in history, for one three times as big took place when three million people heard the voice of God, and witnessed a Divine pyrotechnic display at the foot of Mt. Sinai which so impressed them that they said, “All the words which the Lord has said, we will do” (Exodus 24:3).

Those in attendance at that first Promise Keepers convention weren't playing a game. They were sincere. They truly meant to keep the Ten Commandments. After all, they had heard God speak and had seen a mountain quake. But Moses came down the mountain forty days later to find them worshipping a golden calf.

Times don't change. People with sincere hearts say, “We will keep our promises.” The problem with signing contracts, making vows, keeping promises is that they fail to factor in to the equation a huge component: the flesh [sinful nature].

Romans 7:15-25 NLT

I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature [flesh]. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

God's aware of this, gang. That's why He says, “I will wait until you're as tired as Abram was. Then I'll come through on My own. I don't want you to sign a contract or make a promise. I know what you're made of. I know your frailty. So I'm not going to meet you halfway. I'm going to do the whole thing.”

2 Corinthians 1:20 NKJV

For all the promises of God in him are yes, and in him Amen, to the glory of God through us.

There is only one Promise Keeper, only One in Whom all the promises are yes and amen. Jesus came on the scene and did what we were unable to do. He kept the covenant, the promises, the commandments. All of the promises of God are *in* Him and kept *by* Him. They're fulfilled *through* Him and point *to* Him. What, then, is our part? Our part is not to stand in the midst of an animal cut in two—but to kneel at a Table, to hold in our hands a Body that for us was cut in two, and to remember *Him* (Luke 22:19).” (Jon Courson)

What is the significance of this unilateral covenant?

The “certainty of the covenant God made with Abram is based on who God is, not on who Abram is or what Abram would do. This covenant could not fail, because God cannot fail.” (David Guzik)

Think about it. God can't lie, He can't change His mind, He can't be unfaithful. Therefore, the promise is immutable, or unchangeable. Abram can't break a covenant that he hasn't signed!

1 Samuel 15:29 NLT

And he who is the Glory of Israel will not lie, nor will he change his mind, for he is not human that he should change his mind!”

We see the continuing truth of this promise today, with God bringing Israel back into the land—it still belongs to them, regardless of their continuing rebellion. Think about it. If God doesn't keep His promise, then it means that God isn't who He says He is—He isn't God at all—given the fact that God is by nature perfect. Therefore, God must keep His promises, for His names sake!

Ezekiel 20:44 NKJV

Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel,” says the Lord GOD.’ ”

“A Divine covenant is not a mutual agreement on equal terms between two parties, but a Divine promise assured.” (Maclaren)

This cutting of a covenant foreshadows another unilateral covenant that was cut about 2,000 years later, with a much more precious sacrifice

“In a sense, the Father walked through the broken and bloody body of Jesus to establish His covenant with us, and God signed it for both of us. We merely enter into the covenant by faith; we don't make the covenant with God.” (David Guzik)

The parallels are striking. Just like Abram fell asleep, so did the disciples. Just like Abram repeated fail to obey and remain loyal to God, so did the disciples when they all promised that they would never leave or deny Jesus. Just like the children of Israel at Mt Sinai, and the Promise Keepers in Washington DC, the disciples were sincere in their desire to love and serve God. The problem wasn't a lack of desire, rather a lack of ability to fulfil that desire.

Matthew 26:30-47, 56b NKJV

³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹ Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

‘I will strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

³² But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”

³³ Peter answered and said to Him, “**Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.**”

³⁴ Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”

³⁵ Peter said to Him, “**Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!**”

And so said all the disciples.

³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go and pray over there.” ³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. ³⁸ Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. **Stay here and watch with Me.**”

³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”

⁴⁰ **Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”**

⁴² Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” ⁴³ **And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.**

⁴⁴ So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

⁴⁵ Then He came to His disciples and said to them, “**Are you still sleeping and resting?** Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.”

⁴⁷ And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people.

⁵⁶ **...Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.**

Thus Jesus went to the cross all by Himself. He secured the redemption of mankind all by Himself. Jesus paid the full penalty for all sin all by Himself. No-one else would, no-one else could.

Let us realise our inherent weakness, the weakness that we inherited from Adam, that we are born with a sinful nature that is neither faithful nor loyal, that we have no strength in and of ourselves to keep any promises we make, and therefore we must learn to solely or only rely on God and His strength. Again, it's only by learning to trust God's promises that we can experience the life changing power of God working in us and through us, changing us to become more like Himself. Any time we rely on ourselves, just like the disciples did, we will fail. God knows this. He knows our nature, that we are weak, frail (see Psalm 103), our life like a vapour (see Psalm 39:5). This is why God gives us great and precious promises, everything we need to live a godly life. We need God's promises, they are not optional (see 2 Peter 1:3-5a).

2. Exploring the most important unconditional covenant—Justification by faith, Genesis 15:6

Genesis 15:6 NKJV

And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 15:6 NLT

And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

Why is the doctrine of justification by faith so important?

Justification by faith is the most important teaching or doctrine in the Bible, because it is God's answer to the most basic of all religious questions, namely, **how can a man or woman become right with God?** Isn't this the big issue? Isn't this what the bible is all about? How God can punish sin without punishing the person. How God can legally let us go free when we are guilty. How can a good God, a just Judge, let the guilty go free?

"We are not right with God in ourselves; this is what the doctrine of sin means. Sin means that we are in rebellion against God, and if we are against God, we cannot be right with God. We are transgressors or sinners. Moreover, we are *all* transgressors or sinners. Paul says in Rom 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". The doctrine of justification by faith is the most important of all Christian doctrines because it tells how one who is in rebellion against God may become right with him. **It says that we may be justified, not by our own works-righteousness, but solely by the work of Christ received by faith. This is the centre piece of the gospel.**" (James Montgomery Boice)

"When the article [doctrine or teaching] of justification has fallen, everything has fallen ... This is the chief article from which all other doctrines have flowed ... It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour." (Luther)

"And He accounted it to him for righteousness: This is one of the clearest expressions in the Bible of the truth of salvation by grace, through faith. This is the first time *believe* is used in the Bible and the first time *righteousness* is used in the Bible. This is the gospel in the Old Testament, quoted four times in the New Testament." (David Guzik)

Breaking down Genesis 15:6

v 6 **And he [Abram] believed in the Lord:** What exactly did Abram believe? What exactly did Abram put his trust in? Paul in Galatians chapter 3 tells us that God told Abram the Gospel in advance, that Abram was putting his trust in the promised Saviour, Jesus Christ, the promised individual Seed or Descendent, the One whose life would be the payment for all the sins of all mankind. We've read this before in Galatians chapter 3.

v 6 **He believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness:** "The faith that made Abram righteous wasn't so much believing in God (as we usually speak of believing in God), as it was believing God. Those who only believe in God (in the sense of believing He exists) are merely on the same level as demons (James 2:19)." (David Guzik)

James 2:19 NLT

You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.

v 6 **For righteousness:** The Bible talks about two types of righteousness. “There are essentially two types of righteousness: righteousness we accomplish by our own efforts, and righteousness accounted [transferred] to us by the work of God when we believe. Since none of us can be good enough to accomplish perfect righteousness, we must have God’s righteousness accounted [transferred] to us by doing just what Abram did: he believed in the LORD.” (David Guzik)

Firstly, there is self-righteousness or works based righteousness. This is where we put our trust in our own goodness, trusting that we are good enough, on our own, based on the good that we have done by our own human effort, to be accepted by God. This is represented by Adam Eve covering themselves with the fig leaves in the garden of Eden—they knew that they were sinners, and did what they could to cover themselves. This is what man has been doing ever since—inventing false religions, false teachings and doctrines in the church, and false worldviews that deny the existence of a holy God that we must give account to.

Secondly, there is God’s perfect righteousness. God is absolutely holy—He is perfect in every way. There is absolutely no sin in God. This perfect righteousness is represented by the animal skin that God clothed Adam and Eve with, when He kicked them out of the garden of Eden because of their rebellion (sin) against Him.

Leviticus 19:2 NKJV

Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

1 John 1:5 NLT

This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in Him at all.

Revelation 15:4a NKJV

Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy.

Luke 23:4 NKJV

So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no fault in this Man.”

The Christian faith is the only truth that accurately describes man’s fallen condition—that he is completely fallen, and that nothing good dwells in him—the doctrine or teaching of *sin*.

The Christian faith is also the only truth that accurately describes the only way a man can be saved from the consequences of sin: Justice must be done—Someone who is perfect (Jesus) must die to pay the penalty of the sins committed by those who are not perfect (all of sinful humanity). This same Person would then transfer His righteousness to sinful man if they choose to put their faith in Him. This is the doctrine or teaching of *justification by faith*. This is the only way that God can both be just (a good and fair judge), and the justifier of sinners (declaring guilty sinners to be “not guilty”), see Romans 3:26.

“The Hebrew word translated “**righteous**” is literally “rightly clothed.” When Adam and Eve sinned, they realized they were naked—and man has been naked ever since. But just as God sacrificed an animal to clothe Adam and Eve, He sacrificed His Son to clothe us.” (Jon Courson)

Isaiah 61:10 NLT

I am overwhelmed with joy in the LORD my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a robe of righteousness. I am like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding or a bride with her jewels.

v 6 **And He [God] accounted it to him [Abram]:** **Accounted** is a financial term. It means to transfer something from one person to another. For example, I could transfer all my money to your account, and you could transfer all your debt to my account. I would go from being rich to being poor, and you would go from being poor to being rich. This is exactly what Jesus did for us. But instead of money, it's righteousness. Jesus, who is rich in righteousness, the only one who perfectly kept the law, the only perfect man who ever lived, transfers our sin to Himself, and also transfers His perfection, His perfect life, to any sinner who chooses to put their faith in Him.

2 Corinthians 8:9 CSB

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich.

v 6 **Abram believed God:** Faith is what makes this transaction possible. God transfers His perfect righteousness to sinful man, and transfers man's sin to Himself. For justice to prevail, God had to then willingly suffer the penalty for all of that sin. This is why Jesus had to die on the cross.

Salvation, justification, the forgiveness of sins, is only by faith, and not by works

Genesis 15:6 NKJV

And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 15:6 NLT

And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

The concept that a person is saved only because they choose to believe in the Messiah's work on the cross on their behalf which was first written in Genesis 15:6, is explained in four New Testament passages. We have already looked at Galatians chapter 3, so we'll just look at the ones in Romans chapter 4 now.

Firstly, Romans 4:1-8 makes it clear that salvation, or forgiveness, cannot be earned.

Romans 4:1-8 NLT

Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? ² If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way. ³ For the Scriptures tell us, "**Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.**" [Genesis 15:6]

⁴ When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. ⁵ **But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners.** ⁶ David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it: ⁷ "Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. ⁸ Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of sin."

Secondly, Romans 4:9-10 makes it clear that religious rituals, especially circumcision, had nothing to do with Abram's salvation: Abram being circumcised is like a New Testament Christian getting baptised—it is an outward symbol of a *prior* inward change.

Romans 4:9–17 NLT

Now, is this blessing only for the Jews [those who are circumcised], or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles? **Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith.** ¹⁰ But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised!

¹¹ **Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith.** ¹² And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised [the Jews], but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised.

¹³ **Clearly, God's promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was based not on his obedience to God's law, but on a right relationship with God that comes by faith.** ¹⁴ If God's promise is only for those who obey the law, then faith is not necessary and the promise is pointless. ¹⁵ For the law always brings punishment on those who try to obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!)

¹⁶ **So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the [spiritual] father of all who believe.** ¹⁷ That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, "I have made you the father of many nations." This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.

Thirdly, Romans 4:18-28 makes it clear that Abram was putting his trust, not just in having any child, but in the promise that one of his descendants would be the Messiah who would die for our sins, but then rise from the dead.

Romans 4:18-25 NLT

Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, "That's how many descendants you will have!" [Genesis 15:5] ¹⁹ And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah's womb.

²⁰ **Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God.** ²¹ **He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever He promises.** ²² **And because of Abraham's faith, God counted him as righteous.** ²³ **And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was recorded** ²⁴ **for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in Him, the One who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.** ²⁵ **He was handed over to die because of our sins, and He was raised to life to make us right with God.**

Genesis 15:6 NKJV

And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 15:6 NLT

And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

Fourthly, Galatians chapter 3 is where Paul goes back to Abram to show that we don't have to earn our salvation—indeed we can't. Instead it must be received. It's here in Galatians chapter 3 that Paul makes it crystal clear exactly what Abram was putting his trust in—Jesus the Messiah—see Galatians 3:16 below. As you read it, notice how many times Paul refers back to the promises in Genesis 15 that were given to Abram. Also, notice all the times that Abram is called the spiritual father of all those who believe—because we are all saved in the same way Abram was.

Galatians 3:1-29 NLT

Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ's death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of His death on the cross. ² Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ. ³ How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? ⁴ Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it?

⁵ **I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.**

⁶ **In the same way, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith."** ⁷ **The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.**

⁸ What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would make the Gentiles right in His sight because of their faith. **God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when He said, "All nations will be blessed through you."** ⁹ **So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.**

¹⁰ But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under His curse, for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God's Book of the Law." ¹¹ **So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."** ¹² **This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, "It is through obeying the law that a person has life."**

¹³ But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When He was hung on the cross, He took upon Himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." ¹⁴ **Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing He promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith.**

¹⁵ Dear brothers and sisters, here's an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or amend an irrevocable agreement, so it is in this case. ¹⁶ **God gave the promises to Abraham and his child. And notice that the Scripture doesn't say "to his children," as if it meant many descendants. Rather, it says "to his child"—and that, of course, means Christ.** ¹⁷ This is what I am trying to say: The agreement God made with Abraham could not be canceled 430 years later when God gave the law to Moses. God would be breaking his promise. ¹⁸ **For if the inheritance could be received by keeping the law, then it would not be the result of accepting God's promise. But God graciously gave it to Abraham as a promise.**

¹⁹ Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. **But the law was designed to last only until the coming of the Child who was promised.** God gave His law through angels to Moses, who was the mediator between God and the people. ²⁰ Now a mediator is helpful if more than one party must reach an

agreement. **But God, who is one, did not use a mediator when he gave his promise to Abraham.**

²¹ Is there a conflict, then, between God's law and God's promises? Absolutely not! If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it. ²² **But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.**

²³ Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.

²⁴ Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. ²⁵ **And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.**

²⁶ **For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.** ²⁷ And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ **And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true [spiritual] children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.**