

# Faith and The Word of the LORD

- <sup>1</sup> After these things **the word of the LORD** came to **Abram in a vision**: "Fear not, Abram, I am **your shield**; your **reward** shall be very great."
- <sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "**O Lord GOD**, what will you give me, for **I continue childless**, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"
- <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."
- <sup>4</sup> And behold, **the word of the LORD** came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; **your very own son** shall be your heir."
- <sup>5</sup> And **he brought him outside** and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."
- <sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:1-6

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## A Contemporary Faith

This may be the most important sermon I will preach from the book of Genesis because of the two topics it concerns: **faith** and **Christ**. If you get these wrong, you get everything wrong, and all hope is lost. These two topics deal with the very **heart of our eternal destinies**, where we will go when we die and whether we will find peace with God. It

contains perhaps the central OT verse for both Paul (**Rom 4:3**; **Gal 3:6**) and James (**James 2:23**) regarding how a person is saved in the OT. They cite the LXX which reads, “**Abram believed God (*Theos*), and it was counted to him as righteousness**” (**Gen 15:6**). Therefore, to begin this morning, I want to talk a little about “faith.” How are we to think about it? What are we to make of it? Let’s think about how contemporary people, Christian and non-Christian alike, often talk about faith.

**George Michael** famously sings, “You gotta have faith.” But **faith in what?** **John Hiatt** croons, “Have a little faith in *me*.” **Oprah** says, “Just a little bit of faith can get you through – [so] that you eventually create what you believe.”<sup>1</sup> I guess for her, it is **faith in faith** (your dreams, her power, her words?). **Legend Seven** sings, “Move a mountain | Walk on water | If I couldn't see the situation | I might believe ... I've learned to look with my heart | Not what I see ... I've got blind faith | Though my eyes can't see | My heart believes | I've got blind faith | Though my eyes can't always see all around.” Here, the object of faith is unnamed, and though biblical images are expressed, the reason you have faith (in

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<sup>1</sup> OWN, “Oprah on Faith, Obstacles... And The Mustard Seed,” 2-13-2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/13/oprah-on-faith-obstacles-mustard-seed\\_n\\_2673003.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/13/oprah-on-faith-obstacles-mustard-seed_n_2673003.html)

whatever it is you have faith in), is because your heart tells you to believe. It seems to me that if you look to your heart, then you have **faith in your heart**. **Jiminy Cricket's**, “**Let your conscience be your guide**” seems a wiser move than to trust that deceitful thing called my heart.

Almost everyone today uses the word “Faith.” America is an extremely “spiritual” land. But the object of their faith is often **themselves**, their **faith**, their **freewill**, their **power**, their **dreams**. Others know that they are rotten inside, and so they put their faith in someone else: their **spouse**, their **parents**, their **church**, their **pastor**, their **country**, their **politicians**. Actions have sometimes caused me to wonder if some in our circles might be guilty of putting faith in their **theology**, in their **confession**, in **predestination**, **justification**, or any number of other doctrines. All of these are good things, but are they supposed to be the object of faith? What is your faith in? This is a question you must answer by the end of our time together. Do not leave here without answering it for yourself.

It seems to me that all of these are usually covered by the English word “**G-O-D**,” a word that has very different meanings for us than it did to Paul and James. That is, everyone today says that the object of their faith is **G-O-D**.

Everyone believes in G-O-D. Everyone does: Muslims, Hindus, Wiccans, Jehovah's Witnesses. But my question is, **what god**? The subtlety by which we can be fooled by this question becomes all the more vexing when we start to consider the object of faith in the OT—in our very text—as most understand it today.

Steve Fazekas asks the question that trips many up, “**How then could there be a clear object of faith if the object had not yet appeared?**”<sup>2</sup> Given that Christ hadn't come, his conclusion is that the object of their faith was the *promises* of Christ to come.<sup>3</sup> This is very typical. For example, in a discussion of our passage today, Walter Kaiser says, “**Abraham believed God!**” but asks,

In what way did he believed God? He believed the word of God about the promise of the seed ... We cannot just quote **Genesis 15:6** as a Bible verse of systematic theology on believing: ‘Abraham believed the LORD.’ No, it is much

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<sup>2</sup> Steve Fazekas, “How Were People Saved Before Jesus Came in the Flesh?”, May 10, 2011, <https://answersingenesis.org/gospel/salvation/how-were-people-saved-before-jesus-came-in-the-flesh/>

<sup>3</sup> His conclusion is actually unclear, because he says, “[Jesus Christ] is the central object of our faith and the fulfillment of all that the faithful who have preceded us down through the ages had believed in.” Yet, their faith was in the promises of Christ to come. But a promise is not identical with a person, even if the promise has the person in view. This is just the kind of ambiguity that I have in view in this sermon, which I hope to make clear by the end. Yes, the believed in the promises, but it was more.

more than that! Abraham believed on Yahweh; he believed to Yahweh; and he believed for Yahweh! It isn't enough to say that it is Elohim—that it is God in general—in whom he believed. In that case, Abraham would be a theist, you see ... So then, what was the object of faith? On what did faith terminate, i.e., what was its object? Who was the object? Is it right to say that in the Old Testament people believed in God in a general way? Nein! Nicht! Non! Nyet! Rather, they believed in *the man of promise who was to come*. I don't think we can put it any other way. They believed in the heir; they believed in the seed of the woman that had been promised ever since Genesis. That is the great theme and the passion of my heart in his section."<sup>4</sup>

I love Dr. Kaiser's zeal, his love for Christ, and his desire that everyone knows that OT saints put their faith in the promises of Christ to come rather than in their works. But I have to take issue with him that there is no other way we can put it than this. In fact, there is, and when we do it ought to increase our faith and joy in Christ 100 fold, for what I'm talking about it truly astonishing. The problem with these kinds of statements, no matter how good their intentions may be, is that they tend to reinforce **the impression** many

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<sup>4</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *The Christian and the Old Testament* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1998), 50-51.

Christians have that Christ just isn't "really" in the OT. Maybe he is there in type and shadow, surely he is there as prophecy of the future, but that's about it. But can we really say that anyone actually saw him, met him, talked with him?

What I want to tell you this morning is that faith of OT saints was not merely in the promise of Jesus Christ to come (though it certainly contained that in however shadowy form they understood it). Where the NT and LXX have, "Abram/Abraham believed God," the OT has, "Abram believed Yahweh." So Yahweh is God. But just who is Yahweh? I'm going to show you that Yahweh in this passage is actually called "the Word of Yahweh" who was present before his eyes. And I'm not talking about words or the Bible or prophecy. It does not say he believed in a prophecy. It says he believed in Yahweh. I'm talking about "The Word," John's Logos, Jesus Christ prior to his incarnation. This is what I want to show you now.

## **An Ancient Word**

The passage today is **Genesis 15:1-6**. It is the first of two scenes in the chapter that run parallel and complimentary to one another.

## **Outline of Genesis 15**

<b>The Word's word</b>	v 1	Promise of reward	v 7	Promise of land
<b>Abram's word</b>	2-3	Complaint about childlessness	v 8	Guarantee requested
<b>Yahweh's reaction</b>	v 4	Promise of heir	v 9	Oath rite commanded
<b>Public act</b>	v 5	Taken into open	16-	Oath rite carried out
<b>Yahweh's word</b>	v 5	Promise of many descendants	13-	Promise of land for descendants
<b>Conclusion</b>	v 6	Abram's faith	18-	Yahweh's covenant <sup>5</sup>

It begins, “**The word of the LORD came to Abram**” (vs. 1). Though we have seen God speak before, this is the first time this phrase “word of the LORD” has been used in Genesis. Hebrew has a grammatical form called the **Construct Chain**. Words in construct are put together in modern Hebrew with a dash. Here is the phrase: (*dbr-yhwh*/word of Yahweh). They are also considered a single unit, and this usually serves their language the way the word “of” serves ours. “Of” is a word of possession, as is the possessive apostrophe. So the word of the LORD could also be “The LORD’s word.” The word is possessed by the LORD.

However, and this is what most people don’t stop to think about, in the sentence, “The word of the LORD came to Abram,” “word” serves as the subject and “LORD” is

<sup>5</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 325.

inside a prepositional phrase. “Yahweh” is not the subject, “word” is. Thus, when putting the sentence into its most basic form—getting rid of the prepositional phrase—you get “the word came to Abram.”

Now, “The word came to Abram” is not entirely unusual. Maybe this is a prophecy, right (and it will be)? But first, see how the word came. It says, “**The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision.**” I don’t know about you, but **words don’t come to me through visions**, they come to me through vocal chords, stereo speakers, and ear drums. My eyes are not engaged when words come to me.

But again notice, it does not say “**the words of the LORD came,**” as if there were many words. No, it says, “The word of the LORD came.” **Word is singular.** One word. And yet, there are many “words” that are spoken to Abram. Now, I suppose you could think of these many words as being on big message, and that is why it puts “word” in the singular form. But this is not how the early Jews and Christians took it.

For example, all of the Jewish Genesis Targums, make a point personify the Word. Since they are written in Aramaic, the Hebrew *dabar* becomes the Aramaic *memra*. They personify this Memra by separating it out from bare words, such as the words of a prophecy. For example, “**The word**



(*pithgama*) of the LORD was with Abram in a prophecy, as follows: ‘Do not fear, Abram, my Memra (*memra*) shall be your strength” (Onk Gen 15:1). You can see here how the “word of prophecy” is distinct from the “Memra.” They even use two different words for “word” to make the point: *pithgama* vs. *memra*.

Perhaps the more familiar personification of God’s word is found in John’s Gospel. “In the beginning was the Word (*logos*), and the word was with God, and the word was God ... and the Word became flesh” (John 1:1, 14). The Gospel is making the point that prior to the incarnation, the word was both equal to God (he was God) and separate from God (he was with God). The Word is viewed as a distinct person in a Godhead. But where did he get such an idea?

The answer is, from the OT. Now, while the LXX does not translate “word” here with *logos* (it uses *réma*), we do find the *logos* of God coming many times in the OT, especially to the prophets. This includes: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Gad, Jehu, Shemaiah, and David. The Word of the LORD also comes to Samuel, Solomon, Nathan, Amos, Obadiah, Nahum, and Habakkuk.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “The word of the LORD that came” or “The word of the LORD came” to: Abram (Gen 15:1); Samuel (1 Sam 15:10); Nathan (2 Sam 7:4); Gad (2 Sam 24:11); David (1 Chron

Two of these are particularly interesting this morning. The first is the call of Jeremiah:

- <sup>1</sup> The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin,
- <sup>2</sup> to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.
- <sup>3</sup> It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.
- <sup>4</sup> Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,
- <sup>5</sup> "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."
- <sup>6</sup> Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth."
- <sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.

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22:8); Solomon (1 Kgs 6:11); Jehu (1 Kgs 16:1); Shemaiah (2 Chr 11:2); Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1);<sup>6</sup> Isaiah (Isa 38:4; 2 Kgs 20:4); Jeremiah (Jer 1:11); Ezekiel (1:3); Hosea (Hos 1:1); Joel (Joel 1:1); Jonah (Jonah 1:1); Micah (Mic 1:1); Zephaniah (Zeph 1:1); Haggai (Hag 1:1); Zechariah (Zech 1:1); Malachi (Mal 1:1). Amos (Amos 1:1); Obadiah (Oba 1:1); Nahum (Nahum 1:1); Habakkuk "saw" an oracle of the LORD in a vision (Hab 1:1). BOLD = *logos* in LXX.

<sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD."

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.

(Jeremiah 1:1-9)

In this fascinating passage we can see that that word, the *logos*, came to Jeremiah just like it did to Abram. But Jeremiah's response is to call this "word" God. He says, "Ah, Lord GOD!" (adonai-Yahweh; vs. 6). He calls him *adonai-Yahweh*, just like David who distinguishes between Yahweh and Adonai in Ps 110:1 (that we looked at last time). He is addressing David's Lord. Then we see that Jer 1:7 calls the word of the LORD the LORD—Yahweh. So the Word of the LORD can also just be called Yahweh. Finally, and perhaps most intriguing of all, this "word" and Yahweh "reaches out his hand" and touches Jeremiah's mouth (vs. 9). I don't know about you, but I have never seen a word with hands. I've seen hands say words (through sign-language, which had not been invented yet). But that isn't what this is saying. No, persons have hands. Jeremiah is talking to a person with hands. Friends, this is *not* personification or anthropomorphism anymore than a strange man that wrestles

with Jacob or an angel that speaks to the disciples at the empty tomb is a personification. How do I know?

Another fascinating passage is the [call of Samuel](#):

- <sup>1</sup> Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.
- <sup>2</sup> At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place.
- <sup>3</sup> The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.
- <sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!"
- <sup>5</sup> and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down.
- <sup>6</sup> And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again."
- <sup>7</sup> Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.
- <sup>8</sup> And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy.
- <sup>9</sup> Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

- <sup>10</sup> And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."
- <sup>16</sup> But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am."
- <sup>17</sup> And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you."
- <sup>18</sup> So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him."
- <sup>19</sup> And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.
- <sup>20</sup> And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD.
- <sup>21</sup> And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

(1 Samuel 3:1-21)

Note a couple of things at the beginning. First, there is a connection between the **word of the LORD** and visions—**eyesight**. This is the same as **Genesis 15:1**. Second, notice that Eli's eyes are dim, he is **blind**. Then it says three times that the **LORD** called to Samuel. But Samuel could not recognize the

voice, because the Word of the LORD had not yet been revealed. To not know the Word is to not know the LORD. At some point, it says that the LORD came and **stood** in front of him. Finally, Samuel saw the word of Yahweh. But it took some time for Eli to figure it out, because he was blind. He only knew once Samuel convinced him by what he said, which was a prophecy to kill Eli and his sons. Then Eli knew. Finally, the LORD appeared again to Samuel by the word of the LORD at Shiloh.

Again, I don't know about you, but **I've never seen a word stand**. I've seen stand-up comedians say funny words. I've seen people stand on the word. But I don't know any words that stand. *Unless* that word is **a person with a body** of some kind.

The same goes for **appearing** in various places. Appearance is the language of sight. Going back to Abram, we have seen the LORD "**appear**" to Abram twice already (**Gen 12:7; Acts 7:2**). On one of those occasions, he is called the **Glory of the LORD**, and Abram saw him. Now The Glory is called the Word, and I think it should be capitalized: "**The Word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision.**" If Jews before Christ could get this, why can't Christians who have John 1:1?

You see, Abram is not hearing a disembodied voice. These are not just words dancing like sugarplums through the air. Abram is talking to a man. This is how in **vs. 5** it can say, “**And he brought him outside.**” Who is he? “**The word of the LORD**” (**vs. 4**) again. **The word is a person**, not a homosapien, but as we will see in a few chapters, something else. But this explains how, later in the chapter, he is able to **walk through severed pieces of animal carcasses** (**Gen 15:17**). I do not even know what that would mean if there was no body to walk through the pieces. Finally, notice that Abram calls him the same thing Jeremiah did: Lord God—*adonai-Yahweh* (**Gen 15:2, 8**).

What we have before us in our passage is a person. It is none other than **the Lord Jesus** himself, prior to coming in the flesh, because this person is the Word. Abram saw him. Abram talked to him. Abram *knew* him. And that means, all of those people who had the word of the LORD come to them? Well, they knew him too. Thus, they did not merely put their faith *in a promise* of someone to come. They put their faith in Jesus Christ, whom they knew, who was with them, who spoke to them, fought for them, covenanted with them. This is why the OT does not say Abraham believed “God,” but Abraham believed “Yahweh.” Jesus is Yahweh.

Yes, there was a promise, and based on things like the Dead Sea Scrolls that we looked at last week, it is very safe to say that they believed that someone, perhaps this very person, perhaps another, would one day come in the future and somehow deliver them completely. But **did they understand the incarnation** to come? **No, not like we do.** The Gospels and Peter and Paul make that abundantly clear. That was a mystery kept in riddled prophecy until the time that it should be fulfilled, in part **so that Jesus could go through with his mission.** It had to be kept a mystery to some degree so that the powers of heaven and earth would put him to death! That is why it is so important that they actually trusted in Christ then.

They did believe in Christ whom they saw, whom they knew, whom they trusted had appeared either to them and/or to their leaders. The whole NT is in agreement on this:

- Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. (**Jude 1:5**)
- He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. (**Heb 11:26**)



- And all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. (1 Cor 10:3-4)
- Isaiah said these things because he saw [Christ's] glory and spoke of him. (John 12:41)
- Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad. (John 8:56)

This last verse with Abraham is particular relevant to us today. After Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad,” the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” (John 8:57). They knew what he was saying! They knew he was claiming to have seen Abraham! And Jesus did not deny it. In fact, he went a step further and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). Jesus uses the divine name. He calls himself Yahweh. And the Pharisees wanted to kill him for it. Thus, Michael Heiser concludes all this by saying, “The deity who would one day become a human being and whose body would be from the line of Abraham, was speaking to Abraham in physical form before even the first of Abraham’s children had been conceived!”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Heiser, The Myth that is True. Unpublished.

## The Word of the Word and Faith

With that, let me turn our attention to the second part of this message, the part we also began with: **Faith**. Let's look and see what the Word of God said to Abram. “**Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.**” I AM, Abram. Me. Trust in ME! I will protect you.

One can take note that “**fear not**” is a phrase that is used later with Isaac (**Gen 26:24**) and Jacob (**46:3**), and then Moses and Joshua many times in the wilderness and conquest. The Word says the same thing to all of them. The context is military imagery: **a shield** and a **reward**. I will protect you. I will bless you. In fact, the Word's word here comes on the heels of **Abram's victory in the Giant Wars**. You give everything you won to the king of Sodom? Don't worry. I will take care of you. You don't have a place to lay your head? Do not fear, I AM with you.

The Targums go out of their way to give this context. For example, “**After these things, after the kings had gathered together and had fallen before Abram, and after he had killed four kings and brought back nine encampments, Abram thought in his heart and said, ‘Woe to me now! Perhaps I have received the reward of my observance of the commandments in this world, and there will be no portion**

for me in the world to come. Or perhaps the brothers and relatives of these slain will go and join in legions and come against me. Or perhaps at that time the reward of some minor merits was found with me, so that they fell before me. But the second time the reward of good deeds will not be found with me, and the name of heaven will be profaned in me” (PsJon 15:1). They see Abram as being in need of great encouragement, thus the Memra comes to him. This is what God loves to do on at least a weekly basis with all of his saints together, when they get down, depressed, tired of their sin, tired of circumstances around them, tired of sickness, tired of death, tired of life. This is what he loves to do when you are alone, tired, worn out, fearful of this world, can't go on. He comes to you in your time of need and says anew, “Trust in *me.*”

Yahweh promised Abram that he would fight for him, and this on the heels of *having already fought for him*. And he says that *He* will be Abram's reward. Christ himself is the reward of the saints. People are looking for satisfaction in everything else: money, power, sex, fame, adrenaline, sports, movies, relationships. But Christ is the one who satisfies. He is worth more than gold or silver.

So *after* the Word says that he is Abram's shield and reward, *then* Abram has a particular question. Many years have passed since Jesus first appeared to him, and one thing seemed even more out of reach than ever before. "O Lord GOD [*adonai-Yahweh* again, as he is addressing the Second Power in Heaven, rather than the first], what will you give me, for I continue childless, and heir the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus" (Gen 15:2). The Lord had promised him a seed and a nation (Gen 12:2, 7). But Abram was a very old man now. He has been waiting, most likely, many *years*, and still no child. "And Abram said, 'Behold, you have given me no seed, and a member of my household will be my heir'" (3). The best he has is a foreigner to take over his possessions when he dies.

Thus, it introduces the next speech of the Word with the word "Behold." "Behold, the word of the LORD came to him" (15:4). God is about to speak. What will he say? "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." Then, the Word brings Abram outside (he must have been in his tent when he had the vision). He said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. So shall your seed be" (5).

The promise is incredible, and Abram doesn't even begin to realize how. But first, understand that this is **not a promise that is given to you and I**, though we do benefit from it. That is, God does not promise any of us that we shall have offspring as numerous as the stars. But he did promise this to Abram, even though is 80-90 years old at this time, he will have a son come from his own body. It is an historical promise to a certain man, but the benefits that come from it are universal. It is a promise that begins with the birth of a nation with Isaac and Jacob and climaxes in the birth of Jesus Christ who dies for our sins. We will look more at this promise in ch. 17.

For now, consider Abram's response. **“And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness”** (**Gen 15:6**). Notice the way it is put. It says he believed the LORD. The Word is now called the LORD. Notice, it does not merely say that he believed the promise. Nor does it say he believed the promise of a Lord to come, though both of those are probably implied. It says he believed the LORD (or perhaps “in the LORD”).

Do you understand the significance of this? He is putting his faith in the LORD. It is like if won the Powerball jackpot of \$300,000,000, an unbelievable amount. After the initial

shock wore off, if you really had played the Powerball and those really were your numbers, and you really believed you had won, you would not putting your faith in a piece of paper. You would not putting your faith in a mere promise. You are putting your faith in the State that collected the money and has it in their bank account. In the same way, Abram is putting his faith in—not just “G-O-D,” but Jesus Christ, *adonai-Yahweh*, Lord-LORD, the Word of God.

You can see from this that **the object of Abram’s faith** is therefore not faith. Nor is it himself, nor his dreams, nor his wife, nor his nephew, nor his money, nor his heart. It is not a blind leap into the void, either. For this promise comes on the heels of the objective victory that this same person has just won for Abram. His faith is in the word of prophecy spoken by the Word of God. It is both/and. He believes what is predicted, and he believes the person who predicts it.

Let’s turn to the NT now to see just how this verse is used by both Paul and James. This will help us get a feel for both the significance and nature of faith. First, Paul. In Romans, the Apostle is very concerned about people who try to **justify themselves by good works**, bragging about the law and their ability to keep it before God. He applies Abraham directly to this question. **“What then shall we say that Abraham, our**

forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God” (Rom 4:1-2). If you are trusting in your works, your goodness, your heart, or anything inside of you to make God “happy,” or to make God approve of you, give it up now. For if you are doing this, then you actually are bragging about yourself to God, and this is pride and sin, and it will end up in your destruction. No, works cannot justify anyone, because we are all sinful, including Abram, as we have seen in previous stories.

The solution? “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’” (4:3). “Counted” is a legal term, as is “justification.” It is the term of a court of law. Guilty or not guilty. Listen to how the targum’s put it one last time, as I have never seen it put quite like this before. “And he trusted in the Memra of the Lord, and he reckoned it to him as merit because he did not speak rebelliously against him” (Ps-Jon Gen 15:6). “And he trusted the Memra of the Lord, and He considered it for him as a meritorious deed” (Onk Gen 15:6). They are suggesting that faith is considered as a work, the only work that pleases God, even though it is the exact opposite of a work.

This is what the Reformation reclaimed. Rome had turned justification into a process of becoming righteous. In doing so, they confuse sanctification and justification as well as glorification with justification. But we do not “become righteous” until death. We are declared as righteous now. And then we are given an alien righteousness of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, who begins to sanctify us in this way... let us turn to James.

People are judging one another throughout the churches. The poor are being forced to stand in the back. There is favoritism. Those without food are being patted on the back and turned away with a condescending “God be with you” and no food in their stomachs. One group thinks they have the corner on righteousness. The church is a mess.

So James levels them all saying that if you break one law, you break them all (**James 2:10**). He says, “You brag because you believed in God? Great, so to demons. Demons aren’t atheists” (**2:19**). “You think God doesn’t care about you obeying his law today, because you are saved by faith? You really think that kind of faith will save you? (**14**). Faith without works is dead (**18**). No, no brothers. You prove your faith by what you do. Yes, faith comes first, but if it is also last, so that you couldn’t care less about God’s law, about the



poor, if you are not changed by God to want to serve him, then your faith is not biblical faith. It is the ‘faith’ of Satan.”

Then he quotes our passage, “You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’ (2:22-23). So this is what it means to have faith. First, the object of your faith is in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It always will be. It always has been. Second, it is in his work done on your behalf. Faith says, “Christ did that for me. He died for me. He was raised to life for me.” Faith lays hold of that good news. It accepts it. It receives it. Third, faith changes a person’s heart. It does not eliminate sin, but it causes a person to detest it, not just because it is harmful to them, but because they know God hates sin. And faith does not want to grieve the Holy Spirit.

And so I have to ask you today, have you trusted in Jesus Christ? Have you accepted that this good news is for you? Are you living on your parents faith, your churches faith, your pastor’s faith, your faith in faith? Do you realize that Christ came to Abram, protected him from harm, won great battles for him, promised him a seed, and delivered on that promise? Do you realize that Christ in the flesh is the

fulfillment of that promise? Do you know that he did this all so that you might have salvation rather than condemnation, eternal life rather than perishing in sin and death? And do you desire in your heart of hearts to obey him? Are you grieved by your ongoing sin, or do you not think you really have all that much anymore? Is your life one of repentance and humility, or simply one that wants everyone else to repent and bow before your righteous majesty? Answer these questions and you will know whether you are in the Christian faith or simply have the faith of a devil. Then trust in Christ alone, and he will count that faith as righteousness. For that is what the Scripture says.