

- Genesis 15:1-6: Abraham (or Abram) has a **vision**. This is not the first time God has spoken to Abram - Genesis 12 ("Go from your country [Haran] and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. **And I will make of you a great nation**, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.")
- Abram is 75 years old when he leaves Haran and passes into Canaan – the Lord says, "**To your offspring I will give this land.**"
- They go to Egypt because of a famine – but it doesn't work out well there!
- Genesis 13, Abram passes by the place in Canaan where God had appeared to him earlier. God reaffirms his promise to Abram – "**all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring for ever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted**".
- Genesis 14: Abram gets dragged into a war in order to rescue his nephew Lot. He meets Melchizedek the priest-king of Salem (Jerusalem) – so a lot of time has passed. Still no sign of an heir.
- Genesis 15 is the first time that the Lord is mentioned as having come to Abram in a vision – "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."
- This is the first recorded response of Abram to God – "Oh Lord, what will you give me? for I continue childless, and another man who's not my son stands to inherit everything?"
 - Abram is now he's in his 80's. Sarai his wife in her 70's. Abram's asking "what will you give me? When will I be given it?"
- God reaffirms the promise to him again – "This man [Eliezer] shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." = I will give you real, biological offspring.
- God takes him outside and says "Look towards heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." (...and they're just the ones Abram could see!)
 - (Psalm 147 – 'he determines the number of stars; he gives to all of them their names')
- See John's vision on Patmos – Revelation 7 'After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"'
 - So many stars in the sky/people in the multitude – too many to count!

- Followers of Jesus are *adopted* descendants of Abraham. Just as the Lord knows every star by name, so the Lord Jesus knows every single person in that multitude intimately.
- Abram must have had so many questions – how on earth will this happen? What’s your plan Lord? When will these things take place?
 - God doesn’t reveal all the ‘what, where, when, how’ – he just reaffirms the promise. Abram puts aside these questions and just trusts the Lord – **he believed, and this is counted to him as righteousness.**
 - Romans 4: it’s through belief in Jesus that we’re justified before God. The law only serves to show our inability to justify ourselves before God.
 - [Concerning Abraham] ‘He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, **fully convinced** that God was able to do what he had promised.... But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.’
- The how/when/what/who/why questions are still there but Abram trusts – “I don’t know how, but I know you’ll do it”. We must do the same, knowing that God’s promises never fail.
- This text has some interesting parallels with Luke chapter 1 – Zechariah and Mary
- The angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah in the temple and tells him their prayers have been answered – they will have a son John.
 - Zechariah’s response: “How shall I know this?” = immediate doubt (“How can I know that this will really happen?”). He’s asking for a sign from God.
 - Zechariah is rebuked for his unbelief and for a time he is mute (although God is ultimately glorified when his voice is restored).
 - Contrast this with the account of Mary (vv26-38): Gabriel appears to Mary “...And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.”
 - She asks him a ‘how’ question - “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”
 - Gabriel explains that she will conceive through the Holy Spirit, that her cousin Elizabeth is already 6 months pregnant even in her old age, and that nothing is impossible with God - and Mary simply responds with “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”.

- Zechariah and Mary both wanted to know the how/when/what/who/why – but on this occasion, Zechariah was the one who doubted whether the promise was genuine or not.
- Why does the Lord ask us to wait on him? (Short video of Julie Lowe, a professional counsellor working with the Christian Counselling & Educational Foundation)
- God uses waiting as a process of sanctification – to teach us to trust in Him who is both a powerful and loving God. His ways are perfect and his timing is always perfect. There's change happening in the waiting too - he uses waiting to prepare us for when his promise comes to pass
- He wants to teach us humility too. Instant gratification – the modern affliction – we want this and that to happen now. God teaches us that he is the arbiter of all of time – things happen when He wills them to, not us. He doesn't owe us a single thing – but he's chosen to give us everything.
- **Group discussion: has the Lord ever asked you to wait for something? (5 mins)**

Genesis 15:7-21: We move into the second part of the chapter where God establishes His covenant with Abram – His 'binding contract'.

- The Lord commands Abraham to take the animals and cut them in half (except the birds) – at the very end of the chapter, God passes between the pieces as a smoking fire pot and flaming torch. We don't understand the full significance of the animals/pot/torch, but it may have been an ancient way of establishing a covenant or contract between two people. God uses the same means to establish His covenant with Abraham and his descendants.
- Abram says, "how am I to know that I shall possess the land?". This request for a 'sign' is used as a prelude to God establishing His 'contract' with Abram.
- Sandwiched within this section is a dream. God chooses to reveal to Abram that, long after he's in his grave, his people will live in exile as slaves for 400 years and will suffer much – however, they will be delivered from this and return eventually to the land that's theirs as God had promised.
 - God does a similar thing with Abraham in ch. 18 regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 17 "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"). The Lord chooses to tell him, because this is part of His promise to Abraham – that his descendants will be a people set apart in this land, and that the Lord's judgment upon the nations is entirely right.
- NT parallel – in Revelation, we see a time of testing and tribulation, of judgment and final deliverance of Jesus' people
- 1 Peter 1: Peter refers to the church as 'exiles' and 'the dispersion' in the same way that the OT refers to the people of Israel – a people far from home – called to be holy and to endure the 'various trials that test the genuineness of faith' which ultimately bring glory

to Jesus. And to hold on to the promise of the 'imperishable', 'undefiled' and 'unfading' inheritance.

- Abram and Jacob were both exiles in a foreign land. But they had the promise of God revealed to them in dreams and visions, and God established his covenant with them - although they only see it from far off, God will give them their promised inheritance.
- We're exiles too - although it might feel far off, as heirs to the new covenant, we know with absolute assurance because of our faith in Jesus that one day we'll inherit the promised land.