

1. Attacks of doubt

• Two anxieties – security and possessions

• God's reassurance on both

• Delays, discouragement and doubts

• Eliezar – accepting less than what God wants to give.

1. **Men and women of faith may face attacks of doubt.** Abram received great encouragements from God, yet he still could have doubts. He soon received the answer to Melchizedek's praying. Genesis 15:1 is a link with chapter 14. There have been anxieties about security and about possessions, and doubts about the promises which seem incredibly slow in coming to fulfilment. He has experienced a minor tribal war in which he has been in danger and was risking losing what material possessions he had. Melchizedek has prayed for him. What happens in Genesis 15:1 is surely the answer to Melchizedek's praying. God appears to him and reassures him at the very two points where he needs reassurance. 'I am your shield', says God; Abraham has just been in a war. 'Your reward, your wages shall be very great'. The word is the one normally used for salary or wages. Abram has just been anxious about material possessions. God answers that anxiety too.

Yet even great men of faith can find their trust in God attacked by doubts, and immediately after the reassurance Abram is in uncertainty. God sometimes seems to take a long time to fulfil His promises and we get discouraged. God had given wonderful promises to Abram, and yet they seemed so slow in coming. Now Abram has problems ^{☐1}. 'O sovereign Yahweh', he says, 'what will you give me?' God has for a long time been promising that he will become a great nation, but he cannot even have his first child! 'The heir of my house is a man of Damascus, Eliezar'. Could it be, Abram wonders, that the 'seed' God will give him is to be someone he adopts? 'Exactly what is it you are going to give me?' he asks God. When fulfilment of God's promises is delayed we think of lesser possibilities and are tempted to be content with less than God wants to give us. He is willing to accept a servant as an adopted son ^{☐2}. He will accept anything if only God starts fulfilling His promise to give him a seed. But actually in suggesting the possibility that Eliezar might be the heir Abram is accepting less than what God wants to give him.

^{☐1} 15:2

^{☐2} 15:2–3

2. God renews His promise

• A fourth occasion

• Timely confirmation

2. **God knows how to renew His promise.** At a time when Abram is perplexed and is tempted to accept less than what God has in mind, God comes with a fresh revelation. Eliezar is not the seed. It is from Abram's own body that the promised seed will come.

This is now the fourth time the promise has been given. First they were given in Ur ^{☐1}, then in Shechem ^{☐2}. God gave him promises a third time after Lot had separated from him ^{☐3}. This is now a fourth occasion when God tells Abram of His plans ^{☐4}.

God knows just how much we can stand. Abram is almost at breaking point and is ready to burst out with a cry of perplexity even at the very time when God is giving him a double assurance of protection and provision. So God comes to his aid with even more confirmations of His promises.

^{☐1} 12:1–3

^{☐2} 12:7

^{☐3} 13:14–17

^{☐4} 15:4–5

3. Enlarged promise

3. Not only does God renew His promise. **God progressively enlarges the promise as we walk in fellowship with Him.** God gives more information about how the heir will come to Abram. It will not be a

• The emphasis on numbers is intensified

• Delays drive us to get closer to God

4. Faith reactivated

• Again Abraham responds to God

• Abraham's persistent triumphant faith brought him a covering of righteousness

• A faith that recovers when doubts attack

matter of adopting a servant; Abram's son and heir will be fathered by Abram himself ¹. Also the emphasis on numbers is now intensified. Abram is taken outside and asked to count the stars. He cannot do it. 'So shall your seed be', says God ².

¹ 15:4

² 15:5

God follows these procedures of delaying His promise almost unbearably, because it is necessary. Somehow God's delays refine us and drive us to have further dealings with God and to seek personal contact with Him. If the promises of God flowed into our lives with ease and without our seeking them, we would forget where they come from.

4. True faith is not altogether lost. The fresh word from God reactivates Abram's faith. God's word is enough for Abram.

His response to what God says is immediately reasserted. 'Abram believed Yahweh and it was reckoned to him for righteousness'. It is a mistake to think that Abram was justified at precisely this point. It is not that Abram is **first** approved by God at this point. Abram's faith had begun in Ur, and faith in God's word concerning the promised salvation was saving the very first time God's word came to Abram. He must be regarded as having been justified even in Ur, and certainly in Haran. The statement in Genesis 15:6 lets us know that again Abram responds to God. It does not mean that Abram believed God for the first time; that would totally contradict Genesis 12-14.

We are told what this persistent, triumphant, faith did for Abram. Abram's faith brought him a covering of God's righteousness. True faith rises above doubt. At this point Abram showed that the faith he had had for a long time, was true, lasting, permanent trust in God. It was the kind of faith that rose above doubts. Abram's faith had **always** brought him justifying righteousness – so had Abel's faith, and Enoch's faith, and Noah's faith – but this is an appropriate point to mention how faith in God's promise 'is reckoned for righteousness'. Abram's faith rises above doubt. Saving faith is assurance about God's promise. Abram has had this kind of faith ever since the time of Genesis 12:4 if not even earlier. But it is appropriate that at **this** point the covering righteousness of God should be mentioned because Abram has shown quite clearly that his faith is saving assurance in God's word of promise, and is a faith that persists and recovers when doubts attack.

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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