

A Good and Hard Covenant

Genesis 15:7-21



THE COLLECT OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities that may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



SERMON OUTLINE

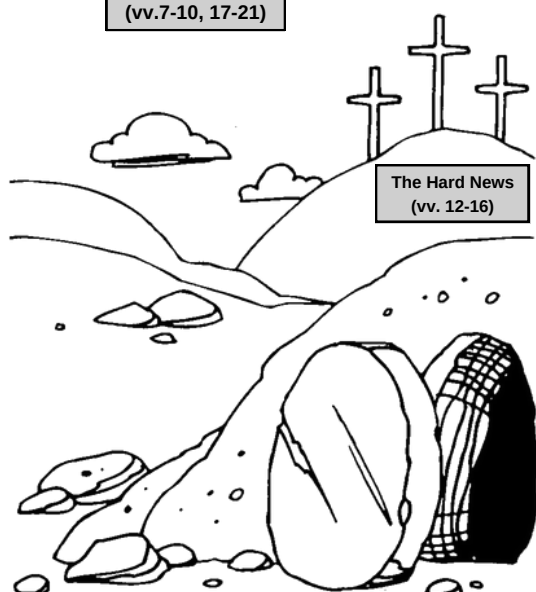
Don't mistake hard for the opposite of good. Often, hard work is required for something to become deeply good. The Bible's central message of good news also comes with hard news. This pattern is evident in God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15:7-21. The covenant secures Abraham's future inheritance of the promised land but includes news of delay and unimaginable difficulty. However, the hard news is integral to the good news, and by continuing to study Abraham's journey, we can explore what it means for God's people today.



Hard and good news often go hand-in-hand in the Bible, as we see in the covenant God made with Abraham, and understanding this truth can help us navigate the delay between God's promises and their fulfillment



The Good News
(vv.7-10, 17-21)



The Hard News
(vv. 12-16)

How Hard Can Be Good in
God's Economy (vv. 14, 16)



The Good News (vv.7-10, 17-21)

- o God makes a covenant with Abraham, binding himself to Abraham and his future, in a ceremony involving the cutting of animals. (9-10)
- o While it was common for both parties to walk between the animals, only God passes through them, indicating that He alone will bear the consequences of any future betrayal of the covenant. (17)
- o God takes full responsibility for seeing his promise fulfilled in the covenant, which foreshadows Jesus paying the penalty for humanity's breaking of the covenant.
- o What do we make of the gathering and cutting of the animals in verses 9-10? This is strange to us, but it was a common practice in Abraham's time, and its meaning is straightforward.



The Hard News (vv. 12-16)

- o God explains to Abraham that his descendants will be displaced, enslaved, and mistreated before they can possess the promised land. This hard news may seem incompatible with the promise, but God shows that it is integral to His plan.
- o Through delay and difficulty, God brings about great blessings and judgment on their oppressors, ultimately fulfilling His covenant.
- o Have you ever made that mistake—thinking that hard is incompatible with good?



How Hard Can Be Good in God's Economy (vv. 14, 16)

- o God works through Israel's captivity in Egypt—an unimaginable difficult event—to bring about good: Joseph keeps them alive during famine (Gen 50:20), they grow ("the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied," Exod 1:12), they leave Egypt with riches (Exod 12:36).
- o Most importantly, God uses this tragic oppression to reveal to them how mighty He is to save.
- o In the economy of God, the fire of affliction can become the furnace of formation. Hard can be used for good.

A Good and Hard Covenant

Genesis 15:7-21



OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can we intentionally embrace and find meaning in the delays and difficulties of our lives, trusting that God's patient kindness and mercy are at work, and allowing these experiences to shape us into the people He has called us to be?
- Have you ever made that mistake—thinking that hard is incompatible with good?
- How can we apply the idea that hard work is often required for something to become deeply good in our own lives?
- Why is it important to recognize the hard news that comes with the good news in the Bible?
- What can we learn from God's covenant with Abraham about delay and difficulty being integral to His plan?
- How can we view our own hardships as a furnace of formation?
- Why does God use delay in fulfilling His promises, and what does it mean for us as Christians?
- In what ways can we be instruments of justice in bringing more people into the covenant and demonstrating God's justice and mercy?



PRAYER

Almighty God, you have revealed your covenant and your plan for your people through your servant Abraham. Help us to understand the difficult and hard news that comes with your good news, and to trust that through delay and difficulty you bring about great blessings and fulfillment of your promises.

May we learn from the furnace of affliction, and may we be instruments of justice in your plan to bring more people into your covenant. We pray this through your Son, Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for our sins and fulfilled your covenant.

Amen.

“.....

Reality is not an enemy of faith. It can be a great opportunity for faith to show its true colors.



Further Study

- John Calvin writes at this juncture of the covenant: “Wherefore the faith of Abram was admirable and singular; seeing that he acquiesced in an oracle so sorrowful, and felt assured, that God would be his Deliverer after his miseries had proceeded to their greatest height. See John Calvin, Genesis, vol. 1, 415.
- Tremper Longman, Genesis, 204.
- “Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, 25 and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants” (Lev 18:24).
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/genesis/>