

## Genesis 15 Part 2

After last week when we heard God explaining that Abram would have a child of his own, we see that God wants to cement that in Abrams mind – so He does this amazing practical covenant. This is really cool.

. (9-11) Abram prepares to make a covenant with God by doing what God tells him

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

a. **A three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon:**

This reads more like a shopping list for a strange pagan ceremony than something the LORD would ask for. I wonder if they had click and collect back then! Yet Abram understood perfectly what God asked him to prepare for.

b. **Cut them in two... and placed each piece opposite the other:** Abram knew exactly what to do with these animals; he understood that according to the custom of his time, God told him to get a contract ready for signing.

i. In those days, contracts were made by the sacrificial cutting of animals, with the split carcasses of the animals lying on the ground. The covenant was made when parties to the agreement walked through the animal parts together, repeating the terms of the covenant. Apparently the Hebrew that is translated *The LORD made a covenant* in Genesis 15:18 is literally in the Hebrew language, “the LORD cut a covenant.”

ii. Jeremiah 34:18-20 makes reference to this same practice of a covenant made by cutting animals and repeating the oath of the covenant as one walks through the animal parts.

iii. The symbolism was plain. First, this is a covenant so serious, it is sealed with blood. Second, if I break this covenant, let this same bloodshed be poured out on my animals and me. In other words if I break the covenant you can rip me to pieces.

iv. When Abram had his doubts and wanted assurance from the LORD, God said to him clearly, "Let's sign a contract and settle this once for all."

c. **And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away:** As Abram waited for the LORD to appear and walk through the carcasses with him (to sign the covenant), God didn't come right away. He had to wait and fight off the vultures until God appeared to complete the covenant ceremony.

i. Abram had reason to expect that God would come down and walk through the animal parts with him, because God had previously appeared to him. It seems that Abram knew that God was capable of taking some physical form.

### **3. (12-16) Prologue to the covenant.**

**We see in the verses 12-16 that there is some waiting involved. And some weirdness.**

**Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him. 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. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.**

**But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."**

- a. **Now when the sun was going down:** As evening came, God had not yet appeared to walk through the animal parts with Abram and seal the covenant. Instead, God caused a **deep sleep** to fall upon Abram. Apparently, at least part of what followed came to Abram in a dream while he was under this **deep sleep**.

b. **Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them:** Abram wanted concrete proof from God, and God would soon sign the covenant. Yet Abram needed to know he would have land and descendants, but all would not go well with his descendants in the future. This was a dreadful aspect to an amazing promise. But as we find within the whole story, God keeps giving a real picture of what life with God is like. – Real issues, real doubts, real promises, real relationship.

i. After God told him some of the hardship that would befall his descendants, Abram might have said, "If that is what is going to happen, I don't want any children."

**This was a complicated blessing.**

c. **They will afflict them four hundred years:** Specifically, God told Abram of the slavery and hardship Israel would endure in Egypt (Exodus 1:1-14). Though the land was given to Abram and his covenant descendants, there would be this long period where they lived outside the land and in affliction. Yet after four generations they would **return here**(Canaan), and come **with great possessions**.

#### **4. (17-21) The covenant is made.**

**Here we see God do the covenant thing.**

**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. 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—the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”**

a. **When the sun went down and it was dark:** As Abram was either asleep or perhaps still groggy from the deep sleep, he saw God do an amazing thing. Abram saw God pass through the animal parts all by Himself, while Abram watched on the sidelines. This covenant thing is totally on God. Wow.

b. **A smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces:** In walking through the sacrificed animals in the covenant ceremony, God represented Himself by two emblems – a **smoking oven and a burning torch**.

i. The **smoking oven** reminds us of the many times smoke or a cloud represented the presence of God:

· As the pillar of cloud with Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22).

· As the smoke on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18).

· As the cloud of God’s Shekinah glory (1 Kings 8:10-12).

All stories worth another look at.

ii. The **burning torch** reminds us of the many times fire represented the presence of God:

· As the pillar of fire with Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22).

· As the burning bush displaying the presence of God before Moses (Exodus 3:4).

· As the fire from heaven that at times consumed sacrifices that pleased God (1 Kings 18:38, 1 Chronicles 21:26, 2 Chronicles 7:1).

Again worth looking at these stories if you have time.

c. **On the same day the LORD made a covenant with**

**Abram:** God, represented by the smoking oven and the burning torch, passed through the animal parts by Himself; as Abram watched, God showed this was a *unilateral* covenant.

Abram never signed the covenant, because he passively watched while God signed it for both of them in the ritual.

i. Therefore, 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.

ii. This is symbolic of our relationship to Jesus. God 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.

d. **The LORD made a covenant with Abram:** By entering into this contract, there is a sense in which God said, "If I don't keep My word, let *Me* be put asunder like these animals." God put His Deity on the line as a confirmation of His oath to Abram.

i. God alone signed this covenant; Abram did not haggle with God over the terms. God established and Abram accepted. Abram could not break a contract he never signed!

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

e. **I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates:**

By quoting the specific lands Abram's descendants would inherit, God made it clear this was not a *figurative* spiritual promise. It was real, and through this promise, Israel would inherit real **land**.

i. "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)