

Faith's Covenant

The Life of Abraham—part 6

July 12, 2026

Genesis 15:7-21

DAY 1: An unusual episode

Reviewing our series on Abraham:

- Wk 1: The Beginnings of Faith
- Wk 2: Faith's Tent and Altar
- Wk 3: Faith's Choices
- Wk 4: Faith's Fight
- Wk 5: Faith's Promises

Genesis 15:7 He also said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

⁸ But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

⁹ So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."

¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. ¹³ Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. ¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

¹⁷ When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

1. This passage has many details with which we are unfamiliar. What strikes you as you read it?

2. What questions do you have about the passage?

3. How does God answer Abraham's question about ownership of the land?

DAY 2: God makes a covenant with Abraham

Genesis 15:7 He also said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

⁸ But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

1. Up until now Abraham's chief questions have been about having an heir.
2. But now an additional question is asked. "How will I know I will take possession of the land?"
3. Abraham had walked the land north, south, east and west for ten years. He had moved his flocks and herds through the land.
4. But others had also used the land for pastureland, tribes moving through. There were no formal, defining boundaries. There was no paper like a deed that Abraham could whip out of his files and show others that this was his land.
5. God enters into a covenant with Abraham. A covenant is a solemn agreement between two parties. In business today this is called a legal contract. The contract stipulates the responsibilities and duties agreed upon by both parties.
6. In California a notary public is an impartial, state-appointed official authorized to deter fraud by verifying the identities of signers, ensuring they are mentally competent, and witnessing the signing of important documents.
7. In Abraham's day there was no such thing as a notary public.
8. The ceremony we are going to see here in Genesis was their version of a public signing of a contract.

Genesis 15:9 So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."

Genesis 15:10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.
9. The killing of the animals, and the laying them out opposite each other creates a lane through which both parties will walk through. That public walking seals the covenant.
10. What strikes you so far?

DAY 3: The stunning proof of God keeping the covenant!

*Genesis 15:12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and **a thick and dreadful darkness came over him**.¹³ Then the Lord said to him, “**Know for certain** that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there.¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.¹⁵ You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age.¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”*

1. As darkness settles in, Abraham falls asleep, a “deep” sleep. What we would call a dream floods his brain. This dream is a vision of the future.
2. The writer describes this as dread, great darkness, a haunting foreboding of what is to come.
3. His descendants will one day be enslaved, for four hundred years, in another land. We know this was done in history exactly as God revealed to Abraham. His descendants did go to Egypt where they were enslaved for four hundred years.
4. Then, God brought judgment on Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and the people in the fourth generation did leave slavery with great possessions, exactly as revealed in this vision.
5. During Abraham’s lifetime, he will not see his descendants become slaves in Egypt.
6. You might ask, then why would this information be important for Abraham to know? If you were Abraham, how would you have responded to this dire prediction, especially in line with your question about certainty of his descendants owning the land?
7. How would the prediction of a coming four-hundred-year slavery be evidence of God promising the land would be to Abraham’s descendants?
8. Abraham’s question about the land is answered in a way that makes no immediate sense to Abraham. The effect on Abraham, in the long run, should be to realize that God is sovereign over the world, and can orchestrate whatever needs to happen to advance God’s Larger Story.
9. The essence of God’s answer to Abraham is, “Abraham, I’ve got this.”
10. This prediction was precisely fulfilled. The stunning prophecy is not just for Abraham, but also for you and I. We can “see” the prophecy fulfilled exactly, and exactly on time.

DAY 4: God “signs” the covenant

1. The covenant God makes with Abraham is now “signed” by God symbolically.
2. Just like we’ve seen God use “props,” visual aids, and metaphors to undergird His promises, so we see God do the same here. The ceremony is filled with symbolism!

*Genesis 15:17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, **a smoking firepot** with **a blazing torch** appeared and **passed between the pieces**.¹⁸ On that day **the Lord made a covenant** with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”*

3. **God’s presence** is symbolized for Abraham in this setting.
4. **The smoking firepot** is a symbol of His presence, particularly His absolute holiness. The same imagery of fire was used with Moses at the burning bush and atop Mt. Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given, and with Isaiah when Isaiah “saw” the Lord high and lifted up (Isaiah 6). Ironically, the fire is both a symbol of God’s holiness and His cleansing, especially seen in Isaiah 6.
5. The **blazing torch** lights the way forward in “signing” the covenant. In the utter darkness of the vision, the light brightly shines and dispels the darkness. The signing of the covenant is distinctly seen.
6. God, symbolized by the smoking firepot and the blazing torch, signs the covenant.
7. Astoundingly, God does not ask Abraham to also sign the covenant. This is a covenant where all the responsibilities and duties of the parties are on **ONLY ONE** party—God.
8. This covenant of God is binding on Himself and unbinding on Abraham!
9. God holds Himself responsible for fulfilling the covenant, unconditionally.
10. Why are the animals slain and laid open making a lane? The dead animals are a solemn warning to the parties that if the signatories violate the covenant they are subject to the penalty of death. God assume responsibility for fulfilling the covenant and if He doesn’t the worst of penalties falls upon Himself.
11. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 5: The meaning of God's covenant

1. God is specific in the choice of animals He tells Abraham to assemble. The reason has to do with symbolism and typology.
2. Each particular animal is a “type” of Christ. A type is an image which foreshadows the real thing. When the real thing shows up, then the aha moment happens. “So THIS is what that means!!”
 - a. Heifer or ox: strength and patience
 - b. She-goat: nourishment and refreshment
 - c. Ram: power, might in warfare
 - d. Birds: gentleness and grace, the Spirit of God at work.
3. Why were the animals to be three years old? The first thing we think of is the three-year ministry of Jesus. These animals combined portray Jesus Christ in His strength, beauty, long-suffering, and life-giving nature.
4. Why does God tell Abraham to kill them? The symbolism is the death of Jesus Christ.
5. This is where this entire episode comes full circle!
 - a. God makes an unconditional covenant with Abraham, guaranteeing that the land He has given Abraham will be for his descendants!
 - b. The covenant stipulates that God must fulfill His covenant.
 - c. The covenant does not stipulate that Abraham or his descendants must fulfill the covenant.
 - d. The only one who may be punished for not fulfilling the covenant is God.
 - e. Abraham's descendants will spectacularly fail to keeping God's laws.
 - f. God will fulfill His covenant with Abraham and his descendant...
 - g. YET, it will be the covenant keeping Son of God who will die in the place of the covenant-rejecting people of the world.
 - h. the death of the Son of God is symbolized in the killing of the specific animals in this episode.
6. What strikes you from today's devotional?