

Faith's Covenant

The Life of Abraham—part 6

July 12, 2026

Genesis 15:7-21

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

The Furnace and the Lamp

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?"*

Up until now Abraham's chief questions have been about having an heir. But now an additional question is asked. "How will I know I will take possession of the land?" Abraham had walked the land north, south, east and west for ten years. He had moved his flocks and herds through the land. But others had also used the land for pastureland, tribes moving through. There were no formal, defining boundaries, no fences, and no deed that Abraham could whip out of his files and show others that this was his land.

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. 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.

In Abraham's day there was no such thing as a notary public. 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.

Because there was no such thing as a notary public or written contract to conduct solemn business, this is how they conducted serious business. They cut animals into two pieces, laid them out to form a path through which the signatories passed through publicly. This public walk was the same as a signature for us. Why must the animals die? They symbolized what would happen to either party if they violated the covenant. Death.

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.”

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. The writer describes this as dread, great darkness, a haunting foreboding of what is to come.

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. 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. During Abraham’s lifetime, he will not see his descendants become slaves in Egypt.

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.

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?

God makes a covenant with Abraham.

A covenant is a covenant is agreement between two parties. God enters a covenant with Abraham. To affirm the agreement of both parties, a public ceremony is enacted. Animals are killed and split into two pieces. The pieces are spread out

Typology. 1. Christ. 2. Death of Christ.

Sign of the covenant. No notary public.

How can I know? Promises and props. Dust, stars, sand, lamp and the torch

Extra material:

The process begins with heart hunger.

Matt. 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

How do children learn to write letters? If you tell them how, it's a long process. If you show them how it's still a fairly long process. But if you do it with them, both their hand and your hand on the pencil, the process is quicker. But if you have the children use a STENCIL, they are learning muscle memory, and mentally connect your instructions to what they're doing, but the stencil guides them—combining muscle memory with brain memory. When you remove the stencil, then the teacher's hand guides them with the stencil.

In countless ways, the people of the OT are the stencils for us, showing us, guiding us, illustrating for us OT truths.

For long periods of Abraham's life, the central anchor was daily, repeatedly found to trust God's promises of a redemptive story being told in spite of a lack of "believable" evidence, evident evidence. His faith was credited to him as righteousness. Romans 4-5 lays out the details.

Romans 6-8 details the long road of sanctification, God slowly transforming our very nature. Genesis 15:7-21 illustrates this process: God's role and our role.

Here is the first step in our sanctification. When we come to Christ we have the experience of being born again, but subsequently, we want to see the fruits of salvation in our lives. We have "owned" our salvation, but how can we "own" our sanctification?

In our Christian lives there is a parallel. Our human nature is so implacable, so stubborn, so rebellious, so intoxicated with self, that change almost seems impossible at times. Some sins, when you become aware of them, are more easily dealt with. Others? Not so much! You now find yourself in the pages of Romans 7.

Romans 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Though some of our character is getting better, some of it is barren, lifeless, and with tenacity gets a hold on us with a fierce stubbornness. Everything else is colored with a pall descending on us. We are not happy with that part of us we see in the mirror.

We take ownership of the misery that is self-inflicted due to our self-indulgence, self-pity, self-righteousness, It is in these dark days where our heart is getting cold and the light of faith is dim, that God steps in.

Jacob turned away from Esau and lived in terror of what Esau might do to him. That is when God met Jacob and wrestled with him all night until he was broken, once again, of self.

David had gone far astray with Bathsheba and Uriah, but it took Nathan the prophet to confront him with, "You are the man!"

Everyone of us have our own versions of the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, and Canaanites, those "filthy" tribes in the human heart. Bitterness, envy, self-righteousness, pride, laziness, lust, and many more.

Matthew 5:6

The furnace tells us Jesus Christ is more than each of those foul tribes, and more than all of them. Christ slowly becoming your "wisdom, your righteousness, your strength, and redemption. There is a renewed joy and peace as you retake land in your heart.

Brokenness→Repentance→Acceptance→Release ????????????

Notice the long-suffering nature and patience of God

"...for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

This brings up the question of evil and justice and what does God do about it. There is a spectrum on this. On one extreme people hate the idea of a God of judgment. "I don't believe in a God of judgment." On the opposite extreme people want justice to be done, justice served. In this sense, justice and judgment are virtues, attributes of God's goodness. In all of life, and depending on what's happening to you, we slide from one side of the spectrum to the other.

The Old Testament is filled with times where the prophets or the people wail, "How long, O Lord? How long will you allow evil to harm us? How long will you allow evil to ply its trade?"

There were vicious tribes in the middle east during those centuries, including the time when the Hebrews would be freed from Egyptian slavery and would enter the promised land. It was at that point in time that the time of the Amorites, and other "ites" would be over, their evil and wickedness so vile that God order their extermination so that the region might have a fresh start, children growing up without the threat of being raped, burned, mutilated, tortured, and murdered. It was an evil like a moral cancer, so degenerate that only God's judgment would bring it to its end.

The next step: a new vision and some victory where you thought none possible.

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The process begins with heart hunger.

vv. 7-8

Matt. 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

God reminds Abraham that he called to him and enabled him to move to the new land. Abraham's response was, "How will I know that I possess it?" Abraham had walked the land north, south, east and west for ten years. He had moved his flocks and herds through the land. 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. Here is the first step in our sanctification. When we come to Christ we have the experience of being born again, but subsequently, we want to see the fruits of salvation in our lives. We have "owned" our salvation, but how can we "own" our sanctification?

The way ahead is through "death"

vv. 9-11

The first thing you notice is an odd list of animals. Why them? And why does Abraham kill them?

Why these animals? Each particular animal is a “type” of Christ. Remember typology? A type is an image which foreshadows the real thing. When the real thing shows up, then the aha moment happens. “So THAT is what that means!!”

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Why does God tell Abraham to kill them? The symbolism is the death of Jesus Christ.

Abraham gathers the animals, kills them, and cuts three of the animals in two, laying them in a row, each part opposite the other. He then waits. Nothing happens, except for vultures flying overhead in search of a meal. He shoos them away. Finally, the sun begins to set.

vv. 12-16

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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. Then, God did bring judgment on Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and the people in the fourth generation did leave slavery with great possessions, just as revealed in this vision.

Abraham was to be spared of slavery and would die an old man in this land.

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FURNACE: hot fires of conviction of sin. “**Searing, scorching**, You have to face yourself. No more denial, pretending, obfuscating, justifying. Now its brutal honesty about yourself.

But the furnace is also **cleansing** (Isa. 6).

Job 5:17-18 Happy is the man whom God reproves. He wounds but He binds up. He smites but His hands heal.

LAMP: lights the path forward. You can now see things more clearly, and especially yourself. Everyone of us have our own versions of the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, and Canaanites, those “filthy” tribes in the human heart. Bitterness, envy, self-righteousness, pride, laziness, lust, and many more.

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FURNACE and the LAMP—GOD SIGNING THE COVENANT???????????

Why does he lay out their halves?