

# Genesis

## Chapter 15



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**Theme:** God’s revelation of Himself as shield and reward; Abraham’s faith; God’s covenant with Abraham.

This section is one of the texts that present the Abrahamic covenant (see 17:1–22; 18:1–15; 22:15–18; 26:23, 24; 35:9–15; compare also 12:1–3, 7; 13:14–17).

**Torah Class:** How true it is that after we have visited the victorious mountaintop, we can easily slide down into the valley of despair below. Abraham, sometime after this great victory over K’dorla’omer, was allowing his fears to surface. Here he was, in wicked Canaan, outnumbered thousands to one, realizing that even though he had a substantial and growing family, that it was the result primarily of the births of his female slaves; plus his hold on the land was tenuous at best. Besides, how was Abraham going to have all these descendants to inherit the land God promised, if he didn’t even yet have children? Abraham wonders in V2 if his purchased servant, Eli’ezer (whom we’re told is from Damascus), is going to wind up as the sole inheritor when Abraham dies.<sup>1</sup>

### **Genesis 15:1**

**After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.**

**[word of the LORD]** First mention of the “Word of the Lord.” The first occurrence of 245 times in the Old Testament and 13 times in the New Testament. Only twice in Genesis (Genesis 15:1,4). It is found 112 times in Jeremiah and Ezekiel alone.

**[vision]** “Fear not, I am your Shield (Lord).” Visions were a means used by God to communicate to people. All of the other visions of this category in the Old Testament were given to prophets (the writing prophets as well as Balaam) and often resulted in prophetic oracles, which were then delivered to the people. Visions may be experienced in dreams but are not the same as dreams. They may be either visual or auditory. They may involve natural or supernatural settings, and the individual having the vision may be either an observer or a participant. Visions are likewise part of the prophetic institution in other cultures in the ancient Near East.

This now is the fourth time that God has appeared to Abram. God is developing this man and bringing him farther along. God does well to appear to him now because Abram has taken a tremendous step of faith in going out and rescuing Lot and in turning down the booty which the king of Sodom offered him.

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<sup>1</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

### **Twenty-one Men who Had Visions from God:**

1. Abraham (Genesis 15:1)
2. Jacob (Genesis 46:2)
3. Balaam (Numbers 24:4,16)
4. Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1,15)
5. Nathan (2 Samuel 7:17; 1 Chron. 17:15)
6. Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1; 2 Chron. 32:32)
7. Messiah (Psalm 89:19)
8. Ezekiel (Ezekiel 7:13; Ezekiel 8:1-4; Ezekiel 11:24)
9. Iddo (2 Chron. 9:29)
10. Daniel (Daniel 2:19; Daniel 8:1-27; Daniel 9:21-24)
11. Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2)
12. Obadiah (Obadiah 1)
13. Nahum (Nahum 1:1)
14. Habakkuk (Habakkuk 2:2-3)
15. Peter (Matthew 17:9; Acts 10:19; Acts 11:5)
16. James (Matthew 17:9)
17. John (Matthew 17:9; Rev. 9:17)
18. Zacharias (Luke 1:22)
19. Ananias (Acts 9:10-12)
20. Cornelius (Acts 10:3,17)
21. Paul (Acts 16:9-10; Acts 18:9; 2 Cor. 12)

**[Fear]** *yare'*, (H3372), *yaw-ray'*; a primitive root; to *fear*; moral to *revere*; causative to *frighten* :- affright, be (make) afraid, dread (-ful), (put in) fear (-ful, -fully, -ing), (be had in) reverence (-end), × see, terrible (act, -ness, thing).

This is the same word translated *reverend* in Psalm 111:9 and is where we get the title used by some pastors.

**Psa. 111:9** *He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.*

**Pink:** And now came the reaction, mental and physical. Abram had good reason to conclude that the remaining followers of the powerful King of Elam would not abandon the enterprise which had only been frustrated by a surprise attack at night—made by an insignificant force—but instead, would return and avenge their reverse. In defeating Chedorlaomer and his allies, Abram had made some bitter and influential foes. It was not likely that they would rest content until the memory of their reverse had been wiped out with blood. They who had been strong enough to capture the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were too powerful to be set at defiance by Abram and his little colony. Thus alarmed and apprehensive Abram now receives a special word of reassurance: “After these things the Word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, *Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield.*” Thus in tender grace did Jehovah quiet the troubled heart of the one whom He was pleased to call His “friend.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (164). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**Pink:** But further. In the remaining part of this opening verse “I am...thy exceeding great *Reward*”—we have another word which looks back to the previous chapter; and a precious word it is. After Abram had defeated Chedorlaomer, and after he had been blessed and refreshed by Melchizedek, the King of Sodom offered to reward Abram by suggesting he take the recovered “goods” unto himself (14:21). But he who “looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God” declined to accept anything from this worldling, saying, “I have lifted up mine hand unto the Lord, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet, and that I will not take anything that is shine, lest thou shouldest say, *I have made Abraham rich*” (14:22, 23). Noble reply! And now we behold the *sequel*. God never permits His own to lose for honoring Him and seeking *His* glory. Abram had refused the spoil of Sodom, but God more than makes it up to him. Just as when our patriarch had shown his magnanimity to Lot by saying: “Is not the *whole* land before *thee*...if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand then I will go to the left,” and the Lord appeared unto Abram and said, “Lift up now *shine eyes*, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward. For *all* the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever” (13:9, 14, 15); so it was here. The refusal to be enriched by the king of Sodom is now compensated, more than compensated by a revelation from God which would greatly increase the joy of His servant. How important is the principle which here receives such lovely exemplification! How much are the Lord’s people losing today because of *their acceptance* of the world’s favors! Unto how few can the Lord now reveal Himself as He did here to Abram!<sup>3</sup>

**[shield]** *magen*, (H4043), *maw-gane'*; also (in plural) feminine *m<sup>e</sup>ginnah*, meg-in-naw'; from (H1598 (ganan); a *shield* (i.e. the small one or *buckler*); figurative a *protector*; also the scaly *hide* of the crocodile :- × armed, buckler, defence, ruler, + scale, shield. Used here as the Lord; Deut. 33:29; Psalm 84:11; Psalm 91:4; Proverbs 30:5.

**[After these things] Torah Class:** Verse 1 begins with the words, “some time later”; so we don’t know just how long it was after the battle with the kings from Mesopotamia, and the rescue of Lot, that this episode of chapter 15 takes place. However, it would appear that it was not long at all. “Fear not”, God says to Avram. Fear? What exactly was the fear Avram was experiencing? Had he not just flexed his muscles and defeated those northern armies? It was the fear that those kings would come back to take retribution because of Avram smiting them. After all, it was not only a humiliating defeat for these powerful kings of the north, but the guy who beat them wasn’t even harmed by what they had done. They had not come to make war with Abraham, and had done nothing to Avram except to unknowingly capture a relative who lived far away from his uncle.

God, knowing Abraham’s fears goes on to explain that He will protect him, and even reward Avram. Reward? Reward Avram for what? For refusing to be enriched by the evil king of Sodom; for choosing to place his faith in Melchizedek’s god. Avram apparently was rethinking his idealistic and principled refusal to accept ALL that he had liberated from Chedorlaomer and had returned to the king of Sodom..... except for that 10%

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<sup>3</sup>Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (164). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

given to Melchizedek. Avram would have been instantly an even wealthier man if he simply had accepted the ruler of Sodom's most generous offer.<sup>4</sup>

**Nachmanides:** Abraham now merited that the word of G-d should come to him in a daytime vision for at first his prophecy came to him in nocturnal visions.<sup>5</sup>

**Nachmanides:** "Fear not Abram" Abraham feared two things: that the four kings – either they or their successors – might increase their forces against him and he would go down into the battle and perish, or that his day shall come to die without child. [To remove these two fears from Abraham, the Eternal] promised him that He will be his shield against them, and that he reward for walking with G-d shall be very great.<sup>6</sup>

This now is the fourth time that God has appeared to Abram. God is developing this man and bringing him farther along. God does well to appear to him now because Abram has taken a tremendous step of faith in going out and rescuing Lot and in turning down the booty which the king of Sodom offered him.<sup>7</sup>

**The Last Word – Chumash:** A *tzadik* (righteous individual) does not seek the reward for a *mitzvah* because he desires physical benefits, or even spiritual delights. Just like he is devoid of a personal agenda in the observance of the *mitzvos*, likewise, the *tzadik* has no personal interest in the reward. He simply does "the truth because it is true"

Nevertheless, the *tzadik* still desires the reward, not for his own sake, but rather, because the physical or spiritual reward of a *tzadik* is proof to others of the greatness of Torah and mitzvos. The reward thus sanctifies God's name further and encourages the observance of torah, which is desirable to the *tzadik*.

Thus, Abraham was concerned, "Perhaps I have received reward for all my righteous deeds", not because he desired the reward personally, but rather, because he knew the impact that his rewards would have in convincing others to observe the mitzvos.<sup>8</sup>

**Nachmanides:** Anyone who serves God out of love, occupies himself with Torah and mitzvos and follows the ways of wisdom, should not do so for any worldly motives, or out of fear of curses or to receive blessings. Rather, he should do the truth because it is true, and the ultimate good will come as a result. This level is an extremely high one, and not every sage reaches it. It is the level of Abraham our father, whom God called His loved one, for the reason that he served God solely out of love.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>5</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>6</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>7</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:66). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>8</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

<sup>9</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

## **Genesis 15:2**

**And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?**

**[Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus]** Question number 16. Next question is in, Genesis 15:8.

**[Lord GOD]** The title “Lord God” (*‘adonai YHWH,* ) appears here for the first time. The Hebrew term *‘adonai*, meaning “lord,” “master,” or “ruler,” can be applied to both God and men (cf. 23:6, in which Abram himself is called “lord”). Abram shows that he did not regard the word “Lord” as tantamount to “the Name” by combining Lord and YAHWEH.

**[steward of my house is this Eliezer]** In those instances where the head of a household had no male heir, it was possible for a servant to be legally adopted as the heir, as particularly demonstrated in an Old Babylonian text from Larsa. This would most likely be a course of last resort, since it would mean transference of property to a person (and his line) who was (1) originally a servant or bondsman, and (2) not a blood relative. It signals the frustration of the childless Abram that he tells God that he has designated Eliezer of Damascus as his heir, though it is not clear whether he has actually adopted Eliezer or is simply referring to that as the only remaining course of action.

This is an important piece of information later when we get to the prophetic story of the Offering of Isaac. In the type developed in that story the “eldest servant” is used as the Holy Spirit. His name is not given in this story as he is acting as the type for the Holy Spirit. John 16:13-14, Jesus said the Holy Spirit will not speak of himself. To find the name we have to come here to 5:2 and find his name is Eliezer which means comforter, a name used of the Holy Spirit.

**Pink:** We do not consider that in asking “What wilt thou give me,” etc., that Abram was giving expression to unbelief. On the contrary we regard his words as the language of faith. Observe there was no rebuke given him by the Lord; instead, we are told, “And, behold, the Word of the Lord came unto him saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of shine own bowels shall be shine heir. And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be” (vs. 4, 5). It is to be noted that in Genesis 13:15 God compared Abram’s seed to the dust of the earth, but here, where *Christ* is contemplated (as well as a numerous offspring), the word is, “*Look now toward heaven,*” and his seed is likened to the “stars.”<sup>10</sup>

What Abram is saying to God is this: “I don’t want more riches; I don’t need that. The thing that’s on my heart is that I’m childless and I want a son. You have promised to make me a father of nations and that my offspring will be as numberless as the sand on

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<sup>10</sup>Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (166). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

the seashore. But I don't have even one child!" According to the law of that day, the Code of Hammurabi, Eliezer, his steward, his head servant, who had an offspring, would in time inherit if Abram did not have a child.<sup>11</sup>

**Rashi:** My entire household is sustained by his orders... but if I had a son, then he would be appointed over my possessions.

### **Genesis 15:3**

**And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.**

**[one born in my house is mine heir]** Referring to Eliezer of Genesis 15:2.

**[heir]** Heirship is based upon sonship (Rom 8:16,17; Eph 1:5,11). [The Prodigal Son never lost his sonship...]

**[no seed]** This was before Ishmael (Genesis 16:15), Isaac (Genesis 21:1-8), and other sons by Keturah were born (Genesis 25:1-6).

**Torah Class:** But, the worrywart continues to wring his hands, and in a really revealing and unflattering dialogue, Abraham starts pouring out his fears and suspicions and anxieties to Yahweh; He doesn't easily accept God's promises to him. Now, we...you and me....we wouldn't ever do that, now would we? God says I'm going to do thus and so for you.....but how often do we respond "yeah, God, but how? How are you going to do it, WHEN are you going to do it? It sure doesn't look like it's happening or is there any evidence it ever will." Yes, Avram may have been God's man, but he was still just a man.

So, after being assured that God will protect him from the bad boys from the north, and then further be assured that his prosperity will be further increased, God promises Abraham the thing he is most worried about: an heir.....a son. In all fairness, we of the modern Western world just can't grasp the importance of a son as an heir to a man in that era. It was not just a matter of passing on wealth and land holdings; to Avram and to virtually all humans of the known civilizations of that time; the belief was that a man lived on THROUGH his heir. Not so much a reincarnation, as that the ethereal substance that was invisible and unknowable..... that which makes each person a unique individual.... the life force which contained the bloodlines of that family, was carried forward through human reproduction. In some mysterious, undefined way, the fundamental nature of the father lived on in his son. For a man to die without an heir meant an end to his family line, and therefore an end to his own human essence. For a woman to be unable to give a son to her husband was the most shameful thing for her; her primary reason for existence as a human female was to produce an heir for her husband. To fail

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<sup>11</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:66). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

was tantamount to being useless. For people of Abraham's day, there was no concept of dying and going to Heaven and living with God for eternity. A son was Abraham's only hope of seeing all of God's promises realized, and he was well aware of it.<sup>12</sup>

**Ambrose; The Lord Is Not Slow to Reward:** Because Abraham did not seek recompense from man, he received it from God, as we read in Scripture: "After these words the Lord spoke to Abraham in a vision saying, Fear not, Abraham I will protect you. Your reward will be exceedingly great." The Lord is not slow to reward. He is eager to promise, and he gives in abundance, lest any delay cause weak souls to repent of having despised visible things. He pays back, so to speak, at high interest, rewarding with great abundance the one who has not been seduced by the things of this world that were offered to him.<sup>13</sup>

**Chrysostom; A Slave For An Heir:** Since God had promised him a reward, a wonderfully, exceedingly great reward, Abraham revealed his grief of spirit and the disappointment affecting him constantly on account of his childless condition. He says, "Lord what sort of thing will you give me? After all, you can see, I have reached the height of old age and am to pass on without children." See how from the outset the just man showed his sound thinking in calling his departure from here a "passing on." I mean, people who live an assiduous life of virtue really from their bonds when they transfer from this life. You see, for people living virtuously it is a kind of transfer from a worse situation to a better, that is protected from death and has no end.<sup>14</sup>

### **Genesis 15:4**

**And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.**

**[This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir]** The 16th prophecy in Genesis (Genesis 15:4-5). Next, prophecy is in Genesis 15:13. This is the third prophecy of Abraham's seed being great in number. It is in the process of fulfillment.

**Ambrose; The Legitimate Son:** But if the words of Abraham are not enough to correct, consider the word of God, who condemns such a mode of transmitting inheritance. "This man shall not be your heir," he says, "but the other who will come out from you, he will be your heir." Who is this other of whom he speaks? In fact Hagar too bore a son, Ishmael, but he is not speaking of him. Instead, he is speaking of holy Isaac. For this reason he added "who will come out from you." In fact, the one who truly came out of Abraham is the one who was born of a legitimate marriage. But in Isaac, the legitimate son, we can see the One who is the true legitimate son, the Lord Jesus, of whom at the beginning of the Gospel according to Matthew we read that he is the son of Abraham.

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<sup>12</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>13</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>14</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

He was the true heir of Abraham, bringing renown to the descendants of the progenitor. Through him Abraham looked up to heaven and understood that the splendor of his posterity would be no less luminous than the radiance of the stars of heaven. As “one star differs from another in brightness, so it is also for the resurrection of the dead,” said the apostle. The Lord, in joining to his resurrection people whom death was accustomed to hide in the ground, made them sharers in the heavenly kingdom.<sup>15</sup>

### **Genesis 15:5**

**And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.**

[seed] May allude to Gal 3:16. The word seed here is singular not plural. Talking about Jesus

[Look] Abraham had four "Look's": over the earth (Genesis 13:14); toward heaven (Genesis 15:5); at God (Genesis 18:2); at a substitute (Genesis 22:13).

**Nachmanides:** According to the simple interpretation of Scripture it means that He brought him forth from his tent into the open so that he could see the stars.<sup>16</sup>

This is remarkable. First God said to him that his offspring would be as numberless as the sand on the seashore, and now He says they will be as numberless as the stars in heaven. Abram could not number the stars. He could see approximately four thousand, but there were probably over fifty thousand in that area where he was looking. Abram couldn't number his offspring, and you couldn't do it today.

This man Abraham actually has two seeds. He has a physical seed, the nation Israel, and he has a spiritual seed, the church. How does the church become Abraham's spiritual seed? By faith. Paul told the Galatians that they were the sons of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ—not in a natural line, but a spiritual seed (see Gal. 3:29).<sup>17</sup>

### **Genesis 15:6**

**And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.**

[**And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness**] First mention of the primary condition of salvation. This foundational truth is repeated three times in the New Testament (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23) to show that righteousness is reckoned in return for faith.

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<sup>15</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>16</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>17</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:66). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

When God made a promise, Abram believed in the LORD. When God commanded Abram, he obeyed (see 12:4; 22:3). Nothing so marks the lives of Abram and Sarai as their *belief in God* (see Heb. 11:8–19). It is this belief, faith in the only living God, that saves the sinner from sin (see John 12:11). **He accounted it to him for righteousness:** Some have thought that in Old Testament times people were saved by their good deeds rather than by faith, but this idea is mistaken. Abram was not saved because of righteous living or obedience, but by believing in God and so being declared righteous by Him. The only valid work is the work of faith (John 6:28, 29).

A key verse for all believers, Genesis 15:6 marks the first mention of three important biblical words:

### **believed**

- Abram was not the first person to believe in God, but his faith is a pattern for all believers (Romans 4; Galatians 3:6-9; Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-19).
- The Bible does not say that Abram pleased God or appeased him, as most religions require, but simply that he believed in him.

**counted** Declared This word is also translated “reckoned” (NASB) or “accounted” (NKJV). It suggests an imputation or attribution by God. There are three main imputations or attributions in the Bible:

- The imputation of Adam’s sin upon all humankind (Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12).
- The imputation of the sins of all humankind upon Christ (Isaiah 53:5-6; 2 Cor. 5:14-21; Hebrews 2:9; 1 Peter 2:24).
- The imputation of God’s righteousness upon each believing sinner (Romans 4:6-25; Phil. 3:9; James 2:23).

**righteous** The Bible teaches that all sinners are naked before God (Genesis 3:7-10; Hebrews 4:13; Rev. 3:17). Some realize this and try to make their own spiritual clothes, but God looks upon such clothes as “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Whenever sinners realize their nakedness and turn to God, he clothes them in his own righteousness (Isaiah 61:10; Zech. 3:4; Luke 15:22).

**[believed]** '*aman*, (H539), *aw-man'*; a primitive root; properly to *build up* or *support*; to *foster* as a parent or nurse; figurative to *render* (or *be*) *firm* or faithful, to *trust* or believe, to be *permanent* or quiet; moral to *be true* or certain; once (Isa. 30:21; by interchange for Hebrew 541 ('*aman*)) to *go to the right hand* :- hence assurance, believe, bring up, establish, + fail, be faithful (of long continuance, steadfast, sure, surely, trusty, verified), nurse, (-ing father), (put), trust, turn to the right.

The Hebrew word, translated believe is from a root meaning “establish” or “confirm.” The English word *amen*, which is used to express approval, comes from the same root (Neh. 5:13; Ps. 41:13). Belief is one of the most important ideas in all the Bible, because a person must *believe* God in order to be saved from sin. For this very reason, the New Testament makes much of the fact that Abraham *believed* God (Heb. 11:8–12). Whenever the Scriptures, whether the Old or New Testaments, state that a person “believed in the

Lord,” it signals that the person has made a decision to treat God’s word as certain and has made a commitment to do what God wants (15:6; John 1:12).

**Torah Class:** Yahweh tells Abraham that he **will** be a father, so Eli’ezer will not have to be the inheritor of the family wealth. Abraham is encouraged when God tells him to look up into the night sky and count the stars; because that’s how numerous his descendants will be. And, then in V6, we are told something that so many modern Believers are so sure it was only a NT promise, one brought by Jesus: **“He (Abraham) believed God, and God credited it to him as righteousness”**. Here was the essence of God’s plan of salvation: trust God, and God will credit it to us as righteousness. This is the very meaning of grace. Grace was Adam’s hope, it was Noach’s, and it was Abraham’s. Grace was the foundation of the Torah given to Moses and is the foundation of the New Covenant in Yeshua; it is precisely our hope today. It has never changed.<sup>18</sup>

**Ambrose; He Believed With Promptness of Spirit:** And how did Abraham’s progeny spread? Only through the inheritance he transmitted in virtue of faith. On this basis the faithful are assimilated to heaven, made comparable to the angels, equal to the stars. This is why he said, “So will your descendants be. And Abraham,” the text says, “believed God.” What exactly did he believe? Prefiguratively he believed that Christ through the incarnation would become his heir. In order that you may know that this was what he believed, the Lord says, “Abraham saw my day and rejoiced. For this reason “he reckoned it to him as righteousness,” because he did not seek the rational explanation but believed with great promptness of spirit.<sup>19</sup>

### **Genesis 15:7**

**And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.**

**Torah Class:** Now that the matter of Abraham’s heir has been addressed.....or at least Abraham thinks it has.....God brings up the matter of the Promised Land in verse 7. And, He says, “look Avram, I brought you from Ur to this place to give it to you.” In other words, don’t you get it yet? What do you think this has all been about? You’re going to get the land...nothing can prevent it..... because I’ve decided it.<sup>20</sup>

### **Genesis 15:8**

**And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?**

**[Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it]** Question 17. Next, Genesis 16:8. A natural question (cp. Judges 6:17; 1 Kings 13:3-5; 2 Kings 20:8).

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<sup>18</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>19</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>20</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

**Torah Class:** Then, Abraham asks in V8 a curious question that smacks of the highest skepticism if not downright distrust: “How am I to know I will possess the land?” I say curious, because God had, at an earlier time, already promised the land to Abraham; did Abraham not believe Yahweh? Did he just not get it? The fact is Abraham’s faith was wavering a bit. How many times do we in our Spirits KNOW that God has spoken to us, but time goes by, and there is no further visible, tangible, confirmation of the subject of that conversation? So, we begin to wonder, is my imagination just working overtime, or did God REALLY speak to me? We’ve all been there, and we will be again.

Now, let’s get practical. The fact is, that by all custom and tradition of humans in Abraham’s era, promises that were real had structure. That shouldn’t be surprising to us; our promises today also have structure. ....it’s called a contract. In our society there is precious little we will accept as legitimate or trustworthy from another person, unless it is put to paper, made to fit the laws of our civil code, and then signed by all involved parties; that’s just how we do it. Nobody questions why. It was the same in Avram’s day; there was a procedure when a promise was made, and that procedure had not yet been carried out in God’s promise to Avram.

We may not realize it, but we perfectly well expect to deal with God in our cultural terms. What good is it to give us Americans a proof or a word in a form that only a Japanese person would recognize for what it is; it would mean nothing to us. The same thing goes in reverse; a person living in the Sudan is going to need a proof or a word from God that he understands. ....something that is normal and customary in his Sudanese society. .... not something that may seem normal for us Americans. Avram was waiting for the promise of God to be put into a structure that he recognized as valid.

God is merciful. So, what happens next is that a VISIBLE form of a covenant making procedure. ....done within the cultural norms for the time. .... is performed for Abraham. I say visible, because Abraham could actually see it with his own eyes, and it was recognizable for what it was. And, I also say visible, because when God speaks and makes a promise, it already is a covenant far superior to anything that can be written down or sealed via a ritual. The fabric of space and time is altered when God makes a covenant; the entire Universe is re-shaped and focused around that covenant. That is not allegory or poem; it is the absolute reality of the situation. There doesn’t have to be some human procedure performed in order for His promise to become a legal covenant; Yahweh did this to give Abraham peace about it.

So, God in His graciousness lowered Himself and performed the standard human covenant ritual as a sign to Abraham of the validity of those promises of land and blessing, of a son and descendants.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

## **Genesis 15:9**

**And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.**

Heifer: goat, lamb; 3 years old. (Covenant basis by dividing animal, cf. Jer 34:18, 19.) Compare the Mosaic offerings (Leviticus 1:3,10,14; Leviticus 3:1,7,12; Leviticus 4:14,23,28,32; Leviticus 5:6-7).

### **The Terms of the Covenant**

- Declared eternal and unconditional.
- Re-confirmed by an oath (Gen 22:15-18).
- Confirmed to Isaac and to Jacob: Gen 26:2-5 (despite their acts of disobedience).
- NT declares it immutable (Heb 6:13-18).

**Nachmanides:** Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explained the word *meshulesheth* (heifer) as meaning three years old. But Onkelos said “three” This is indeed correct since a three-year old cow is no longer called *eglah* (heifer), just as we have learned in a Mishnah: “But the Sages say that an *eglah* (heifer) is two years old; a *parah* (cow) is three years old.” The allusion here is to the three sacrifices which his seed will bring from them before Him: the Whole-offering, the Sin-offering and the Peace-offering. And as for the Guilt-offering, that is like the Sin-offering, the difference between them being merely in the name.<sup>22</sup>

## **Genesis 15:10**

**And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.**

The covenant of blood is one of three kinds of legal covenants in the Bible. The others are the covenant of salt (Leviticus 2:11-16; 2 Chron. 13:5) and the covenant of a sandal (Ruth 4:7-8).

**Torah Class:** In V9 & 10, we see a typical covenant ceremony performed; and it revolves around the use of animals as agents for the promise; these animals.....CLEAN animals..... are killed, cut into pieces, and separated into two groups (remember, the Hebrew word for covenant, B’rit, means cutting or dividing).

Now, I want to be careful in my terminology, here; and I’d like you to notice that this covenant ceremony was NOT a sacrifice. The animals were not “sacrificed” in the strict sense of the word. There was no altar; there was no burning up of the animals. This was *not* a presentation of a gift, or the seeking of acceptance, or a plea for atonement to God, by Abraham. Rather, this is God’s gift to man. This is God raising His right hand and swearing upon Himself to be true to His oath. This is a 100% God action; Abraham was simply the recipient of the promise. God promises a national identity to a people who didn’t even yet exist.....a people who at first would be called Hebrew, and then

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<sup>22</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

eventually Israel. Ancient records of various Middle and Far Eastern peoples are full of covenant ceremonies essentially like the one we are witness to in these passages; but, nowhere, ever, is there record or even a tradition of a god promising a land, and a title that is irrevocable as long as time exists.<sup>23</sup>

### **Genesis 15:11**

**And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.**

### **Genesis 15:12**

**And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.**

**[deep sleep fell upon Abram]** This isolated Abraham's mind and brought him into a wholly yielded state. God alone was seen and heard, making the Abrahamic covenant vivid and indelibly real.

God passes through sacrifice *alone*: unilateral, unconditional. Israel not abandoned. Usually covenants were confirmed by both parties. This implied that each accepted obligations related to carrying out the intentions the covenant expressed. How significant Abram's deep sleep becomes. God alone passed between the parts of the sacrificed beasts. Abram has no part in making the covenant, so nothing Abram does can cause it to be canceled. You and I contributed nothing to our salvation: Jesus did it all. All we must do, all we can do, is put our trust in God. He will keep His covenant promise to save us for Jesus' sake.

**Torah Class:** Suddenly, in verse 11, birds of prey appear and try to escape with the carcasses of the dead animals. Abraham drives them away. What is the meaning of these few words about these birds? Birds of prey...really, we're talking about vultures, scavenger birds..... are symbolic of death and evil: this was Satan trying to disrupt and stop the covenant because he knew well what it was going to lead to. How often we are warned in the Scriptures that when God promises us good things, Satan will come and try to steal it away. Whether it be to steal the thing itself, or our faith and trust in God's promise, or just our Shalom, Satan wants you to have what he has to offer you, not what God has already given to you. As those birds swooped down, Abraham could have simply sat there and thought, "well, easy come easy go", and not fought the evil. Or, more in tune with the modern Church attitude, he could have been completely passive, deciding, "Well, if God wants the promise to go forth, HE will have to do battle with that vulture, the Devil". Wrong. We are Yahweh's warriors on earth. We are going to have to get our hands dirty, and put ourselves at risk. Prayer does NOT replace action; prayer prepares us for action. Avram driving those birds away is the Torah equivalent to James' famous N.T. saying: "resist the devil, and he will flee from you".

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<sup>23</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

God now recites an oath, always central to the covenant making protocol. But, before He does, a deep sleep comes upon Abraham. This does not mean that Abraham fell asleep because he got tired; we see several O.T. and N.T. equivalents to this when it speaks of “visions within dreams”, or even of “being taken in the spirit”. Even more, it says a great sense of dread overcame Abraham in his sleep; it was a “dark dread” the Bible says. Let’s turn to our Hebrew for a minute: the word used here, in Hebrew, for “dark dread” is chashekah. This word ought to sound familiar to us, for its root is the word choshek. And, choshek simply means darkness; but as we learned back in Genesis 1, this doesn’t mean nighttime. It is a spiritual term.....it means dread, evil, death, blindness....so chashekah is a negative term and it indicates that its source is from the spirit world.<sup>24</sup>

### **Genesis 15:13**

**And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;**

**[in the land that is not theirs]** The book of Exodus tells the story of the enslavement and miraculous deliverance of Abram’s descendants. Exodus 1-2; Psalm 105:13-43; Acts 7:6.

**[four hundred years]** Four hundred years dates from Isaac's confirmation as Abraham's heir and seed. He had no official seed until then (Acts 7:6).

**Didymus The Blind; No Discrepancy Between Genesis and Exodus:** This word anticipates the sojourn of the people in Egypt, for they were to sojourn as it were in a land not their own. They would be reduced to slavery by the Pharaoh and mistreated in many ways by him and by the Egyptians. There is no discrepancy between what is said here and what is written in Exodus. There it is said, “After 430 years, the army of the Lord left the land of Egypt.” Here: “After four hundred years.” It should be noted that it is not said that they left when four hundred years were completed but rather after four hundred years, which leaves room for the thirty years.<sup>25</sup>

### **Genesis 15:14**

**And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.**

**[will I judge]** This refers to the plagues of Exodus 7-14.

**[great substance]** See Exodus 12:35-36.

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<sup>24</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>25</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

## The Sojourn of Abraham's Seed

The actual sojourn of Abraham's descendants in Egypt was only 215 years. There were other countries which made up the land of sojourn (Genesis 12:1-20; Genesis 13:1-18; Genesis 15:13-14; Genesis 20:1-18; Genesis 21:22-34; Genesis 23:4; Genesis 26:3-35; Genesis 28:10; Genesis 29:1; Genesis 31:13-55; Genesis 35:6; Genesis 37:1; Genesis 46:1-7; Genesis 47:27; Genesis 50:22-26 ; Exodus 1-12; Hebrews 11:8-10). The 400 years of Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6 date back to the time when Isaac was weaned and confirmed as the heir, and Ishmael was cast out (Genesis 21:12; Galatians 4:30). At that time Isaac was 5 years old.

Other scriptures speak of the period as 430 years (Exodus 12:40; Galatians 3:14-17), and that reckoning takes in the 5 years of Isaac's life and 25 years prior to his birth—when Abraham went into Canaan to sojourn (see \*Genesis 47:9, note). The following outline shows how the 430 years are accounted for:

How Years Were Reckoned	Years
1.From the 75th year of Abraham to the birth of Isaac (Genesis 12:4; Genesis 21:5)	25
2.From Isaac's birth to that of Jacob (Genesis 25:26)	60
3.From Jacob's birth to his death (Genesis 47:28)	147
4.From Jacob's death to that of Joseph (Genesis 37:2; Genesis 41:46; Genesis 47:28; Genesis 50:22)	54
5.From Joseph's death to the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:40; Galatians 3:14-17)	144
TOTAL:	430

**Torah Class:** And, what follows helps us to understand the disturbing nature of what Abraham saw. What Yahweh says, in V13, scares the pants off of Abraham: God tells him that Abraham's descendants are going to become slaves in a foreign land, and they will be in that foreign land for 4 centuries. That they will be oppressed; oppressed is not a throw in word. Slaves to Abraham were simply purchased family members. He did not oppress his slaves. But, Avram's offspring WERE going to be subjugated and they WERE going to be badly treated. And, it was NOT going to be here in Canaan where they'd be enslaved.....because Yahweh says it will be in“ a land not their own”.

Then God says He will punish that foreign land, and Abraham's descendants will be released. Even that they will go with great wealth. Of course, with the benefit of hindsight, we now know that Egypt would be that foreign place, and that a succession of Pharaohs will be the oppressors; we even know that indeed the Israelites DID leave with much of Egypt's wealth. Yahweh also tells Abraham that he will live to a ripe old age,

and that his clan is soon going to leave this place, not to return until the 4<sup>th</sup> generation from Abraham.<sup>26</sup>

**Sparks of Chasidus: “They will leave with substantial wealth”** The above verse indicates that amassing wealth was one of the purposes of Egyptian exile. For this to be achieved, it was necessary for *Yosef* to become the ruler of Egypt and gather wealth from all the other lands.

According to Chasidic teachings, “sparks of holiness” are trapped within the physical world and are released when a Jew takes the object and uses it to perform a mitzvah. Therefore, one of the inner purposes of exile is for the Jew to utilize physical objects in the service of God.

Thus, someone who truly desires to cleave to God needs to involve himself in the physical performance of mitzvos, for this is also the only way he can fulfill his soul’s mission.<sup>27</sup>

### **Genesis 15:15**

**And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.**

**[to thy fathers]** A way of speaking about death; the phrase may include the promise of life after death as well (see 25:8; 35:29; 49:33; see also 1 Sam. 12:23).

**[old age]** Abraham lived 175 years (Genesis 25:7).

### **Genesis 15:16**

**But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.**

Return in the fourth generation (Ex 6:16-26).

The 17<sup>th</sup> prophecy in Genesis (Genesis 15:13-16). Next, prophecy is in Genesis 15:18. This predicts that Abraham’s seed would be sojourners for four hundred years more; that Egypt would be punished for enslaving Israel; that Israel would become rich; that Abraham would live long; and that his seed would come out of Egypt in the fourth generation to defeat the Amorites. All of the prophecy was fulfilled in the exodus and settlement of Canaan under Moses and Joshua (Exodus 7:1-14:31; Numbers 21:21-25; Joshua 12).

**[fourth generation]** Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses (1 Chron. 6:1-3).

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<sup>26</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>27</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

**[the iniquity of the Amorites]** This refers to the sins of the Canaanites who were to be destroyed.

### **Thirteen Sins of the Canaanites**

1. Homosexuality (Genesis 13:13; Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18:22-30; Leviticus 20:13)
2. Incest (Leviticus 18:6-30; Leviticus 20:12-23)
3. Inordinate affection (Leviticus 18:19-30; Leviticus 20:18-23)
4. Adultery (Leviticus 18:20-30; Leviticus 20:10-23)
5. Idolatry (Leviticus 18:21-30; Leviticus 20:2-5; Deut. 12)
6. Profanity (Leviticus 18:21-30)
7. Bestiality (Leviticus 18:23-30; Leviticus 20:15-23)
8. Witchcraft (Leviticus 20:6,23; Deut. 18:9-14)
9. Whoredom (Leviticus 20:1-23)
10. Dishonor to parents (Leviticus 20:9-23)
11. Murder (Deut. 12:31; Deut. 18:9-10)
12. Stealing (Leviticus 19:11-13 compared with Leviticus 20:23)
13. Lying (Leviticus 19:11-16 compared with Leviticus 20:23)

**Torah Class:** Let's look at verses 15 and 16 a little closer. As I have taught you on a few occasions, there was no concept of "dying and going to heaven" in Abraham's era; in fact, that concept is nowhere to be found in all the O.T. Rather, in general, life ended at the grave, the typical Hebrew word being Sheol. What existed after bodily death is very hazy in the O.T., and the number of references to death, and the varied descriptions of what death amounted to makes it clear that, at least for the Hebrews, they had NO clear doctrine of an afterlife. Particularly in the era of the Patriarchs, and therefore the era of the Torah, perhaps the most common term used is "going to your fathers in peace", or some variation of that theme. What, exactly, did that mean? It's not explained, and I can find no ancient source that gives me any confidence that the people of that day knew what it meant beyond a VERY general sense, either. It seems to me that "going to your fathers in peace" was but a gentler and less onerous way of talking about death. Today, we tend to speak of someone beloved who has died as having "passed", or "passed away". I underline BELOVED.....because when we're speaking of a wicked person, we tend not to use the words "passed or passed away". I guarantee you, when that day comes that Saddam Hussein is likely executed, it won't be reported that he "passed away". Yet, in the most literal sense of those words, passed or passing, there is not much we can take as to exactly what "passing" entails.

In general, living to a ripe old age and then going to meet your fathers in peace was the best anyone hoped for in the Bible era. It simply indicated that they had lived out a full life span, and that they died more or less naturally of old age. This, as opposed to being cut-off, meaning they died early, or were murdered, or executed for a crime, or it was determined that your death was a judgment from the Lord for a transgression

Did they actually expect to meet their ancestors in some form or another when they died? I think in a vague way, perhaps. It was a hope. It was about the best outcome one could expect from the always-unwelcome end of life. So, in our story, Abraham was essentially promised that he would live out a very full lifespan, and that his death would

be of old age, and that he would die in peace with God, not from judgment or wrath or violence at the hands of another.

We're going to come back in a few minutes to some other important fundamentals concerning generations and the identity of "the Amorites", but I'd rather finish the covenant making process to maintain some continuity.<sup>28</sup>

**Didymus the Blind; God Inflicts Even Chastisements with Measure and In Time:**

After having said this of Abraham himself, God speaks of the children who will come from him: "In the fourth generation they shall come back here," meaning the generation that would return to the land of inheritance. This is why he says that the return would take place after four hundred years, "because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" – iniquity for which they will suffer ruin, so that their condemnation will allow the descendants of Abraham to occupy their land. For God inflicts even chastisements with measure and in time, using patience until the time of retribution has arrived. There is a similar and edifying saying in the Gospel: "Then Jesus began to upbraid the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." To which one might object: Why ten were the miracles not done in Tyre and Sidon, because they would have repented, but were performed instead in places where the people did not repent? We would respond that the Son of God who acted in this way is Wisdom. As he knew the hidden things, he knew that these people would not have been authentically repentant, even while doing penance and this is why the miracles did not take place among them. And one could appropriately say about these people: It was better for them not to have known the truth than, having once known it to return to their former errors. Thus he did not do works in Tyre and Sidon, because their repentance would be fragile. The patience and goodness of the judge are shown, then, in the fact that he waits until the sins of the Amorites have reached their full measure. It is only after reproaches, exhortations and everything that can provoke repentance that God inflicts chastisements. The same was true in the case of Pharaoh: often reprimanded and having obtained many reprieves, through his hardness of heart he brought upon himself the final judgment as well.<sup>29</sup>

**Ambrose; In the Fourth Generation They Shall Return:** The history of the Jews, who went down into Egypt and came out from Egypt, seems to accord with this. The years they spent there were 430, but not all of them lived a hundred years and more, as did Moses and Joshua, so that the time of the fourth generation would be appropriate in this context.<sup>30</sup>

**Nachmanides:** The correct interpretation appears to be that the fourth generation refers to the Amorite whose sin will then become full, for from the day of the decree He prolonged the time of the Amorite, as He visits iniquity upon the third and fourth

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<sup>28</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>29</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>30</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

generation. Had the Amorites repented of their iniquities He would not have utterly destroyed them. Rather, they would have been a levy of bondservants, or they might have gone elsewhere.<sup>31</sup>

### **Genesis 15:17**

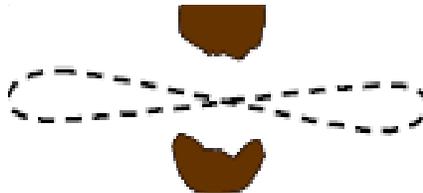
**And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.**

**[burning lamp]** A flaming torch or a burning lamp was an emblem of God's presence. In the East it was a custom to light a torch when making a covenant or in celebration of a marriage, to symbolize the fire of destruction if the agreement was broken (cp. Matthew 25:1-13). “a burning...”: Heb. “a lamp of fire.”

### **Unconditional Covenant: Genesis 15**

A divinely ordered ritual: *barath*, “To cut a covenant.” This is similar the military term “cut orders”. (Participants would divide a sacrifice, and together, in a figure “8,” would repeat the terms of the covenant. Adam is in a “deep sleep.” Not a participant. Here God goes it alone.)

As in the case in Jeremiah 34:18, where a covenant ritual is represented by passage between the severed body of a sacrificial animal, here Abram is given the “sign” of the covenant promise for which he asked. Each “three-year old” animal (calf, goat, ram, dove, pigeon, the same animals featured in the sacrificial system described in Leviticus) is cut in half, although the body sections of the birds are not separated. Second-millennium Hittite texts use a similar procedure for purification, while some first-millennium Aramaic treaties use such a ritual for placing a curse on any violation of the treaty. Texts from Mari and Alalakh feature the killing of animals as part of the ceremony of making a treaty. Walking through this sacrificial pathway could be seen as a symbolic action enacting both the covenant’s promise of land and a curse on the one who violates the promise, though interpreters have wondered what significance a self-curse could possibly have for God. Abram’s driving away the birds of prey further symbolizes the future protection from their enemies when they take possession of the land.



**[smoking furnace, and a burning lamp]** The furnace or firepot is made of earthenware and could be of various sizes. It functioned as an oven principally for baking, including the baking of grain offerings (Leviticus 2:4). The burning lamp or torch could certainly

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<sup>31</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

be used to provide light, but it is also used in military contexts or to speak of God's judgment (Zech. 12:6). Mesopotamian rituals of this period usually featured a sacred torch and censer in the initiation of rites, particularly nocturnal rites of purification. Purification would be accomplished by the torch and censer being moved alongside of someone or something. While in Mesopotamia the torch and oven represented particular deities, here they represent Yahweh, perhaps as the purifier. This would be one of many instances where the Lord used familiar concepts and motifs to reveal himself.

**Torah Class:** Next, the most important part of this covenant ceremony takes place: in V17, the makers of the covenant pass, as is custom, between the separated animal pieces. But, wait; what actually passes between the animal pieces is a smoking fire pot and flaming torch. Smoke and fire usually represents the presence of God in the Bible. God walked between the pieces signifying His agreement and word to keep the terms of the covenant. Notice: Abraham did NOT walk between the pieces. Why? Because this was a unilateral covenant; this was not a two-way deal. This was entirely on God. God made promises and had obligations..... Abraham did NOT! Everything promised from this covenant was up to God to make happen.<sup>32</sup>

**Didymus the Blind; Burning and Illumination:** What is suggested here is perhaps something like this, as the law contains rewards and punishments, it was given in the midst of fire to indicate that it brings burning to some and illumination to others. In fact, fire has a twofold power: it illuminates, and at the same time it burns. The gift of the law, then, burns those who abandon it and enlightens those who observe it.<sup>33</sup>

**Nelson:** The deep sleep came on Abram when the **sun** was setting (v. 12). Now in heavy darkness, he saw supernatural light. **a smoking oven and a burning torch:** These symbols represented the glory of the Lord to Abram. Smoke and fire, with clouds and darkness, often precede God's acts of judgment (see Ex. 19:16–20; Ps. 97:2–6; Isa. 6:1–5; Joel 2:2, 3; Zeph. 1:14–16). This oven and torch imagery may indicate the impending judgment on Canaan—the promise that God's word to Abram will be kept. **between those pieces:** This last element has profound implications. In solemn agreements between equals (parity treaties), both parties would pass between the bloody pieces of slain animals and birds. The symbol would be evident to all: “May I become like this if I do not keep my part of the deal.” But Abram was not to walk this grisly pathway. Only God made that journey in the symbols of smoke and fire. The fulfillment of the promise of God to Abram, the Abrahamic covenant, is as sure as is the ongoing life of the Lord!<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>33</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>34</sup> The Nelson Study Bible, notes

## **Genesis 15:18**

**In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:**

This passage may hold an interesting code. In October of 1985 Yitzhak Rabine in a public speech said that Israel could not make its claim to the land from the Torah. The Torah reading for November 4<sup>th</sup> 1985 was in part this verse. In the original Hebrew language there were no spaces between the words and those spaces had to be implied by the reader. However if you go to the first implied space and move the letter one space to the right and continue to do that at every space you get a new sentence that reads “Evil Evil fire into Rabine God decrees”. This was the day Yitzhak Rabine was shot twice and died. A very interesting code.

**[river of Egypt]** The usual designation of Israel’s southwestern border is the “brook [wadi] of Egypt,” identified with Wadi el `Arish in the northeastern Sinai (Numbers 34:5). It is unlikely that it refers to the Nile River. Another possibility is that it refers to the easternmost delta tributary that emptied into Lake Sirbonis.

The 18th prophecy in Genesis (Genesis 15:18-21). Next, prophecy is in Genesis 16:10. The third prophecy of Abraham's seed possessing Canaan. In the process of eternal fulfillment.

**[Unto thy seed have I given this land]** It was never fully occupied, even in the prosperous reigns of David and Solomon. It will be fully occupied by Israel in the Millennium (Ezekiel 47:13-48:29).

**15:18-21** The boundaries of the Promised Land are now given for the first time. This promise has not yet been fulfilled but will be when Christ returns. See 17:8, note; Josh. 21:43-45, note; and 1 Kings 4:21, note. *the river of Egypt*. I.e., the Nile. Some understand this to refer to the Wadi el-Arish (E of the Nile), which is also called “the river of Egypt.” However, the word for *river* used here means “a large river.” A different word meaning “a stream” is used for a wadi, which does not always have water in it.<sup>35</sup>

**Why did god say, “I have given this land to your descendants,” in the past tense?**

**Rashi:** Because a statement from God is considered as if it has already happened.

**Midrash:** God’s speech has the power of action, as the verse states, “I have given this land,” it does not state, “I will give this land,” but rather, “I have given this land”.

**Jerusalem Talmud:** Rabbi Shmuel Bar Nachman said, “It does not say here, “I will give”, but rather, “I have given,” suggesting that “I have already given it”

**Talmud:** The Land of Israel already belonged to the Jewish people before they entered. It is an inheritance from our patriarchs.

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<sup>35</sup> Ryrie Study Bible, Study Notes, Moody Press, Charles Ryrie

**Ohr HaChayim:** Earlier, God told Abraham, “Get up and walk through the land, across its length and its breadth, for I am going to give it to you”. Through this procedure, Abraham made a legal acquisition of the land of Israel. Consequently, God now told him “I have given this land to your descendants,” in the past tense, because Abraham had already acquired the land legally.<sup>36</sup>

### **Genesis 15:19**

**The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites,**

### **Genesis 15:20**

**And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims,**

[**Hittites**] Most Hittites lived in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), but there were some Hittites in Canaan (see ch. 23).

### **Genesis 15:21**

**And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.**

[**Canaanites**] The term **Canaanite** could be used broadly to include all the people groups in Canaan (see 12:6), or more narrowly, as here, to indicate a particular people group (see 10:15–20).

**occupants of Canaan** This is the longest (including ten groups) of seventeen such lists of Canaan’s pre-Israelite peoples (see Deut. 7:1; Joshua 3:10; 1 Kings 9:20). Each of these lists, which usually comprise six or seven names, ends with the Jebusites (perhaps tied to David’s conquest of Jerusalem), but the list in Genesis 15 is the only one to exclude the Hivites. For the Hittites, Perizzites, Amorites, Canaanites and Jebusites, see the comments on Exodus 3:7-10 and Numbers 13. The Kenites are often associated with the Midianites and appear as a seminomadic people from the Sinai and Negev region. The name suggests that they were metalworkers, tinkers or smiths. The Kenizzites, Kadmonites and Girgashites are little known, though the latter is also attested in the Ugaritic texts. The Rephaim are considered to be Anakites in Deut. 2:11, who in turn appear as giants in Numbers 13:33. Aside from these associations, nothing is known of this ethnic group.

The vast extent of the land promised to Abraham—*from the river of Egypt to ... the river Euphrates* (15:18-21)—would include the territory of Israel’s two great oppressors: the Egyptians and the Babylonians. Historically, Israel never controlled the expanse from the Nile to what is modern Iraq or dominated the peoples here listed.

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<sup>36</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

The boundaries of the Promised Land are now given for the first time. This promise has not yet been fulfilled but will be when Christ returns. See 17:8, note; Josh. 21:43-45, note; and 1 Kings 4:21.

**Torah Class:** In V18-20, as Yahweh is amidst the separated piles of animal flesh, God recites the terms of the covenant, and it includes the calling out of the boundaries of the land He is giving to Abraham and to his descendants for all time. While the exact location of these boundaries can be disputed to a small degree, the fact is that they extend well beyond what Israel, Abraham's descendants, have ever occupied to this day. Israel was at its peak territorial size during the time of Kings David and Solomon, and their territory was significantly larger than Israel is today; but still it didn't ever reach the proportions enumerated in this passage. Sometime, in the near future, Israel will be even larger than it ever has been.

Let me be very clear; for those who want to say that either the Bible doesn't SAY just what land mass constitutes "the promised land", or that this covenant has ended, just read this covenant. It is quite literal; to the south, the boundary is the "river of Egypt". This is NOT the Nile. Rather it is identified with the Wadi el-'Arish, down in the Sinai. After identifying the southern border, the northern border is said to be "the great river". The great river has long been an epithet for the Euphrates River that flows to this day from modern day Syria into Iraq. The eastern and western boundaries are a little less explicit, as it refers to the location by means of the areas certain tribes occupy. However, the western boundary is the Mediterranean Sea, because that is the end of the land mass of Canaan, and the location of these tribes is fairly well attested to as including land to the east of the Jordan River, on into the current Kingdom of Jordan, and probably a minor part of westernmost Saudi Arabia.<sup>37</sup>

**10 nations**, summarized as

3 in Ex 23:28;

6 in Ex 3:17;

7 in the conquest of Joshua 24:11.

### **Abrahamic Covenant**

- Commitment of the Land to his descendants "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates";
- Afflicted in Egypt: 400 years ( Acts 7:6); in Egypt 430 years (Ex 12:40);
- But will return with great possession.

"West Bank?" Which river?! Satan then has four centuries to lay down a "mine field:" The *Nephilim (Rephaim)* in the land! In Egypt: 430 years, afflicted 400 years. Return in the fourth generation (Ex 6:16-26).

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<sup>37</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

### Three Major Promises

- God's Covenant with Abraham;
  - In his seed all nations shall be blessed.
- God's Covenant with the Nation Israel;
  - If they faithfully served Him they'd prosper.
  - If they forsook Him they would be destroyed.
- God's Covenant with David;
  - His family would produce the Messiah who would reign over God's people forever .

*(Rom 8:29-30) For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

Basic Paradigm (Romans 8:30): Predestined. Called. Justified. Glorified.

**Torah Class:** Now, before we move to chapter 16, we need to face the difficulties associated with the definition of the term “generation” and with the length of time Israel would be in Egypt.

First, the Hebrew word for generation is *dor*. And, despite what some might think, that term is not all that concrete. For although it certainly CAN mean how we think of a generation...meaning the span of time between the birth of children and the birth of their parents.....it can also refer to a complete life span. It can even refer to all people living during a certain event. Later in Numbers, the word *dor* will be used to refer to all those who left Egypt on the Exodus. We also find that the traditional life span of people varies a great deal. So, the arguments as to “how long” a biblical generation is, is not likely to ever be answered, because it is a general and not a specific term. So, as to the answer of what a “generation” means in the Bible, we must say that it means different things at different times and it carries a very fluid and indeterminate meaning.

The next item I want to approach is the length of time Israel will spend in Egypt. Honest scholarship reveals that we cannot easily say 4 centuries and just leave it at that. Here, in Genesis 15, the time is referred to as 4 generations....which leads some to say that in Abraham's day, a generation was a length of time equaling about 100 years. Yet, Exodus 12:40 says the time in Egypt was 430 years. Further, we know that there was a time, before the death of Joseph, that Israel was an honored guest of Egypt, and not under subjugation. But, there is no solid information on the time that elapsed between the death of Joseph and the beginning of Israel's oppression.

Generally speaking, rabbinical tradition is that the 400-year period begins with the birth of Isaac, and that the 430-year figure begins with the day this covenant with Abraham was made official. We are told in the Bible that 190 years passed from the birth of Isaac until Jacob took his small family down to Egypt. So, if the Rabbis are right, then Israel was not in Egypt 400 years, but only 210 (190 + 210 = 400). To explain this

problem they say that being in a foreign land INCLUDED some of the time spent in Canaan BEFORE moving to Egypt. And, if we look in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the O.T.), or the Samaritan version of the Torah, we'll find that those manuscripts specifically state that the period of 430 years included the time in Canaan.

Obviously we have a problem with ascertaining with certainty the actual amount of time Israel spent in Egypt; but remember there is NO disagreement that they indeed did go to Egypt, were there a VERY long time, and were subjugated and oppressed.

This is why I talked last week about redaction.....editing. The major time problems occur when the Torah is translated into foreign languages, which is itself a redaction. And, yet, we also know that until the invention of the printing press in the 1400's AD, all copying of books, and therefore Bibles, was done by hand. So, without doubt, some type of numerical error was introduced either through innocent mistake, or...more likely in my opinion...some misguided soul that attempted to reconcile what seemed to him to be chronological conflicts. And, once that happens, it's hard to recover the original until an earlier version is found.

I will tell you in advance that because of little other alternative, I go with the teaching that Israel was 400 years in Egypt until something can prove it incorrect.

Finally, what does that statement at the end of verse 16 mean? The one that says "and they shall return here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete". First, the Amorites became synonymous with the term Canaanites. The Amorite cultural became the dominant culture in the land of Canaan, and so the general term for those folks living in Canaan became, for a time, Amorites.

The part about the iniquity of the Amorites not being complete simply means that the timing of Israel coming back to take the land of Canaan has much to do with when the residents of Canaan have finally crossed over some line of evil that only God knows.....their wicked ways had become too much..... and Yahweh was then ready to have them driven out of their land in divine judgment for that wickedness, and displaced by Israel. This is an interesting clue about how Yahweh operates. In some intricate way that is beyond humans to fathom, God uses the acts of the wicked to achieve His purposes, even to the ultimate benefit of His people. Further, this also indicates God's absolute foreknowledge of all things. He KNOWS in advance when this wickedness of the Amorites will reach some critical mass; and at the same time He knows in advance when His people Israel will be ready to leave Egypt; and He knows in advance when the Pharaohs of Egypt will have oppressed His people too much, so that God will be justified in smiting them. And, then, all these things will converge at some precise moment in history such that the Exodus will occur, and then a little later Joshua will lead Israel to conquer the land of Canaan and make it theirs.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida