

Timeline of Truth – God Confirms His Covenant with Abram (Gen 15:7-21)

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| <p>¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I <i>am</i> your shield, your exceedingly great reward." ² But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house <i>is</i> Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" ⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD <i>came</i> to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." ⁵ Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶ And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The <u>Timing</u> of This Circumstance</i> 2. <i>God Communicates to Abram in a <u>Vision</u></i> 3. <i>God Addresses Abram's <u>Fear and Faith</u></i> 4. <i>Abram <u>Asks</u> a Direct Question</i> 5. <i>Abram <u>Answers</u> His Own Question</i> 6. <i>God <u>Corrects</u> Abram's Conclusions</i> 7. <i>God <u>Clarifies</u> His Promise to Abram</i> 8. <i>God <u>Expands</u> His Promise to Abram</i> 9. <i>Abram <u>Takes</u> God at His <u>Word</u></i> 10. <i>God <u>Transfers</u> Righteousness for <u>Belief</u></i> |
| <p>⁷ Then He said to him, "I <i>am</i> the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. God Reminds Abram of the Original <u>Promise</u> |
| <p>⁸ And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Abram Struggles with <u>Belief</u> |
| <p>⁹ So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹ And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. God Directs Abram to Prepare a <u>Ceremony</u> |
| <p>¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror <i>and</i> great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land <i>that is</i> not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. ¹⁴ "And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ "Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ "But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites <i>is</i> not yet complete."</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. God Reveals the Future |
| <p>¹⁷ And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. God Confirms His <u>One-Sided</u> Covenant <u>Unconditional</u> Ratification by God <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>God had made <u>promises</u> to Abram</i> • <i>First mention of a <u>covenant</u> with Abram (18)</i> • <i><u>Second</u> covenant mentioned in the Bible</i> • <i>First covenant was with <u>Noah</u> (6:18; 9:9-17)</i> |
| <p>¹⁸ On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates-- ¹⁹ "the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰ "the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹ "the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. God Further Details His <u>Land</u> Promise 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 <i>river</i> 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. ^(Charles Ryrie) |

He came down and **made** (lit, “cut”) a formal treaty (**a covenant**) **with Abram** (the Abrahamic Covenant). Since God could “swear” (confirm the covenant) by none greater, “He swore by Himself” (Heb. 6:13). In other words this was a unilateral covenant. So its promises are absolutely sure.¹

The interpretation of this mysterious rite is much discussed; see Hasel (*JSOT* 19 [1981] 61–78) for a comprehensive survey. Most modern commentators take their cue from v 18, “The LORD made [literally, cut] a covenant with Abram,” and from Jer 34:18, which speaks of the people passing between a dismembered calf. This act is then interpreted as an enacted curse. “May God make me like this animal, if I do not fulfill the demands of the covenant.” A curse like this is actually attested in one of the eighth-century treaties (*ANESTP*, 532). In Genesis, of course, it is God himself who walks between the pieces, and it is suggested that here God is invoking the curse on himself, if he fails to fulfill the promise.²

Then the glowing furnace moved, gliding down the aisle lined with the animal parts that glistened in the fire’s light. Surely an ecstasy gripped Abram’s soul! He had not been asked to join in the pageant—to pass with God between the pieces. It was God alone. This was an unconditional, unilateral covenant. God (with astounding condescension) was symbolizing that if he were to break his word, he would be sundered like the butchered animals. It was an acted-out curse, a divine self-imprecation guaranteeing that Abram’s descendants would get the land or God would die. And God cannot die.³

In this symbol, the passing of the Lord between the pieces meant something altogether different from the oath of the Lord by Himself in Gen. 22:16, or by His life in Deut. 32:40, or by His soul in Amos 6:8 and Jer. 51:14. It set before Abram the condescension of the Lord to his seed, in the fearful glory of His majesty as the judge of their foes. Hence the pieces were not consumed by the fire; for the transaction had reference not to a sacrifice, which God accepted, and in which the soul of the offerer was to ascend in the smoke to God, but to a covenant in which God came down to man. From the nature of this covenant, it followed, however, that God alone went through the pieces in a symbolical representation of Himself, and not Abram also. For although a covenant always establishes a reciprocal relation between two individuals, yet in that covenant which God concluded with a man, the man did not stand on an equality with God, but God established the relation of fellowship by His promise and His gracious condescension to the man, who was at first purely a recipient, and was only qualified and bound to fulfil the obligations consequent upon the covenant by the reception of gifts of grace.⁴

The term *flaming torch* in Hebrew means “a rising flame,” and this would keep the fire going in the oven. What the *Shechinah* Glory did was to pass *between these pieces*, meaning it passed by in between the two rows of animal pieces. Here was something normal and something abnormal. The normal procedure was for both persons making the covenant to walk between the pieces of the animal, rendering the terms of the covenant obligatory to both parties. This procedure also rendered the covenant conditional: If one party broke the terms and forfeited his life, it would exempt the other party from keeping his part of the covenant. Since the covenant was between God and Abram, it was normal here that God passed *between these pieces*. The previous abnormality was the fact that in place of one animal, there were five. Now there was a second differentiation. It was not God and Abram that walked between these pieces of the animals, but it was God alone Who passed between the pieces of the animals, which rendered the covenant unconditional. Abram’s lack of participation emphasizes the unconditionality of this particular covenant. So Abram did not become an active participant in the signing and sealing of the covenant as such; he was only the recipient of the covenant and the covenantal promises. It meant that no matter how often Abram failed (and he will fail in the next chapter), and no matter how often his seed, the Jewish people fail, the Abrahamic Covenant cannot be rendered null and void.⁵

Gal 3:17 ¹⁷ And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.

Heb 6:13-14 ¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, ¹⁴ saying, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.”

¹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Ge 15:17–21). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Wenham, G. J. (1998). *Vol. 1: Genesis 1–15*. Word Biblical Commentary (332). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

³ Hughes, R. K. (2004). *Genesis: Beginning and blessing*. Preaching the Word (234). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

⁴ Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Ge 15:17). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

⁵ Fruchtenbaum, A. G. (2008). *Ariel's Bible commentary: The book of Genesis* (1st ed.) (283–284). San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries.