

Introduction: God is the perfect Father. He knows each and every one of His children intimately; and, He works with tireless patience to teach them to surrender in faith to Him in order to love Him and each other. *** Those who fully trust Him will have His character formed in them. He gives them every good thing they need. He is patient with their sincere questions. His answers about their future include hardships and deliverance. Finally, He gives His children who live in obedient faith towards Him good gifts at His own expense. *** But, children who continue to live in selfish depravity will eventually run out of time, reaching a point of no return and loss. *** All of this is illustrated in today's story of Abram and The Lord Yahweh. Yahweh makes a covenant with Abram to give good land to his descendants. And, when He does this, He will expel the descendants of Noah's grandson Canaan who went deeper and deeper into depravity and iniquity until they would not, and could not, turn back to Him. *** We are ready to examine the details of this story. When we do we will find that:

Abram received the covenant from Yahweh in great darkness

Hinge: Five weeks ago we learned that Abram's faith in Yahweh's word to him was thought righteousness by Yahweh to Abram. This is the starting point of today's story. (*Verse 6*)

I. After Yahweh says He will give Abram land, He instructs Abram to covenant with Him. (*Verses 7-11*)

A. Abram asks covenant Lord how he can know his descendents will possess the land. (*Verses 7-8*)

1. He said, I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess and inherit. (*Verse 7*)

Call: Yahweh called Abram in Ur ('flame' – over 1,000 miles from Beersheba, 'well of the seven-fold oath'), but he stayed with his father in Haran ('mountaineer') half-way to Canaan ('lowland') until his father died. Then Yahweh renewed the call with a seven-fold word. (*Genesis 11:31-12:5*)

2. And then he said, Adonai (Lord) Yahweh how will I know that I will possess and inherit it? (*Verse 8*)

Question: The eternal, three-in-one God and Savior does not mind sincere questions coming from a heart of faith. He will answer the question, but first He instructs Abram to 'cut a covenant' with Him.

B. Abram cuts three animals in two and lays the halves across from each other. (*Verses 9-11*)

1. He commands Abram to take a three year old cow without a calf, a three year old female goat, a three year old ram, a turtledove and a pigeon. (*Verse 9*)

Birds: These are the same birds a poor woman was to present to Yahweh at the end of her days of purification after giving birth. (*Leviticus 12; Luke 2:22-24*)

2. He did this, cutting the animals in two and placing each half opposite the other. (*Verse 10*)

Obedience: Abram was not perfect, but he obeyed Yahweh often, and made the 'honor roll' of faith. (*Hebrews 11:8-12*)

Ancient covenants: To understand what God is doing here, we need to understand how covenants were made in the second millennium before Jesus came to earth. When a servant entered into a covenant with his master, he finalized it by walking between the halves of slaughtered animals. He was saying, if I fail to keep the covenant, may it be done to me as it was done to these animals. In other words, he is pledging his life to be faithful to the covenant with his master. In a covenant between equals, both walked between the pieces of the slaughtered animals. (See *Jeremiah 34:17-20*) This is a 'blood covenant'.

3. When birds of prey came upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. (*Verse 11*)

Zeal: Abram will let nothing get in the way of the covenant His God is making with him!

II. As the sun sets a deep sleep falls on Abram before Yahweh tells him what will happen to his family in the next four hundred years. (*Verses 12-16*)

A. After the deep sleep, behold, terror and great darkness; then, He tells Abram his descendants will be enslaved aliens. (*Verses 12-13*)

1. Then, when the sun went down a deep sleep fell on Abram; and behold, a horror, a deep darkness fell on him. (*Verse 12*)

Deep sleep: The sun went down before the covenant was finalized. Then God put Abram in a deep sleep. Behold! Terror fell on Abram.

Great darkness: It is paradoxical, and a great comfort, that even in great and terrifying darkness God is always faithful to keep His covenant and provide for people with obedient faith IN Him.

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2. He said to Abram, know with certainty your descendents will be aliens (strangers) in a land not theirs, and serve them and be afflicted four hundred years. (*Verse 13*)

Oppression: He now begins to answer Abram's question about the future. His offspring will suffer oppression as slaves in a far away land. This is a fixed part of God's plan.

B. And I am also judging the nation so they will come out with great possessions, and you will die in peace. (*Verses 14-16*)

1. And also, I am judging the land in which they serve as slaves; and, afterwards they will come out with a great wealth of possessions. (*Verse 14*)

Deliverance: Adonai (Lord) Yahweh has already provided for their future deliverance when they will take much out of Egypt with them. (*Exodus 12:31-36*)

2. And you, yourself, will go to your fathers in peace and will be buried in a good old age. (*Verse 15*)

Peace: We can be encouraged to know that if we live by faithful obedience to Jesus and The Father we will receive peace at the end of our life on earth.

3. And the fourth generation will return here because the iniquity of the Amorites ('sayers') is not yet full. (*Verse 16*)
Fairness: God is more than fair in that He never judges iniquity (perverted rebellion against Him) until there is no possibility of turning back to Him. The name for the people living in the land is 'speakers'. They were people who said what was right, but their un-righteous actions contradicted their words.

Receive Promised Land: The land would be theirs after four hundred years of oppressive slavery.

Yahweh fulfills His Covenant

III. Then God ratifies the covenant by pledging to die Himself should it be broken. (Verses 17-21)

- A. In thick darkness a smoking firepot and flaming torch pass between the pieces of the animals as Yahweh cuts the covenant to give land. (*Verses 17-18*)
1. In thick darkness, behold, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch passed between the pieces. (*Verse 17*)
GRACE: The sovereign God lives IN unapproachable Light. (*1 Timothy 6:14-16*) Jesus is The Light of the world. (*John 1:9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46*) With these two sources of visible light going between the animal pieces, God is showing Abram that He is graciously holding Himself responsible for the fulfilling of this covenant. Abram does nothing as he is immobilized and flat on his back. Going back to the promised possession of an inheritance, in order to obtain the inheritance, God's people must come to it, willing to face all opposition in the obtaining of it. But, God will defeat all opposition. We must all understand how God works in His children so they can work out the salvation they have graciously received from Him. (*Philippians 2:12-13*)
2. In that day, Yahweh 'cut' a covenant with Abram that his descendants have been given this land from the River of Egypt to the great Euphrates ('fruitful') River. (*Verse 18*)
God takes the oath on Himself: Covenants in those days were 'cut', not made. The term comes from the parties to the covenant cutting the animals in two and walking between the cut pieces to bind themselves at the penalty of death to keep the covenant. When Adonai (Lord) Yahweh walked between the pieces, He indicated He Himself is willing to die to insure that the covenant is kept. Understood in its historical context, this story is a beautiful foreshadowing of what Jesus did on The Cross to initiate The New Covenant.
GOSPEL: God gave Himself over to death so we do not have to die for our sins and rebellious iniquities. If we turn to Him in faith of what He has done in the death of Jesus, The Savior, our sins can be forgiven and we can be His adopted children, citizens in His growing Kingdom on earth. This is The New Covenant that began in the three hours of darkness that covered the whole earth at midday while Jesus died on The Cross. (*Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44*) So, we all have the same opportunity to receive Yahweh's gracious covenant that Abram had. This past year has shown us all the world is getting much darker, but this is the time God's Light gives salvation to humble, surrendered people desiring to live lives of faithful obedience to Him, just as Abram did.

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- B. The list of displaced Canaanite nations. (*Verses 19-21*)

Names: The ten names mean, respectively: smiths, hunters, easterners, terrors, village dwellers, giants, speakers, zealots, dwellers in clay soil, and threshers. Only one of these names carries a negative connotation. The bottom line is that all kinds of people may enter into God's gracious covenant. But, these people were ultimately excluded from God's grace because they refused to repent of their iniquity.

God's just patience: God will give these descendants four hundred years ('four generations' calculated by the age at which Abram became the father of the child of promise Isaac) from the time the Israelites will go down to Egypt to be kept alive through Joseph to repent of their iniquity. In reality, the people of Canaan were given over four hundred fifty years to repent. But they did not, and Yahweh fulfilled this covenant He cut concerning Abram's descendants around 1400 BC under Joshua.

Yahweh fulfills His Covenant

Conclusion: After He reckoned Abram's faith to be righteousness, Yahweh gave him a word of inheritance. Then, after Abram asked Him how he could know, Yahweh cut a covenant with Abram in great darkness. As Abram was flat on the ground, Yahweh's Light walked between the dead animals, symbolizing He would die to fulfill His covenant. Because of His great Father LOVE, Yahweh gives great grace to His children, even in deepest darkness.

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