

# The Counting of Righteousness and the Cutting of the Covenant

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[ 0 : 00 ] And I'd like you to open up your Bibles once again to the book of Genesis.

We are still in Genesis. We'll be in Genesis for a while. But this morning we are in Genesis chapter 15. And we're going to read all the way through Genesis chapter 15, beginning in verse 1 down through verse 21 this morning.

This is one of the most important chapters in the book of Genesis. In fact, we could say this is one of the most important chapters in the entire Pentateuch, in the entire Old Testament, and indeed in the entire Bible.

It sets the stage for everything that God is going to do after this point in time. And so what we read here in chapter 15, we need to make sure that we understand.

That we understand it not only in the context of the events as they are unfolding throughout the book of Genesis, but we understand it as it relates to what God is doing overall throughout history. And so this morning we're going to jump in in verse 1 and go to the end.

[ 1 : 09 ] And I'd like you all to stand with me as we read God's Word together. Moses writes, After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision.

Fear not, Abram. I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great. But Abram said, O Lord God, what will you give me?

For I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus. And Abram said, Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.

And behold, the word of the Lord came to him. This man shall not be your heir. Your very own son shall be your heir. And he brought him outside and said, Look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them.

Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. And he said to him, I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.

[ 2 : 15 ] But he said, O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it? He said to him, Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon.

And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. And when the birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, a dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve. And afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried in a good old age, and they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your offspring I give this land.

[ 3 : 30 ] From the river of Egypt to the great river of the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Parasites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

Father, we give you thanks for your word this morning. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You guys take a seat. We are told that we live in a culture, and we do see evidence of this around us, we live in a culture that does not value universal values.

We are told that we live in a culture that has as its only absolute truth, the truth that there is no absolute truth. And then closely related to those two things is this idea that we live in a culture that does not like, that does not prefer, and that will not accept large overarching stories that are meant to explain reality, that are meant to explain the purpose of existence and the way that things work. We call these kind of large overarching stories, philosophers and others call them metanarratives. They are these big explanatory stories that help you understand the world.

If you can look at the world through the lens of this particular story, then you can understand the world. And we are told that we live in a culture that does not value those things, that does not like those things, that rejects any story that would command everyone's attention and that would give meaning and purpose to all the events as they unfold around us.

[ 5 : 05 ] But while that's true on a certain level, I think at the same time though, we live in a culture, and not just a culture, but because we are human beings, we actually crave that kind of a story.

We want there, deep down inside, we want there to be some large story unfolding. We want there to be some real purpose for which we live and for which we were created.

And we want, because of that story, we want there to be universal values by which we can decide who's right and who's wrong and what should we do and what should we avoid.

We want there to be truths that stand regardless of what's happening around us. We need those things. Even when we are rejecting them, even when we are claiming that we don't want those things, we desperately need those things.

I think that's why some of the most successful movies that we have for the last several years, as we live in a culture that increasingly denies the existence of an overarching story that tells us about reality, we keep creating these movies and series of movies that present to us large worlds.

[ 6 : 14 ] And within those worlds, everyone has a place. People are good or they're bad. They're either the good guys or the bad guys. And they fit into a place. And we can watch those movies or those series of movies, whether it's the Marvel Avengers movies or it's the Star Wars movies or any of these movies that are these massive, massive franchises.

What we're seeing is a large overarching story that explains where everyone fits, what they're supposed to be doing, why they exist, who's right and who's wrong, and what standards you use to decide those things.

And we flock to those kinds of movies, I think, not necessarily because of the wonderful special effects, because there are plenty of movies with wonderful special effects that bomb at the box office. We flock to these because I think they offer us a false version of what we crave in reality. And that is an explanation for reality. A large, big, overarching story that tells us where we fit and what's happening. And that's what we have in the Scriptures.

We have for us the true story of reality. And there are times, there are places, chapters and passages and paragraphs and verses that we land upon as we're walking our way through the Scriptures that open up for us and show us and remind us that we are part of a much larger story.

[ 7 : 35 ] So that what we're seeing as we work our way through the book of Genesis is not merely the story of one particular individual, Abraham. Nor are we looking at the story, the history of one particular nation, the nation of Israel.

Yes, the focus is there for much of the Scriptures. But that's not merely what we're seeing. What we are really seeing is the story of all of humanity. We are seeing God's story and God's purposes for His creation and for His people as they unfold.

And there are some clear hints within this chapter that we are caught up in a much bigger story as we read about this guy named Abram who will later be known as Abraham.

One of the places where I find that to be clearest, that we're looking at something much larger, is right in the middle of this chapter. I want you to glance down to verse 12.

Excuse me, verse 13. Where God is speaking to Abram as he's fallen asleep. Listen to what he says. The Lord said to Abram, Know for certain that your offspring, that's your descendants, will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs.

[ 8 : 44 ] And they will be servants there and they will be afflicted for 400 years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

Well, if you know the story of the Old Testament, if you know the history of the people of Israel, you know that all of those things came to pass. You know that Abraham's descendants indeed wound up in the land of Egypt.

That's where they will be at the very end of the book of Genesis. And the book of Exodus picks up and begins to tell us the story of how God in fact brought them out of Egypt 400 years after the life of Abraham.

And in fact, He calls the Egyptians, He moved the Egyptians' hearts so that the Egyptians gave up many of their possessions, their silver and their gold and their other things, as the people of Israel exited the land of Egypt.

This is a glimpse into the larger story. Abram himself is given a glimpse right here in the middle of this chapter. And as we read it, we're reminded that we're caught up in a much larger story than just the life of Abraham.

[ 9 : 44 ] God has a plan for history that is only beginning to unfold here in Genesis chapter 15. There are many more stages and even beyond Israel's captivity in the land of Egypt and Israel's deliverance from the land of Egypt and their eventual settling in the land of Canaan.

Even beyond that, there's much more to the story. And as we're going to see as we get our way to the end of this sermon, there are clear indicators of where the story is ultimately headed.

But I want us to start back at the beginning of this chapter where we find a reminder that the events of chapter 15 are in fact connected in some sense, at least sequentially. They come after the events of chapter 14.

After these things, what things? Well, the events in chapter 14 where Abram goes all braveheart and he takes his men and he rescues Lot and he defeats the kings from the east and this magnificent story of Abram the warrior.

It's the only glimpse we get of Abram as a warrior. It's the first and only mention of warfare in the book of Genesis. But it's a spectacular story. It's an amazing event recorded for us from the life of Abram so that we can see that unlike the Abram we see in the second half of Genesis chapter 12, Abram at this point is bold and brave and powerful, which makes God's first words to him seem a bit strange.

[ 11 : 11 ] Coming off of this victory over these much more powerful kings and nations, God comes to him and says, Fear not, Abram. I am your shield.

What does he have to fear? What does Abram have to be afraid of? He's just won a marvelous victory. He's just done something incredible. And from whom does Abram need protection? Why does he need God to be his shield? It would appear as though Abram is quite capable of putting up his own shield when necessary and even chasing off the bad guys when he has to do it. So this seems a strange way for God to begin this conversation with Abram here in chapter 15.

There's nothing that surrounds Abram that he ought to be afraid of at this point.

Those closest to him are his allies. They're the ones who've entered into covenant with him. They're the ones that helped him pursue those eastern kings out of the land. And some of the city states, the city nations around them, well, they owe Abram.

[ 12 : 15 ] He just rescued them. Who does he have to be afraid of? And the only clear answer that we can come with is that Abram needs to fear the one who speaks to him.

We've defeated these kings. But as the Lord comes to him in a vision, the first thing that the Lord must say to him is don't be afraid. Find this repeatedly over and over throughout the scriptures. If the Lord speaks to someone, oftentimes he will begin with do not be afraid. Even when the Lord sends one of his angelic messengers, many times the first words of those angels are do not be afraid.

Because those who stand in the presence of God shine with such glory that it is frightening and shocking to those who see how much more so God himself when he comes to Abram in a dream. So he says, don't be afraid. Abram is no great warrior in the presence of God. He's not. He trembles. He's afraid. And God says, do not be afraid.

[ 13 : 12 ] And then perhaps even more shocking is that God says, I will be your shield. God will, in fact, as we will work our way through this chapter, God will, in fact, be the very one who shields Abram from the danger of his own presence.

But we're not quite there yet. First, Abram has a question. An important question. He says in verse 2, Lord God, what will you give me?

For I continue childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus. And then again, he emphasizes, behold, you've given me no offspring and a member of my household will be my heir. Abram has a legitimate question, I think. I don't think that we're seeing Abram question God in some sort of sinful way. I think he genuinely wants to know. He does not understand. He is now as many as perhaps ten years removed from God's promise to him in chapter 12. If you'll recall, back in chapter 12, God promised Abram that he would have descendants and have many descendants.

[14:17] Turn over to Genesis chapter 12 real quickly. I want you to be reminded of this. Chapter 12, verse 2. God says to Abram, I will make of you a great nation. That requires a lot of descendants.

And I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. He's going to bless him. He's going to come out from Abram and will come great nations. And then further down in verse 7, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to your offspring, your descendants, which he does not yet have, I will give this land.

And so God has promised to Abram offspring, descendants. He has promised that he would give him this land upon which he stands. We see again, if you move down to chapter 13, verse 14, the Lord said to Abram after Lot had separated from him, lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are northward and southward and eastward and westward for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.

I'm going to give this to your descendants. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. I mean, that's a pretty spectacular promise for a man who's 75 years old and whose wife is barren.

But Abram trusts in that promise. He went to the land. He's in the land. He's doing the things that he's supposed to be doing. But now here we arrive as many as perhaps 10 years later, chapter 16 at least, opens up 10 years later and we're probably right before the events of chapter 16.

[15:52] So we're as many as 10 years later and there's no evidence practically for Abram that he's going to have any children. He says, the only potential heir living in my entire household is Eliezer of Damascus who most likely is just a household servant.

There's no one here, Lord. I believe your promise, but it's not happening. I'm not seeing it come to pass. What's going to happen here?

And so God does indeed respond to him. We look in verse 4. Behold, the word of the Lord came to him. This man, Eliezer of Damascus, this man shall not be your heir.

Your very own son shall be your heir. And so God is very concrete and very explicit with the promise here. These won't be offspring by any sort of cultural convention in which you can name someone else as your descendant, as your son.

No. These will actually come from you. These will be your physical descendants, Abram. I promise you this. So God's being now very specific with Abram. Although we'll get to chapter 16 and perhaps God should have been more specific, but at this point it's more specificity than he's had.

[17:05] They're going to come from you, Abram. That's who they're going to be. Your physical offspring. I promise you. And they will be numerous, he goes on to tell them. Look toward heaven. Number the stars if you're able to number them.

So shall your offspring be. You're going to have these descendants, Abram. I promise you. The offspring will come through you.

And then we're told, what we're told next is one of the most important verses in the entire Bible. And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Abram believed God's promise and God counted Abram's faith for righteousness.

That should sound familiar to some of you because some of you were here as we walked our way through the book of Romans. And one of the things that you'll recall from the book of Romans is that the Apostle Paul quotes from this particular verse in Romans a couple of times and then he quotes from it again in the book of Galatians.

[18:13] As Paul is explaining and defending and defining the gospel of Jesus Christ for the Roman Christians, he looks back to the life of Abram to defend his case that we are saved, we are justified, which means we are declared to be righteous by God, not because of anything that we do, not because God looks at us and says, oh, there's a good person, there's a righteous person, I think I'm going to consider them righteous.

No. What Paul tells us is that God looks upon the mass of humanity and what he sees is sinners. I'm a sinner. You're a sinner. Abram clearly is a sinner.

We've seen that in Genesis. What God sees in reality are sinners and he looks upon those sinners who believe in his promises and he says, though they are sinners, he looks at them and says, I will count them as if they are, in fact, righteous.

I will consider them, I will legally, as the judge, declare them to be righteous in my sight. We call that the doctrine of justification, the doctrine of being declared righteous by God.

In fact, hold your place in Genesis 15. I want you to see this yourself, especially if you weren't here as we walk through the book of Romans. I want you to see how Paul looks back to this event and this particular verse in Genesis.

[ 19 : 36 ] In Romans chapter 4, if you're using our church Bibles that are scattered around, turn to page 941 and you'll find it there. Paul begins this chapter by asking a question about Abraham.

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? Verse 2, For if Abraham was justified, that means declared to be righteous by God.

If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? And here it is. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Now, Paul comments, to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due. And to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Paul looks back upon the case of Abraham and he says, this is a case in point. This proves the point that we cannot be saved, we cannot be righteous in God's sight by actually doing good things.

[ 20 : 45 ] Because we're not good people naturally. We are sinners, we are fallen, and so we cannot, by our own efforts, ever earn our way into heaven or ever earn eternal life or ever earn before God a good, positive standing where God the judge would look at us and say, oh, that's a good person.

Oh, that's a righteous person. Paul says, we can't do that. And he points back to Abraham as his test case. If even Abraham needed his faith and not his works to be credited, counted by God as righteousness.

And how much more do we? Look down to verse 20 in Romans 4. Paul speaks of the faith of Abraham again. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness. But the words, it was counted to him. Those are the words of Genesis 15, 6. But the words, it was counted to him, were not written for his sake alone, but also for ours.

So these are for us. Genesis 15, 6 is written for you. That's what it was written for. To help you understand how you can get right with God. They were written for us.

[ 22 : 05 ] But the words, it was counted to him, were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him, who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Righteousness will be counted for us if we believe in him who raised Jesus from the dead. It will be counted to us.

Abraham is declared to be righteous even though he's sinful because he trusts in the promise of God. And we can be counted as righteous before God and in his sight when we trust in the promises of God concerning his son, Jesus.

This is how eternal life is obtained. This is how we receive the great inheritance. When Abraham speaks of an inheritance, he's speaking about more than just the things that he has to pass on. And he's speaking about more than just the land that God has promised to him. Abraham understands. Abraham has an eye to the future and he understands that the inheritance, what he has to pass on is the very blessing of God itself which brings in ultimately eternal life and new life on a new heavens and new earth.

[ 23 : 22 ] Abraham understands that to a certain degree and so that he knows that for him not to have an heir is not merely for him not to have someone to pass on his physical possessions to. But for Abraham to not have an heir is to have no one who can receive the inheritance that he himself has received from God.

In fact, that's the very inheritance that God has in mind when he says your reward shall be very great. How does Abraham receive the prize or the reward or the inheritance?

Through his faith in the promises of God. When Abraham trusts in God, God says, I count you righteous and therefore the reward is now yours.

And now I myself by covering you with my righteousness, I shield you from my own wrath. I am your shield. I give you a very great reward and all of that happens through faith and through faith alone.

There's a question though that bugged me throughout the week this week. I mean, we're in Genesis chapter 15, right? When we read this. And Abraham came on the scene in Genesis chapter 12, really the end of chapter 11.

[ 24 : 32 ] And while there have been a couple of hiccups here and there with Abraham, on the whole, Abraham has displayed a pretty impressive amount of trust in God.

He really has. I mean, he left not only his homeland, but he left his household, he left his father's household and all the safety and security that would have come along with that to go to a land and he didn't even know initially how far God was going to take him and where he was going to end up. That's an incredible amount of trust that Abraham displays. I mean, he believes before Genesis 15, 6, does he not? He must.

This isn't the first time that Abraham has expressed any kind of faith in God. In fact, as you read this in the original language, that's indicated by the form of the verb that's used.

It's not simply Abraham believed here for the first time. It's the idea that Abraham continued to believe that Abraham's faith had already begun and it continued and it showed itself to be a real, authentic, genuine faith.

[ 25 : 35 ] But we know that not simply from this verb form and from the things that we've seen from Abraham. We know that because the New Testament tells us that Abraham's faith preceded Genesis chapter 15.

Hold your place again in chapter 15 there and turn all the way near the back of your New Testament to Hebrews chapter 11. You're going to find the passage that we're looking for in the church Bibles on page 1007.

But in Hebrews chapter 11, this is what we read about Abraham. Verse 8, By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.

There's the inheritance again, right? And he went out not knowing where he was going. So this is Abraham's initial going out, his leaving and going into the land of promise.

He went out not knowing where he was going. Listen, by faith he went to live in the land of promise as in a foreign land living in tents with Isaac and Jacob heirs with him of the same promise.

[ 26 : 34 ] By faith he went out. So that means that from the very beginning Abraham's obedience was motivated by Abraham's faith. So Genesis 15.6 is not the first moment where we see Abraham believing.

This is just the moment where we are given a glimpse into a peek into God's response to Abraham's faith and that is to say because your faith in me is real and genuine and authentic I count it as righteousness.

It should not surprise us that Abraham's faith is not a one time fleeting moment but that it is actually an enduring faith. A faith that began with God's call and has continued all the way to this point and will continue all the way to Abraham's death.

faith. That shouldn't surprise us. Because as we learn later in the New Testament faith itself is a gift that God gives to us. God is the one who grants faith.

And if God is the one who gives faith then God is certainly capable of causing that faith to endure and to persevere through all sorts of trials and struggles so that the faith that saves the faith by which God declares us righteous is and always will be a faith that endures.

[ 27 : 49 ] It will have times where it is stronger than other times. There will be times when your faith is shaky and wobbly. There will be times when you find yourself challenged in your faith.

But the faith that gets one declared righteous by God is a faith that endures. It is not a flash in the pan. It's not something that happens once. Abraham's faith began back in chapter 12 or prior to that even and continues all the way to the end of his life.

Because the faith that saves is the faith that lasts. That's true because the God who gives the gift of faith is capable of preserving that faith and keeping it in motion.

This is how Abraham and how we get right with God by trusting in his promises. But there's a further question that I think the rest of chapter 15 is meant to answer and that is how exactly does this work?

How exactly does God look at a sinner and say I'm going to count you righteous? If a judge did that in any court of law he would be deemed an unfit judge removed from the bench most likely.

[ 29 : 02 ] If you had a notorious well known violator of the law someone who was flagrant in their violation someone who had done awful things and everybody knew it and all the proof was there and the judge was absolutely certain of his guilt and yet the judge looked at him and said I think that I'll consider you and count you innocent of all of these crimes.

We would say he can't do that. That's not justice. That's not right. That's not how things are supposed to go down. So how is it that God can look at us sinners guilty of cosmic treason against God himself?

How can he look at us and say I'm going to count you righteous by your faith? How does that happen? I believe that the rest of chapter 15 helps us to better understand that especially when we read Genesis 15 in the light of the New Testament.

The rest of chapter 15 from verse 7 all the way down to the end of verse 21 is what we would call a covenant ceremony. God is making a covenant with Abram here.

And this is why this is one of the reasons that this chapter is so significant and so important because the covenant that God makes with Abram in this chapter determines the rest of the Old Testament.

[ 30 : 19 ] The people of Israel are protected by God and even at times judged by him so that they might repent because of the covenant that God makes with Abram here and with all of Abram's offspring here in Genesis chapter 15.

So these events from verse 7 down to the end of this chapter are highly significant for us. A covenant of course is sort of like a contract. It is a sacred agreement between two parties.

This is not the first time we've seen a covenant made in the book of Genesis. We saw it after the flood with Noah. God came to Noah and made a covenant with Noah. We saw even in the last chapter that Abram had made a covenant.

That is, he had a contract with his neighbors around him. They are called his allies in chapter 14.

This is not the first time we've come across the concept of a covenant, but this is the most detailed account that we have of the actual process of making a covenant so far in the Bible.

And I want you to pay attention to the process, to the ceremony itself, so that you can understand exactly what's happening here, because what happens here helps us to understand what happened precisely in verse 6, and how God, the just judge, can declare unjust sinners to be righteous.

[ 31 : 35 ] How does he do that? Verse 7, God says to Abram, I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land. So now God's already brought up the issue of descendants, half of the promise from chapters 12 and 13, and now he brings up the other half of the promise, I'm going to give you this land, I'm going to give it to you, I'm going to give it to your offspring.

And so Abram once again has a legitimate question. Again, this is not Abram expressing his doubt, he's just expressed his faith, his faith has just been commended. This is not doubt, he's genuinely curious.

But he said, O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it? How do I know this? How can I, I mean, I believe you, I believe in your word, but how do I know?

And in response to that, God initiates the covenant ceremony. Verse 9, God says to him, bring me a heifer, three years old, a female goat, three years old, a ram, three years old, a turtle dove, a young pigeon, which seems like a pretty random collection of animals, unfortunate animals in this instance.

But all of these animals are animals that were acceptable for the sacrificial system of Israel, which God will give through Moses at the end of the Torah, of the Pentateuch.

[ 32 : 48 ] So all of these animals that God chooses are reminding us, because the original readers of Genesis would have been the Israelites. And as they're reading the book, they go, oh, we sacrificed those same animals.

Something important is about to happen here. Bring me these animals, God says. Verse 10, he brought him all these, and he cut them in half. Now I want you to pause for a moment there,

because this is not a, what happens here is not sanitary, right?

It's not neat and clean. It's not like we, this is not, we see, we hear, we read this, he cut them in half, and sometimes we might picture something like we would see in an anatomy textbook, right?

In an anatomy textbook where they'll kind of give you like the cut out view of a body, whether it's a human or an animal, and you're kind of given a glimpse maybe from the side or whatever of what's inside of a person. It's always just sort of nice, neat, as if they've been just cut straight open with a laser and everything's clean and neat.

That's not what's happening here. Don't picture that in your head. Don't picture a nice, neatly, smoothly cut animal straight in half laying on the ground. Don't picture that. This is nasty stuff.

[ 33 : 55 ] This is business. All day long, Abram's sawing these animals in half. There's no electric bone saw that he can use to just quickly go through the bone. He's got to go through skull.

He's got to go through all the bones in this. He's got to get right down the middle and cut all the way through them. This is messy and this is bloody and this is tiresome work. So tiresome is this that at the end of this chapter, as the sun begins to set because it took all day long, Abram falls asleep. He's exhausted at the end of this process. He's cutting these animals in half. The ground is filled with blood. It is gross and nasty and smelly, so much so that eventually birds begin to swoop down and try to eat the carcasses and Abram has to fight them off while he's in the middle of cutting all these animals.

He would have been covered in blood. The ground would have been covered in blood. This is not sanitary and it's not meant to be sanitary.

It's not. Notice what happens next. He cuts them up. He lays them in halves. Not the birds. They would have been too small, so he just kills them and sets them on each side.

[ 35 : 07 ] Verse 12, As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. It ought to. He's tired by now. And behold, a dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.

We're back to our reminder. Verse 1, God ought to be feared. He ought to be feared. The dreadful darkness falls upon Abram and God begins to speak.

The Lord said to Abram, know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in the land that is not theirs. They will be servants there. They will be afflicted for 400 years, but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve.

And afterward they shall come out with great possessions. You, what about him? Verse 15, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried in a good old age and they shall come back here in the fourth generation for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

Verse 17, when the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. Now that is an odd description of what happens.

[ 36 : 14 ] But remember, Abram is asleep and he's seeing things in a symbolic fashion here. And if you continue to read on past Genesis into the book of Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, but especially the book of Exodus, one of the things that you will notice very quickly is that when God appears to his people throughout that book, he appears in two ways.

He appears as a flame of fire and he appears as a pillar or a cloud of smoke. So that we know in the larger context of this book that the smoking fire pot and the flaming torch represent God.

This is God himself and he's doing something strange. It says that he's passing between the pieces of the animals. He's going through the midst of them.

He is, in a sense, walking through the bloody path between the pieces of these animals. Verse 18, And on that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram.

It's important that you know that the words translated made a covenant in the original language are the Lord cut a covenant. Because that's what a covenant is.

[ 37 : 24 ] When a covenant is made, animals are cut. Blood is spilt. So that the language of the Jewish people expressed that clearly by simply saying, cut a covenant.

That's what happens. God cuts a covenant, a covenant of blood with Abram. And then the promises are repeated. To your offspring, I will give this land.

Why is all this so significant? Because this covenant ceremony is unlike every other covenant ceremony that we see. It's different. It stands out as strange and odd.

Not just the covenant ceremonies that are recorded for us in the Bible, but it stands out against the backdrop of the records of covenant ceremonies that we have of other ancient nations in the Middle East.

This stands out as strange because typically in a covenant ceremony, yes, you would have all the blood, you would have the animals cut and you'd be laid out. And the two parties making the covenant would both walk through the middle of those animals.

[ 38 : 28 ] Both parties walk through the middle of those animals. And the purpose of that was for each party to say to the other, if I break the covenant, may I be treated as these animals that have been brutally cut in half and killed.

And always you have. First, one party walks through, taking upon himself the solemn oath, if I break the agreement that I'm making with you, do this to me. And the next party passes through.

If I break the agreement that I'm making with you, do this to me. And yet, in this covenant ceremony, Abram never passes through pieces of the animals.

God alone passes through pieces of the animals. God, in effect, saying, if the covenant is broken, may this be done to me.

And yet God could not break a covenant. He never lies. He never falters. He never fails. He never fails. So what's the point? The point is God is saying to Abram, when you break the covenant, when you violate it, when you stand condemned, may it be done for me as it ought to be done for you.

[ 39 : 54 ] I walk through the pieces and I splash my feet through the blood to show you and to make it known to you that when you fail, when your offspring fail, I will take it upon myself and I will bear the curse of the covenant.

And that is exactly why Jesus came into the world. That is exactly why God the Son walked upon the face of the earth so that he himself might make a way for unrighteous people to be declared righteous by God by taking upon himself the punishment that they deserve.

Don't take my word for it. Go back to Hebrews and I'll show you this as clearly as I know how. In Hebrews chapter 9, we'll jump in in verse 12.

12. Christ entered once for all into the holy places. Now notice, not by means of the blood of goats and calves.

No. No, those were pointing to something. But by means of his own blood. His own blood. Thus securing an eternal redemption.

[ 41 : 16 ] For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Verse 15 ties it all together. Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant. So those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

A death has occurred that redeems. He offered himself. He spilt his own blood.

So that he might bear the covenant curse in our place. How does God declare sinful people to be righteous?

By treating his righteous son as if he is sinful. And his perfection is counted as our righteousness and our sin he suffers for on a bloody cross.

[ 42 : 34 ] And that is where the story is heading from the moment that God called Abram out of the land of Ur of the Chaldeans. That's where this big story was moving.

And the only real question that we need to ask ourselves is what is our place in the story? Where do we belong in this grand meta narrative that starts all the way back in the garden and moves all the way to a new heavens and new earth?

Where do we fit in all of this? And we fit in one of two places. Either we are covered by his blood and cleansed by his death because we have trusted in him.

Or we stand alone unbelieving without a shield to protect us from the dreadful and fearful God.

God has displayed his love and that he has sent his son. And if you trust in him, he bears the penalty for your sin. Let's pray.

[ 43 : 38 ] Let's pray.