

30.

The Lord Signed the Covenant with Abram

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain how the faith of Abram is used many times in the New Testament to show what it means for justification to be put to our account. In this topic, we will see that Christ made a blood covenant (eternal covenant) with Abram.

In the last topic, God had promised that a son would come from his own body and through that son, he would have more descendants than could be counted. Abram believed that promise. God went on to say, in Genesis 15:7-11, “Then He said to him, ‘I *am* the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.’ And he said, ‘Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?’ 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.’ 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. And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.” Here, we see that God told Abram to prepare the sacrifices for a blood covenant.

In the Bible, we have three kinds of covenants. A salt covenant was in effect as long as the two people making the covenant were both alive. In Numbers 18:19, God gave a salt covenant to tell Aaron and his family that his priesthood would be lasting and endure. A second kind of covenant was a shoe covenant. A shoe covenant was in effect as long as the people making the covenant had any descendants. In Ruth 4:7, we have a shoe covenant. That verse says, “Now this *was the custom* in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything: one man took off his sandal and gave *it* to the other, and this *was* a confirmation in Israel.” Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem about twelve hundred years later because they were descendants of Boaz with whom that covenant was made. The third covenant was a blood covenant. A blood covenant was an eternal covenant. Here, in Genesis 15, God made a blood covenant with Abram. Christ said in Luke 22:20 at the Last Supper, “Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.’” Here, Christ said that the cup was a symbol of the blood He would shed on the cross the next day, that would make possible eternal forgiveness and eternal life.

God reminded Abram that He had brought Abram out of the land of Ur to inherit this land. Here, Abram asked the question, “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?” God immediately told Abram to get the animals for a blood sacrifice to show that this was an eternal covenant. This included three animals and two birds. A three-year-old heifer is a female cow that has not yet had its first calf. Abram was also to bring a three-year-old female goat and a three-year-old male sheep (ram). In addition, he was to bring two birds, a turtledove, and a young pigeon. People who made covenants in that day would take animals and cut them in half and walk between the two halves. This was to show that they would be cut in half if they broke the covenant. Jeremiah 34:18-20 says, “““And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it—the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. Their dead bodies shall be for meat for the birds of the heaven and the beasts of the earth.””” After Abram cut the pieces in half, the vultures tried to eat the carcasses and Abram chased the vultures away.

Genesis 15:12-16 goes on to say, “Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete.’” Here, we see that when the sun went down, God put Abram into a deep sleep. This meant that only God would go between the pieces, so Abram or his descendants could not break this promise. In addition, God will never break His promise. In Malachi 3:6, we read, “For I *am* the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” Here, we see that God told the descendants of Abram that they were not destroyed because He does not change.

While Abram was in this deep sleep, we see that God told Abram that it would be several hundred years before his descendants would possess the land. God said that first the descendants of Abram would be strangers in a land that was not theirs. They would have to serve the people in that land for four hundred years. The people of that land would also afflict them. In this way, God spoke of the fact that the descendants of Abram would be enslaved and suffer under the hands of the Egyptians for four hundred years before they would even possess this land. However, God said He would judge the people of that land for enslaving them. He would also cause the Egyptians to give them great riches when they left Egypt. Exodus 12:35-36 says, “Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them *what they requested*. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.” The Egyptians gave Israel these riches because the Egyptians wanted the people of Israel to leave their land quickly before any more destruction came.

God then told Abram that he would die in peace and be buried at a good old age. God also explained why his descendants would not possess the land immediately. God said the descendants of Abram would return after they had spent four hundred years in Egypt because the sins of the Amorites and the other people in the land were not yet complete. Here, we see that God is a God of great mercy, even to the most sinful of nations. Among other things, the people of the land were offering their children as human sacrifices to their idols. God specifically warned Israel not to follow the actions of these nations when He said in Deuteronomy 12:31, “You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.” We see that the God was going to give the people then living in the land more than six hundred additional years to repent of their evil, including human sacrifices, before judging them for their sins.

Genesis 15:17-21 says, “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. 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—the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.’” Abram was in a deep sleep as God told him about the time when his descendants would take possession of the land. As he slept, we see that evening had come and it had become dark. Then, God appeared in the form of a smoking oven and a burning torch and He alone passed between the pieces of the sacrifices. This meant that only God signed the covenant so Abram and his descendants could not break the covenant.

God did later warn Israel what would happen if they turned from following Him. In Deuteronomy 28:41, we read, “You shall beget sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours; for they shall go into captivity.” They did turn to the idols of the surrounding nations and God did eventually take their children to captivity. However, there is still a future for Israel because of the promise in this covenant with Abram. Romans 11:25-26 says, “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.’” Then, Hebrews 8:10-12 says, “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” The fulfillment of these promises is still in the future.

Noah placed a curse on Canaan and his descendants, in Genesis 9:25, where we read, “Then he said: ‘Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren.’” Then, Genesis 10:15-19 says, “Canaan begot Sidon his firstborn, and Heth; the Jebusite, the Amorite, and the Girgashite; the Hivite, the Arkite, and the Sinite; the Arvadite, the Zemarite, and the Hamathite. Afterward the families of the Canaanites were dispersed. And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; then as you go toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.” This is the land God promised to Abram and his descendants.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that God showed great mercy to the descendants of Canaan and, even here, gave them six hundred more years to repent of their sin before bringing judgment on them. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.