

Genesis 15:17-21

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God appeared and made the covenant with Abram. God again promises the land to Abram's descendants and gives the details.

While Abram was in a deep sleep, God (in the manifestation of a *smoking oven and a flaming torch*) passed between the pieces of the blood sacrifice. Most agree that the smoking oven and burning torch represent God. This resembles the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire indicating the presence of God in the wilderness as shown in [Exodus 13:21-22](#). God was establishing the covenant without any oath, agreement or commitment on the part of Abram. This was very unusual, Abram was the recipient, but not an active participant. Abram was simply a spectator of this wonderful exhibition of God's free grace. The covenant did not depend on Abram's promise. This was a covenant of God's promise alone and its fulfillment depended on God alone. God was assuming sole responsibility in the covenant.

Interestingly, the word "oven" (Hebrew *Tannur*) used here was a firepot used for baking bread and roasting grain for sacrifice ([Leviticus 26:26](#), [2:14](#), [7:9](#)). The use of the English word "oven" could create the wrong mental image for the modern mind. The term was used for a large earthenware jar. The dough placed inside the jar stuck to the sides and was then baked by putting charcoal inside the jar or putting the jar near the fire. Fire is often used as a metaphor for God's judgment, and the Bible tells us that God Himself is a "consuming fire" ([Deut 4:24](#); [9:3](#); [Hebrews 12:29](#)). A furnace produces heat that consumes what is in it. It is also used as a symbol of God's avenging presence ([Exodus 24:17](#); [Deut 9:3](#); [Isaiah 31:9](#)). The Bible tells us God's enemies will be consumed by fire as if they were in an oven ([Psalm 21:9-10](#)). Fire represented God's cleansing and unapproachable holiness ([Isaiah 6:3-7](#); [1 Corinthians 3:10-14](#)). Many times smoke and fire have been used to represent God's presence. One example is in the exodus from Egypt and at Mount Sinai ([Exodus 13:21-22](#), [19:18](#), [20:18](#); [Hebrews 12:18](#)).

The Lord made a covenant with Abram. A covenant is a contract, a treaty, a ritual agreement or alliance between two parties. It formally binds the two parties together in a relationship, on the basis of mutual personal commitment, with consequences for keeping or breaking the covenant. Here, God was making a covenant or promise with Abram's seed,

his *descendants*, and committing himself never to break it. This covenant ceremony emphasizes that Abram's seed will receive the promised land ([Genesis 15:13-16, 18-21](#)). In the ancient world, sacrifices often accompanied symbolic gestures as if to say, "May God make me like this animal if I do not fulfill the demands of the covenant." This was a serious oath. Since only God made the covenant promise, He was invoking the curse on Himself if He failed to fulfill the promise.

To your descendants I have given this land, God promised with the covenant. In the ancient near east, Kings sometimes granted land or other gifts to loyal subjects. Here, God gave land to Abram, his subject, as a possession and an inheritance. However Abram would not take immediate possession, but it was to be possessed by his *descendants*. This would certainly occur because God had promised that it would occur, and He has the power and integrity to do what he promises. A clear theme of the Bible is that God's promises never fail.

God's clear message to Abram was that despite prospects of death and suffering (enslavement in Egypt), he and his descendants would eventually receive the promises, for God had sworn an oath ([Hebrews 6:13-14](#)). Nothing can separate God's people from His love or the fulfillment of His plans ([Romans 8:18-39](#); [2 Peter 1:3-4](#)). Even though the actual possession of the land by Abram's descendants was yet hundreds of years in the future, God speaks of this event in the past tense, saying *I have given*, again emphasizing the certainty that God's promises will be fulfilled. The four hundred plus years of waiting would be like the time between closing on the purchase of a house and moving in and taking possession. The ownership is certain, but possession is pending.

God defines the extent of the promised land *from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates*. The promised land was about 300,000 square miles. The "*river of Egypt*" could be the Nile. However, others believe this refers to the "Wadi El-Arish" (brook of Egypt), which is a familiar landmark for Canaan's southwestern border near the Sinai desert ([Joshua 15:4](#); [Ezekiel 48:28](#); [Numbers 34:5](#)). The river Euphrates marks the northeastern boundary of Canaan. It is interesting to note that the actual border of the nation has not yet extended to the full length of what God promised. Even though after four hundred plus years Abram's descendants took partial possession, the complete fulfillment of this promise still lies in the future.

On a deeper level this ceremony is foreshadowing the work of Christ and His blood which was shed on the cross. In ancient covenants the parties who were agreeing to the covenant would walk through the *pieces* of a

dismembered animal to seal the deal, so to speak. In this covenantal ceremony there are three parties participating.

1. *A Smoking Oven*
2. *A Flaming Torch*
3. *Abraham*

It seems that God the Father is represented by the *smoking oven*. When God descended on Mount Sinai the Bible says:

“Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace(oven), and the whole mountain quaked violently.”
([Exodus 19:18](#))

The *flaming torch* seems to represent Jesus. Jesus is the Light of the World. And humanly and biblically speaking Jesus being a descendant of Abraham was in the loins of Abraham participating in the ceremony ([Hebrews 7:10](#)). Abraham requested of God assurance that his descendants would be granted the land ([Genesis 15:8](#)). By having Jesus, represented by the torch (rather than Abraham) pass through the parted animal along with God (represented by the oven) demonstrates that God’s covenant with Abraham and His descendants is eternal ([Romans 11:26-29](#)).

This blood covenant God makes in [Genesis 15](#) is both a guarantee of the grant of the land to descendants who will come from the body of Abraham ([Genesis 15:4](#)), as well as a foreshadowing of Jesus as the one who will seal a blood covenant in His blood, with a reference to “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” ([Luke 22:20](#)). The new covenant applies to all who are Abraham’s spiritual children, as Abraham is the father of all who believe ([Romans 4:11](#)).

Verse 17 says that *it was very dark*. The Hebrew literally says “thick darkness” this also seems to link to the fact that great salvation will be born out of great difficulty. Israel will become a great nation, mighty enough to occupy the land, but that will be born out of four hundred years of slavery in Egypt ([Genesis 15:12-14](#)). Similarly, Jesus redeeming humanity and taking on the sins of the world came through His suffering and crucifixion, represented by the darkness that covered the land beginning in the sixth hour ([Matthew 27:45](#), [Mark 15:33](#), [Luke 23:44](#)).

There is an application to each believer that can be applied through this passage. It is out of difficulty and suffering that each believer has the opportunity to grow in faith ([James 1:2-4,12](#)). Knowing God by faith is the path to know God, and that gains us the experience and reward of life ([John 17:3](#)). Further, to know God by faith is the path to receive the greatest blessing of this life, which is to reign with Christ ([Romans 8:17b](#); [Revelation 3:21](#)).

Chapter 15 ends with a list of ten pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land of Canaan. In addition to giving geographic boundaries, this is a list of groups to be dispossessed. There are as many as 27 lists of pre-Israelite nations inhabiting Canaan in the Old Testament.

The Kenite were known as metal workers and semi-nomadic. They dwelt mostly in the south of the land in the Negev ([Numbers 24:21–22](#); [Judges 1:16,4:11,17, 5:24](#); [1 Samuel 15:6, 27:10, 30:29](#); [1 Chronicles 2:55](#))

The name “Kenaz” appears first in [Genesis 36:11](#) ([1 Chronicles 1:36](#)) as the grandson of Esau, who was head of an Edomite clan ([Genesis 36:15,42](#); [1 Chronicles 1:36,53](#)). The Kenizzites migrated from Edom, just east of the Jordan Valley (and part of the modern country of Jordan) to the Negev, where they likely assimilated among the Judahites.

The Kadmonite appears only here in this verse. Nothing is known about them other than their name comes from a root word meaning “east.” With their association in the list of southern tribes, they may have resided in the Negev.

The Hittite were descendants of Heth and lived near Hebron ([Genesis 23:10](#)). Abram acquired a burial cave from the Hittites ([Genesis 23:10-20, 25:9](#)). Israelites were forbidden to marry Hittites ([Genesis 26:34-35](#)). Uriah the Hittite served in David’s army ([2 Samuel 23:39](#)). Esau married a Hittite woman ([Genesis 27:46](#)) and greatly grieved his parents. Solomon sold chariots to them and even intermarried with them ([1 Kings 10:29, 11:1](#); [2 Kings 7:6](#)).

The Perizzite were one of the peoples who inhabited Canaan and were destroyed by Israel ([Genesis 34:30](#); [Joshua 17:15](#); [Judges 1:4-5, 3:5](#)). Their name means “Village dwellers,” in contrast to those who live in walled cities ([Deuteronomy 3:5](#)).

The Rephaim inhabited the promised land prior to the Hebrew conquest. They were known for their unusually large (giant) size ([Genesis 14:5, 15:20](#); [Deuteronomy 2:11,20, 3:11,13](#); [Joshua 12:4, 13:12, 17:15](#)).

The Amorite were a Canaanite tribe known as “mountain dwellers” (1 Samuel 7:14; 2 Samuel 21:2; 1 Kings 4:19, 9:20, 21:26; 2 Kings 21:11).

The Canaanite were the inhabitants of Canaan. They were merchants, traders, and tradesmen (Genesis 38:2; Numbers 21:1, 33:40; Proverbs 31:24; Zachariah 14:21).

The Girgashite were a native tribe of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:1; Joshua 3:10, 24:11; 1 Chronicles 1:14; Nehemiah 9:8).

In antiquity, Jerusalem was also called Jebus (Numbers 13:29). *The Jebusite* were the earliest inhabitants of Jerusalem (Judges 1:21; Joshua 15:63). Once David gained control of the city (2 Samuel 5:6) it was called “the city of David.” The Jebusites would be defeated by Israel in the conquest of Canaan (Exodus 3:8,17).

Biblical Text:

¹⁷ It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, *there appeared* a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying,

“To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: ¹⁹ the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite ²⁰ and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim ²¹ and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.”