

98-11-22b

We are ready now to resume our study this morning in Genesis chapter 15. You will recall that God has appeared to Abram in a vision, chapter 15, verse 1, saying, Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward. I should note in passing, I didn't mention this when we first looked at verse 1, but the word here for vision is *mazeh* in Hebrew, which you don't have to write that down, but it's a rare word, it's not the commonly used word for vision.

Remember over in Judges it says there was no frequent vision, that's a different word. This word is used only of Abram here, and it's used of Balaam over in Numbers chapter 24, verse 4 and verse 16. The reason that's interesting is it tells us a little bit about the kind of experience that Abram is having.

If you go over to Numbers 24, Balaam is giving his oracle, and he's describing the vision through which this truth comes to him. Remember, Balak tried to hire Balaam to curse Israel while they're out there in the plains, and he says, I can't curse those that the Lord has blessed, and so on. In Numbers 24, 4, Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel.

This is 24, 1, he did not go as at other times to seek to use sorcery, but he set his face toward the wilderness. Balaam raised his eyes, saw Israel encamped according to their tribes, and the Spirit of God came upon him. That's important.

Then he took up his oracle and said, The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened, the utterance of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down with eyes wide open. It's a pretty graphic picture. Well, this word for vision, seeing the vision of the Almighty, it's the same word, *Mazet*, that's used of Abram back here in Genesis 15.

This is about the only place, there's one other obscure passage over in Ezekiel where this is used of some false prophets who claim that they've had a vision when they haven't. But these are the two legitimate times when someone has a vision of the Almighty and uses this particular word. So, you get the idea that Abram is in this particular state where the Spirit of God has come upon him and he falls down with eyes wide open.

Sort of a, you get the idea, this is a trance-like state. And the interesting thing about this is that in both cases, when you look at what God says to Abram and when you look at what God says through Balaam, this is a long distance view of Israel's history. That's what the significance of this is.

It's not just, isn't it interesting that this word is used. But in both of these cases, these are long distance, this is looking down the tunnel of history and seeing the sweep of God's plan for Israel. God is going to tell Abram some things about his descendants

during this episode, not unlike what Balaam is going to prophesy.

Jesus Christ is prophesied in the Oracle of Balaam. When we get a little closer to Christmas, we'll review that one more time, about the star rising in Jacob and smiting the brow of Moab and so forth. It's in this prophecy.

But this is a big deal. This is not just, behold, next year Sarah will have a son. This is looking down history, a very great, it's being lifted up high and seeing a long ways.

So the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, in this particular kind of vision, saying, do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward. Abram said, Lord God, what will you give me, seeing I go childless? The heir of my house is Eleazar of Damascus.

God says, look. Or Abram says, look, you've given me no offspring. Indeed, one born in my house is my heir.

Behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, this one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir. Then he brought him outside and said, look now toward heaven and count the stars if you are able to number them. He said to him, so shall your descendants be.

And he believed in the Lord and he accounted it to him for righteousness. Now, if you look at that section, those six verses, there's a sequence of events. You have the word of the Lord in verse one, giving Abram a promise about the land.

He says, I'm your shield, I'm your great reward. Then you have Abram responding in verses two and three, his complaint about not having a son. So Yahweh's word in verse one, then Abram's word in verses two and three.

Then you have the Lord's reaction or the Lord's response in verse four. Then you have an action. God tells Abram, go do something.

In this case, he says, come outside and look up at the sky. And that's in verse five. Then, following this action, you have the word of the Lord coming again, promising him many descendants.

And then you have the conclusion. What's the result of all this? Abram believed God in verse six. That's the pattern.

The interesting thing about that pattern, those six things, Yahweh's word, Abram's word, Yahweh's reaction, command to act, Yahweh's word, and then the conclusion, is that that pattern is repeated exactly in this next section, in the remainder of Genesis chapter 15. You have the exact same sequence of events. So that in verse seven, God is going to speak again.

He says, I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to inherit it. He identifies himself just like he did in verse one. He says, I am your shield and your exceedingly great reward.

By the way, when God comes to Israel to deliver them out of bondage in Exodus, he prefaces his remarks the same way. And when he talks to Israel after the Exodus, he says, and when he talks to them in Egypt, he says, I am the God of your fathers. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

After they are delivered from Egypt, he says, I am the Lord who brought you forth from the land of Egypt. He identifies himself that way dozens and dozens of times in the Old Testament. What is that? I am the God who delivered you.

I am the God who rescued you out of what you used to be in. For Abraham, brought him out of the idolatry and the paganism of Ur of the Chaldees. For the Israelites, brought them out of the idolatry and the paganism of the land of Egypt.

The God of their salvation is the idea. When God is going to speak to Abraham, when God is going to speak to Israel, he says, this is me talking. This is the God that delivered you.

So pay attention. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul reminds his readers and his hearers of the same thing. I am, Paul, an apostle according to the will of God.

God is speaking here. This is the God that saved you. This is the God that brought you out of the paganism and the idolatry of your heathen origins, he says to the Greeks and the Romans.

So, there is establishing of authority to speak. This is the basis. Why should you pay any attention other than just being frightened by the vision of God? Because this is the God that made your life what it is.

This is the God that has delivered you and established the direction of your life. He is worthy to be heard. He is worthy to be considered and obeyed.

So, verse 7, his word comes again. He speaks and says, I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to inherit. You have to ask yourself, why does God say that? Abram knows that God brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees.

Why does he remind him of it? This establishes the foundation that's going to be built on. Because I am the God who brought you out, because I am your Lord, this is what needs to happen. So then, just as we had in the first section, now Abram is going to respond.

He's going to say his piece. He says, Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it? I need a sign. I need some confirmation.

This isn't so much an expression of doubt as a request for confirmation. So then, just as in the first case, the Lord's reaction here is to speak and he says, let's take some action here, Abram. I want you to do something.

Take and bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon. So Abram brings all these things. Brings them to him, cut them in two down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other.

But he did not cut the birds in two. When the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. Now remember, we started out, we noted in the beginning of chapter 15 that this happened at night because God says to Abram, step outside the tent flap here and look up at the stars.

That's how numerous your descendants will be. Well, vultures are carrion birds. They look for dead meat in the daytime.

And Abram didn't get up in the middle of the night and kill these animals. He tells us it's the next day. Time has passed.

It's the next day. Probably in the morning, he goes and gets each of these animals, brings them, slaughters them, lays them in rows, puts half on each side, and then he's sitting there. And during the course of the day, as the sun rises and the meat starts to kind of stench up here a little bit and wafts on the wind, the carrion birds start circling and they find this dead meat and they're swooping down wanting to do what God designed them to do, which is be the garbage truck of nature.

But Abram has to drive them away. And then look at verse 12. When the sun was going down, Abram does this all day.

Now, it's fairly late in the morning right now, but imagine if you'd gotten up this morning at say 730 or 8 and had gotten a cow and a goat and a sheep and some birds, killed them all, sawed them in half. This is not half through the midsection. This is half the head, one foreleg, one hind leg, and so forth on one side.

The other half, this animal has been chopped lengthwise down the middle, one half on each side. And you do this out in your front yard, you can imagine the gory sight that that's going to be, the entrails, the blood, the gore. We've got a nice day going out here.

It's a little coolish, but it's warming up. The sun is shining on this. Before long, you've got flies, you've got drying, sort of stenchy kind of things happening, and you're sitting there.

And it's 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock in the morning, midday. Vultures and birds are starting to come down and try to pick the meat, carry off the little dead birds and things, and you're out there shoing them away, flies buzzing around. If you've ever seen the

Middle East, you know that there are flies.

I don't know how many there were in Abram's day, but they have enough flies now. God could have said, your descendants are going to be like the flies you see in this country, because they are numerous. People over there are so used to flies that you'll be talking to someone, and a fly will land on their face, and they don't even brush it away.

All their life, they've been around flies, and they just ignore them. I don't know about you, but I can't concentrate when a fly is on my own face, certainly. And it's hard to concentrate when it's crawling around on somebody else's face.

You just fixate on the fly. It's on the bridge of their nose and crawls up around their eyebrow and crawls around down on their cheek. It gets over near their ear, and you think, I wonder if he's going to go in.

I wonder if he'll brush it away before it goes into his ear. And another fly lands, and there's flies landing on the food. You've got all these different kinds of pates and flatbread and tabbouleh and stuff out, and flies just everywhere.

And people just act as though there are no flies. They never brush them away. They crawl all over their face.

Well, see, here's all these flies, and here's Abram out here all day long. There's flies. There's carrion birds.

This meat is just getting older and older, laying there with the blood and the entrails. Sun rises, heat of the day, 2 o'clock, 2.30 in the afternoon, sun beating down on him. He can't leave.

Birds will come and carry this stuff off. He's out there shooing this stuff away. Gets on toward evening.

The sun starts going down. Well, Abram is no doubt exhausted by this time. And you have to wonder what's going through his mind.

God says, you get the idea something momentous is going to happen. Bring me these animals. Chop them in half.

He does. He lays it all out. And nothing happens.

And hours go by. Flies and birds and everything else. Nothing happens.

What do you think is going through Abram's mind? This puts me in mind of what we saw a few chapters ago. You remember back when Noah built the ark? All the animals came in. Everything's all good to go.

And then he sits there. And a week goes by. And he's just sitting there.

Remember that big delay? Where it's all ready. Here's the ark. Here's the animals.

Here's the family. Nothing happens. And you have to wonder, what's going through Noah's mind? Boy, did I just have a strange meal and dream this stuff? Or was this a figment of my imagination? I wonder if God really did speak.

I wonder if this really is going to happen. There's this waiting period. Well, here's Abram.

All day long until the sun goes down. Then in verse 12, when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram. And behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.

Now this is just making matters worse. Now he's falling into a deep sleep. And you think, well, he fell into a deep sleep.

And he looked up and behold, a ladder and angels ascending and descending. It's going to be some grand thing like Jacob's going to see. His grandson is going to see when he lays his head down on the rocket at Bethel.

But no. Horror and great darkness fall upon him. Well, he's done the right thing.

He's stuck it out with all these dead animals all day long. And now horror and great darkness has fallen upon him. Finally, God speaks.

And He says 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 400 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. The King James says a ripe old age. But in the fourth generation, they shall return here.

This is the descendants. For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. 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.

But what on earth is going on here? How did this get started? God, if this is after the defeat of Keterleomer, Abram's at a high point, has bread and wine with Melchizedek. God comes to him and says, Even though you've turned down all of these riches from the King of Sodom, don't worry about it. I am your great reward.

Abram says, Well, what about this issue of descendants? All of this is meaningless if I don't have a future, if I don't have a son and an heir. So God brings him out and says, Look at the stars, and confirms the promise. Well, you would think, Okay, fine.

We can just go forward. But instead, God comes to him again in verse seven and says, I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to inherit it. And now Abram asks this question, How shall I know that I will inherit it? Well, that question is what precipitates everything in verses nine through seventeen.

How shall I know that I will inherit it? What is the picture of the future? Paint this picture in for me how this is going to take place. And the material, the substance of Abram's question is not give me a sign so that I'll know it's going to happen. He's wanting to know how is this going to happen? How are you going to fulfill? He believes God already, right? He looked up at the stars.

He believed God and it was imputed to him for righteousness. So he's not looking for a sign, Oh God, turn the fleece wet on the dry ground or turn the fleece dry on the wet ground and then I'll really know you're going to do this. He's saying, How? Give me the knowledge of how I'm going to inherit it.

That's what he's asking. So God says, Do these things. Well, let's take a look at this.

First of all, just ask yourself, Do you have any idea at all what this might mean? I didn't. When I looked at this and read it and I thought, Why these animals? Why cut them in half? Why sit there all day? Why the mention of the birds? Why deep sleep? Why the horror and darkness? Why the smoking pot and the burning torch? To me, this is nothing but questions. It doesn't.

If I was Abram and woke up from this, I'd be saying, Run that by me again now. I asked you how this is going to take place. I've got dead animals and blood and entrails.

I've got carrion vultures. I've got smoking pots and torches. What was that? Well, interestingly, it does yield to observation.

First thing God says is what? Bring me a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon. Specifically, three-year-old animals for the heifer, the goat, and the ram. If you go to Leviticus and look at the sacrificial laws, you look at the code for worship in Israel, which is still future for Abram, this is a representative of every kind of animal that's qualified for sacrifice.

These are the sacrificial animals. There are no others. When you go to Leviticus, there isn't anything else you can sacrifice except cattle, goats, sheep, turtle doves, and pigeons.

That's it. You can't put a dog up there. You can't put an ibex or anything else.

It's only these animals. Abram already knows that these are sacrificial animals. The code that's given great fleshing out and description in Leviticus is already known.

Abel knew what a sacrificial animal was. Abram has already offered sacrifices to God. Noah has offered sacrifices to God.

There was knowledge of what is a legitimate and what is not a legitimate sacrifice long before it was written down in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. So Abram, when he hears this, he says he knows these are the animals of sacrifice. What does a sacrificial animal represent? Substitutionary atonement.

This is my representative. This animal is suffering in my stead. My guilt is transferred to this animal and it suffers the penalty for my iniquity.

It, in a sense, represents me. It represents and embodies what ought to happen to me. This is the penalty due me for my iniquity.

That's what the sin offering symbolizes. It also symbolizes the idea of substitution. That the guilt is transferred to another who bears it on one's behalf.

So that much we know. There is the idea here of sacrifice and of representation and substitution. Why three years old? Well, we'll come back to that.

He brought 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. This is the sacrificial law.

The birds are never divided. Remember in Leviticus 14, we studied the law for the cleansing of a leper. You have the two birds.

One is slain. It's broken but not divided. Its blood is sprinkled on the living bird.

The living bird is set free. You have the picture of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The two birds represent one bird.

One dies and one lives. It's the same bird. It's death and resurrection.

The resurrected bird or the living bird bears the blood, bears the mark and the identity with the dead one. It's a beautiful, beautiful picture of resurrection. Well, these birds are present because here they're both dead.

There's one on one side and one on the other. So you've got carcass, carcass, carcass birds. The birds were the sacrificial animal for the poor who could not afford the heifer or the goat or the sheep.

And so Abram's descendants, the nation of Israel, from the least to the greatest, who will be represented by these sacrifices in the future, can be seen as in view here. Abram and all of his descendants, the nation of Israel. It's like the point made in the New Testament that the whole Levitical priesthood did obeisance and paid a tithe to Melchizedek.

So Melchizedek's priesthood must be greater than the Levitical priesthood because the honor was paid by Abram to Melchizedek. That point is made and drawn out in Hebrews. So you see in Abram the embodiment of all of his descendants, the Levites and the whole nation of Israel.

So here, these animals, which Abram will see as representing himself and his need. There's judgment on iniquity and so forth, sin offering. Here you have from the least to the greatest these animals spread out.

And all day long, he's fending off the birds. We'll come back to that also. When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.

The key to this is understanding what we saw over in Numbers with Balaam. This word for vision, the long sweep of history that's in view because Abram has asked the question, how am I going to inherit this land? If I believe I'm going to inherit it, how is it going to take place? Well, deep sleep falls on Abram as the sun is going down. When's the last time we saw a deep sleep fall on someone? Remember the rib episode? God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam and then out from Adam comes Eve.

I will call her woman for she is taken out of the man. So we have the idea of here's offspring, here's descendants. A deep sleep is falling on Abram and it also pictures and foreshadows his death.

We're now going to see things that take place after the death of Abram. The deep sleep falls on him. This is picturing the sleep of death.

It's also a reminder that we're going to see his descendants who will come forth from him and live after he's gone. So horror and great darkness fall on him. Well, in the Old Testament, death doesn't have the bright halo around it.

It's Sheol. It's the pit. It's darkness, forgetfulness.

The dust cannot praise you. The dead have no remembrance, David says in the Psalms. Death is pictured as a shadowy place of foreboding.

There's not a lot of hope. They say, well, you know, I'm not happy about the death and going into the pit. It's when my flesh is raised.

Job says, even though I turn to dust and I'm eaten by worms on the last day, I will stand and see my Redeemer in my flesh. And Job knew that there would be a resurrection. He wasn't looking forward to the intermediate state.

He was looking forward to the resurrection, as was David and everyone else in the Old Testament who knew anything about it. Horror and great darkness. The deep sleep of

death.

This is what's going to happen after Abram's death. God says to Abram, No, certainly your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs. This is not a happy prediction.

He's saying your seed, all of these stars in the sky, numerous blessing light to the Gentiles and so forth, they're going to be slaves. They're going to serve someone in a land that does not belong to them. They're going to be not in this land.

They will serve them and they will afflict them 400 years. This is a good long chunk of time. 400 years.

Also the nation whom they serve, I will judge. Afterward, they will come out with great possessions. Skip verse 15.

Verse 16, In the fourth generation, they shall return here. For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. So, what's happening? You have these animals and you have the horror and great darkness that fall on Abram.

And God says, This is how your descendants are going to inherit the land. They're not going to get it right away. You're not going to have a son and he's not going to have grandkids for you and grandkids and grandkids and you all are just going to populate and just take over the land as you become more numerous.

You're here. You have it. Your son's going to have it.

You're just going to have the old homestead here. You're going to have Abrahamville that's just going to spread out and encompass the land. Abram says, How am I going to inherit this land? God says, Well, not right away.

Your descendants for the next 400 years are not going to dwell in this land. Your descendants for the next 400 years are going to be slaves. After you die, it's going to be bad news all the way around.

It's going to be darkness and horror. They're going to be slaves. And not until the fourth generation are they going to return.

And this is going to be after Abram's death because he says, In verse 15, As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried at a good old age. So this being driven from the land and becoming slaves is not going to happen until after Abram's death.

He sleeps to deep sleep. And after he goes to sleep, the horror and the great darkness come. Now, these animals, the sacrificial animals, this is the definition of Israel, isn't it? The Levitical code, the law of Moses, that defines Israel.

And these sacrificial animals, this is a symbol of Israel. Think about it. These animals are three years old.

Three generations of Israelites are going to live in bondage and slavery. It's the fourth generation that will return. For three generations, these three-year-old animals, they're going to look as though they are cut in half and dead.

You'll have to beat the buzzards away from the dead pieces. For three generations. Not until the fourth generation will they return and they will come out with great possessions.

Just as Abram has spent all day long waiting for God to act, waiting for God to appear, waiting for God to speak, Israel, in captivity in the land of Egypt, is going to wait for God to act. It's going to wait for God to appear. It's going to wait for God to speak.

They are going to appear to be dead as a nation. The fulfillment of the promises is going to seem impossible because of this slavery and being ground under the heel of the Egyptian taskmaster for these many years. And of course, in this time, a generation is figured at 100 years.

Later on, a biblical generation will be 40 years. But here, as you know, Abram and a lot of these patriarchs lived a long time, so a generation here is figured at 100 years. Afflicting 400 years.

In the fourth generation, they shall return here. For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. And you get the idea that the corruption that sets in on these pieces of the animal, the buzzards and the carrion birds are always symbolic of evil.

Even in Jesus' parable of the seed, the birds come and pick up the seed and carry it away. The carrion birds are symbolic of evil and enemies. And Abram has to keep them away from the pieces.

He can't give up and say, it's over. Take it. Forget it.

God's not going to appear. God's not going to show up. Every time Abram chases a bird away, he's saying, these pieces have to stay here because God's going to do something with them.

It's an expression of faith. It's an expression of hope. Every time he runs back out there and chases those birds away, he says, I'm waiting in hope.

I am not giving up on the appearance of the Lord. I'm not giving up on the Word of the Lord. I'm not giving up on the action of the Lord no matter how long it takes.

And he maintains that hope until he falls asleep. And of course, you have that spelled out in Hebrews when it talks about the faith of Abram who dwelt in tents, waiting for a city

whose founder and builder is God. He did not lose Hari, even when he saw the deadness of Sarah's womb and so forth.

Then in verse 17, it came to pass when the sun went down and it was dark, this is the furthest extremity of time. It's at the end of this long wait. The sun's not up anymore.

It's dark. And just when you think, well, it's utterly hopeless. Abram is asleep.

The sun is down. But Abram wakes up and what does he see? When Abram is conscious again, at least in a vision form or whatever it is, when the sun went down and it was dark, behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. At the end of that long wait, Abram sees the presence of God pictured in fire.

Now, there are two symbols of fire that pass between these pieces. Why two symbols? Well, the smoking oven, of course, you can't really picture your Amana radar range or your general electric oven coming between this. This is an earthen vessel in which coals were kept.

These vessels a lot of times were round and were stippled or had a texture on the outside so that they could actually put the flat bread on the outside of the vessel, fill it with hot coals and the bread would bake on the outside of the vessel. It's an earthen vessel full of hot coals. That's why it's called a smoking cook pot or a smoking fire pot because the coals are in there and there's nothing but smoke coming out.

You don't see the fire. You see the smoke. It's a source of heat.

It was used to cook with. It's a source of heat. There's energy there in the form of heat, but you can't see the fire.

What's the other thing that passes between? It's a torch. Now, a torch is not, you don't cook with a torch. You don't transform something with a torch.

The torch lights the way. It is consumed in order to provide light and the issue there is light. So the issue in the one is heat.

The issue in the other is light. You have, but both of them are powered by fire, which is often a symbol of the divine presence. And of course, when you get into Exodus, you have the pillar of cloud or the pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night.

When it stands between Israel and the Egyptians, just before the Red Sea parts, it's smoke on one side and fire on the other. It's smoke on the Israelite side. It's fire on the Egyptian side and it keeps them apart.

So the smoke and the fire, this is, there's no getting around it, this is the divine presence. The divine presence passes between the pieces. Now there's a lot of things

you can say that are real obvious about, Berit means to cut.

You cut a covenant. These animals are literally cut in two. You bind yourself to an oath by passing between the pieces of the cut animal.

That's all there, but when you think about the significance of these animals, these three-year-old animals representing Abram's seed, Abram's descendants who are going to inherit the land, how is this going to take place? Well, they're going to be cut in half and appear to be dead and useless. The carrion birds are going to think they are dead and try to carry them away, but they're going to be preserved and at the right time, after a long wait, the divine presence, like a purifying fire, is going to pass between. Remember what the Bible says of itself, the Word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow.

It is a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart. God is a purifying fire. He's going to pass right through the midst of Abram's descendants and that passing through is a purifying presence.

Fire purifies. And so at the end, you can see the symbolism beginning to build up here because Abram falls asleep. What is the point? What does it symbolize when Abram wakes up again? It's the resurrection.

The resurrection of the just. The resurrection that brings the fallen saints of the Old Testament back to life. When is Israel going to be sanctified and purified? When will God take out their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh and they will no longer have need for rebuke and correction and discipline and so forth? It's when they're resurrected.

It's a purified Israel that will inherit the land and it's a prediction of the millennial kingdom. This is the ultimate fulfillment of the promises to Abram. When Abram is raised, when Israel, who appears to be dead, appears to be in bondage and so forth, is raised, is purified, that's when they're going to inherit the land.

There's a short-term and a long-term fulfillment of this symbolism, this Balaam-like vision. In the near term, they're going to be in slavery for 400 years and afterward be delivered. God will be in their midst.

God will lead them out literally in a pillar of fire and a pillar of smoke, just like this smoking pot and burning torch. That's the near fulfillment. After 400 years, I will bring them back to this land.

The long-term fulfillment, when Abram wakes up, he will see purified Israel taking full possession of the land under David's greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The other interesting thing about why is it three generations and in the fourth they'll return to the land? Why is it the three-year-old animals? Why this particular period of time? Why

couldn't they just do that for one generation or for five generations? Once again, looking at it in the prophetic tenor in which this is given by God, Abram lives roughly 2,000 B.C. It's actually 18 or 19 hundred years B.C. Well, three years, what is going to be the time of Israel? 2,000 years hence is the time of Christ. They're going to live for 1,000 years in the millennial kingdom.

And it is after that period of time that everything is purified and everyone enters the kingdom of the Father. So, Israel's time, the descendants of Abram, whether it's Israel or those who are descendants of Abram by faith, the time of the sojourn, the time of the possibility of the incursion of sin and the descent of the buzzards and so forth, three years old, 3,000 years. A day is to the Lord as 1,000 years.

1,000 years is as a day. And God will use these numerical references. A year can be 1,000 years.

A day can be 1,000 years. It's the number that counts. So, the three-year-old animals, this three historical days in which this death is going to be working its power.

And you think, well, wait a minute. I thought it should only be 2,000 years because in the millennial kingdom they're all resurrected and perfect. But the final victory over death has not yet been won.

When is it that death and hell are cast into the lake of fire? It's not until the end of the millennial kingdom. That's when the fire purifies away the presence of death. Death and hell are cast into the lake of fire after the millennial kingdom.

Because remember, the rebellion fomented over that 1,000 years and by the end of it you have the Gog Magog rebellion where Satan is loosed and you have a huge horde of people who rebel against God. Even in the midst of that perfect kingdom, it's still not completely sanctified. It's not the time when we come into the full inheritance of the eternal blessings of God.

Not until death and hell are cast into the lake of fire does that take place. The millennial kingdom, by the way, is a kingdom for Israel. Jesus Christ will sit on the throne of his father David and rule Israel.

And from Israel he will rule the world. But the kingdom proper is Israel. The millennial kingdom is in a sense an extension and a fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant promises to Israel.

We rule and reign with Christ but the millennial kingdom is not per se a promise to us. Our union with Christ and our fellowship and rulership with him sharing his priesthood and his heirship and so forth take place during that period. But the actual kingdom is a fulfillment of the promises to Israel.

So you have these three days, these three generations, three years represented by these three year old animals. So this is a long telescope look into the future when Abram asks God how will I inherit the land? It looks down the tunnel of history at the fulfillment in the fourth generation. After these three generations are complete it's in the fourth generation which looks all the way forward past the great white throne judgment to the kingdom of the Father when these things are ultimately fulfilled.

That's why Paul can say and the author of Hebrews can look back and say those who by faith are Abram's sons and Abram's seed will inherit. That's when the inheritance comes to full fruition. So it's an amazing and powerful picture and prophecy of what will happen both in the near term to Abram's physical descendants and what will happen in the long term to all of the descendants of Abram both physical and spiritual in the unfolding of God's plan.

It's a tremendous I could spend another two or three weeks on this but these are the essentials. In the fourth generation they shall return here for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. It is necessary for those pieces to lay on the ground all day.

It is necessary for that iniquity to be visible and be manifest. It is necessary for Israel to experience the slavery in order to appreciate the deliverance. Why will we appreciate our deliverance and our eternal blessings in the future? Because we have experienced the bondage of sin and the iniquity of the Amorites has found its full measure and we've seen it with our own eyes.

God is working all things together for good and even the iniquity that surrounds us is fulfilling God's purpose. We are going to see it for what it is as we live in this life. When we get to the eternal future we're never going to want to return to it again.

All of the perfect beings that have fallen in history whether it's Lucifer or Adam had no experience of previous evil. We in the perfected state have already had an experience of evil and we'll never want to return to it again. That's one of the things that gives us confidence that we are not in the eternal future going to somehow fall like Lucifer or fall like Adam.

It's a wonderful and powerful passage. When we return to it after our holiday break we'll see the statement of the covenant once again in verses 18-21 of Genesis 17 but let's close here in a word of prayer. Father we thank you for the powerful way in which you communicate the history of your plan and the future of your plan to us in your word.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will incorporate these things into our souls and that it will become a part of the resources that we draw upon day by day to live by faith, to be motivated by hope and to walk in love and in so doing to fulfill our calling and to reflect the glory of our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask these things in his name. Amen.