

# OpenTheo

## Genesis 15:1 - 17:8



### Genesis - Steve Gregg

In this analysis of Genesis 15:1-17:8, Steve Gregg explores the concepts of Christian discipleship and the Abrahamic covenant. The text discusses the burden that Abram carried and the delay in God's appearance, which may have symbolized the delay in delivering the people of Egypt and bringing Abram's seed to the promised land. Gregg also delves into the cultural context of polygamous marriages in the Bible and the importance of obedience and submission in hierarchical relationships. Additionally, he highlights the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his promises and Abram's great faith in believing God's promise.

### Transcript

Let's turn to Genesis 15 and we will continue our survey of the life of Abram. I hope that you will be looking for, and I'll occasionally make note, that you'll probably, if you look carefully, see more than I have occasion or time, or for that matter, intelligence, to spot. It's possible you'll see far more than I do, but in the twelve or so chapters about the life of Abram, which cover a century of his life, there are many things, perhaps everything in them, serves as a prototype of Christian discipleship, beginning with the call to leave his past life and past associations to become a pilgrim and a stranger in a land that he will not possess during his time, to all the different lessons that God takes him through.

In chapter 15, we have one of the more peculiar chapters, although we also have one of the most quotable verses in the whole life of Abram, verse 6, I'm thinking of, because in the New Testament that verse is taken up and quoted no less than three times and possibly alluded to more than that. It is an important verse. It is about justification by faith, but the context of it, and especially what follows it, is rather strange and a little difficult to interpret, but we will have a look at it.

After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward. Now that last line, your exceedingly great reward, is rendered here in the New King James that I'm looking at, similar to the way it is in the King James.

In fact, it's identical, but many modern translations believe it would be better to render it, your reward shall be very great. The difference being whether God is himself Abram's reward, or whether God is simply promising Abram a great reward. God has already rewarded Abram in terms of protection from his enemies and given him victory in the battle he just came through, making him a rich man and all, and has promised other blessings to him that have not yet been realized, making him great and all that.

Therefore, simply to say, You will have a great reward, might not be adding any new information. On the other hand, in view of the fact that Abram has just given up much of his land to Lot, and has even, he could have seen what happened to Sodom and Lot in the previous chapter, where they were taken captive by Chetlamer, he could have seen, well that's how God got Lot out of there and got my land back from him, you know. But instead, he goes out and rescues Lot and brings him back, as was the King of Sodom and all those people.

Abram is not out looking out after his own interests, or seeking a reward of his own, he has just turned down a tremendous financial gift that was offered by the King of Sodom, and said, No, I'm not going to take anything from you. I don't want you to be able to say that you made me rich. And having just said that and turned down the possibility of a great reward from the King of Sodom, God says, I am your reward.

Or he could be saying, you will have a great reward, without specifying what that reward is. But it's in the context of Abram turning down a reward from the King of Sodom, God says, well you'll have a reward from me. Verse 2, But Abram said, Lord God, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? Then Abram said, Look, you have given me no offspring.

Indeed, one born in my house is my heir. Now, Eliezer of Damascus, we have not heard anything of before this, but we now find that he is one that was born in Abram's house, obviously not to Abram, because Abram has had no children born to him. We know that they were male and female servants, and it would appear that Eliezer was one of these, was his chief servant.

Now, it was customary in ancient times for a servant who quitted himself well in his master's service and was trusted, and had seniority and so forth, to inherit something from his master, especially if his master had no other heirs. In fact, it was the most natural thing to expect, that if the master had no son, that his most trusted and senior slave or servant would probably stand next in line to inherit, and that is what Abram acknowledges here. This Eliezer of Damascus, not even related to him, someone from Syria, who is apparently a slave, he is the only one that stands as an obvious heir.

Now, Lot had once stood in that role, but Lot is no longer with him. Lot now belongs to Sodom, and it is clear that if Abram had any hopes that Lot would be heir of his relationship with God and the promises of God, even after they departed in chapter 13,

Abram may have held out hopes for that, but the fact that Lot has been a part of the society of Sodom, belongs to Sodom, makes it clear that he would not be a worthy heir of the promises of God, and Abram doesn't have any notions that Lot, who is of course a closer relative to Abram than Eliezer is, but Lot is apparently out of consideration, and so Eliezer, the oldest servant, is the probable heir, so it would appear at this point. Now, Abram says he's not real happy about that.

Just as I said earlier when we were talking about why did God make the world, why did God make people, it may be that God was somewhat motivated by that, which motivates most men historically is the desire to have offspring and to have something to leave to them. Whether that is true of most men, and certainly whether or not that is true of God, it is true of Abram. He's not all that satisfied that he's got wealth and luxury.

He's not going to live forever. He's an old man, and what good is it to be wealthy and die and see all this wealth go to somebody who you don't have any particular attachment to? More importantly, if you had a son from your own body, there's a sense in which you live on through your offspring. In the Old Testament, there was no clear revelation recorded about eternal life or about heaven or hell.

Yeah, there seemed to be illusions and some slight mentions of a life beyond the grave in some places. Even Job had a conception of resurrection at the last day, and he didn't even have any scriptures. So it may be that God's people almost instinctively knew there must be more than this.

But there was very little disclosed in the Old Testament about the life beyond this life. And most people, the Jews included, if they wanted to see themselves as having ongoing significance beyond the grave, they had no clear, vivid hope of where they would be after the grave. They might have had some hopes that were vague, but they didn't have any clear promises.

But they did know that if they had offspring, they would, in a sense, through their offspring, live on. And if their offspring had offspring, they would live on. As long as there were descendants of theirs, they would live on in the memory of their children and in the persons of their children, as it were.

This is a mysterious thing, the connectedness of persons to their offspring. I mean, there is a biological continuity there. A child is actually some of the biological material from their father and some of the biological material from their mother that was once part of their mother's body and father's body.

And so there's some, I mean, it's a strange thing to really contemplate. But in ancient times, one of the best and most vivid hopes of immortality and having significant continuance beyond death for a man was that he died seeing offspring of his that would carry on his name, carry on his estate, and so forth. And this was apparently quite

important to Abram, as with most of the time.

He had an estate to be envied by even some of the wealthiest chieftains, but he had no son to leave it to. And he said, what's the point, God? You promised me a great reward. I've already got a great reward.

But what good does it do me? I'm an old man. I don't have anyone to leave this to. I can hardly enjoy this reward when I don't know what's going to become of it when I die.

I only have this servant. Of course, I live on through him. I mean, I can leave it to him.

He's a nice guy. But any reward you give me is very little, and it's of very little consequence if I don't have some son to leave it to. And he says, this person born in my house to a servant is the one who's my heir.

And 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. Now, this is the first time he's made very clear that Abram will actually become a biological father. It is true that God has made previous reference to his descendants and his seed, but such could refer to his adopted son, Lot, although it's not technically his seed, yet they could be counted as such.

He makes it very clear that the heir that you will have will now come from your body. Notice, however, at this early point, God has not mentioned who the woman would be. And there was sufficient ambiguity here.

Abram only had one wife at this time, Sarai, so the assumption is that it would come through Sarai, but it's not stated. And that leaves open the possibility at a later point in time, not much later than this, which in fact, the very next chapter, Matthew, that maybe Sarai isn't the mother. Abram's only been told that he will be the father.

He's not told who the mother will be. And this raises some possibilities in the mind of both Abram and his wife that maybe the mother would be someone else. This we see as an example of progressive revelation.

God doesn't lay out his total plan all at once on people. That's true in this general sense of the revelation of Scripture. God makes some vague references to Messiah early in Genesis, and then some more detail is added later, later in Genesis, and later in the Prophets.

There's more in the Psalms, and in the New Testament we see the full disclosure. And likewise with many of the issues of, for instance, the meaning of marriage. That was hardly made clear in the Old Testament.

Certainly the roots of later revelation that Jesus gave on the subject are found in the Old

Testament. In fact, they're found back in Genesis 2.24. But they are not expounded on in the Old Testament, so that the verse is taken more casually in law than it is in the New Testament. Polygamy is an option that is somewhat taken for granted throughout the Old Testament, and certainly not so in the New Testament, where we have a higher view of marriage disclosed through the Apostles and Jesus.

Moral issues, even the issues of war and a lot of other issues in the Bible. God doesn't say his last word right at the beginning. He lets people grow into some of those understandings and gives them a little at a time.

It's line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little bit. God makes his counsel known to his people. And here, with reference to his promise to Abram, he is told Abram earlier that he'll have offspring of sorts, that perhaps Abram wasn't so sure this meant precisely literal physical offspring from his body.

It could be someone adopted into his family conceivably. It would not be the first time that an adopted son became the heir of his father's estate. But now he's told that Abram will in fact be the physical father.

But as I say, it's not yet mentioned who will be the physical mother, and that is made clear not until chapter 17, the answer to that question. Verse 5, Then he brought him outside and said, Look now toward the heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to number them. And he said to him, So shall your descendants be.

And he believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness. Now that verse 6, as I mentioned a moment ago, is quoted numerous times in the New Testament as a wonderful proof text for the general doctrine of justification by faith. Paul quotes it at least twice in Romans 4 and in Galatians 3, and the writer of Hebrews I believe quotes it if I'm not mistaken, and James quotes it in James chapter 2. So obviously it became a major part of the building blocks of New Testament theology that Abram, before the law was given, and this becomes important to Paul in Romans chapter 4, that this is before Moses, this is before the law.

It was counted to him for righteousness on the basis not of any works Abram performed, but on the basis simply of believing what God said to him, believing God. And Paul argues that that means that the law never was the means by which people were made righteous before God. God never justified men through their keeping of the law, because this arrangement of Abraham being justified by his belief precedes the law, and Paul in Galatians 3 actually talks about this as if this is sort of a covenant deal with God, that Abram's justification by faith was part of a covenant promise.

And Abram says this, I mean Paul says this applies to us too, anyone. After that, the law that was given 400 years later, Paul says, could not annul the covenant that was made between Abram and God. That part of the Abrahamic covenant was justification by faith,

which again raises a bit of data relevant to the question of who are the beneficiaries of the Abrahamic covenant.

Is it the Jews or is it the Christians? Well, part of the covenant is justification by faith. Who has faith? Do the Jews? Well, the majority of them do not, but all Christians do by definition, and therefore, again, we see Paul arguing that only those who have the faith of Abraham are really the children of Abraham. But, with reference to his children, he says they will be as numerous as the stars.

He takes them out under the night sky and says, can you count these stars? No. Well, that's what your seed, your descendants will be like. Now here we run into the problem of seed or seeds.

We saw in a previous class when we were talking about the Abrahamic covenant that Paul, in saying in Galatians 3.16 that the promise was made to Abraham and his seed, Paul emphasizes that it is not seeds, plural, but seed, singular. Now, there is ambiguity here. There is unclarity here because the word seed in Hebrew and in the New Testament Greek, which Paul wrote in, and in English, for that matter, in the translated language that we have the Bible in, the word seed can be singular or plural.

When I say to the man at the hardware store, I need 30 pounds of grass seed, I don't say grass seeds, I say grass seed, and that means whatever quantity of seeds there are, they are all seed. Seed can mean singular or it can mean plural. And that is true in the Hebrew, which we have the Old Testament recorded in, and it's true in the Greek that Paul wrote in.

This word is ambiguous. You use the same word in the same form whether you mean singular or plural. Now, Paul indicates that the promises are to Abraham and his seed and emphasizes the singular seed, Christ.

But there are certainly times in the Old Testament where seed is used of the plural, especially a case like this. Can you number the stars? That's what your seed will be like. What? Like the number of the stars.

That seems to be a plural situation. Likewise, when there are previous times, I can't go back and find them all at the moment, but there are previous times, well, like chapter 13, verse 16, it says, I will make your seed, the New King James translates it as descendants, plural. I will make your seed as the dust of the earth so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your seed also could be numbered.

Obviously, seed in that case is plural. Talking about numbers of seed. So, Paul certainly cannot be denying that in some sense, some promises do apply to the plural seed of Abraham.

And it would appear especially that the plural seed of Abraham are promised the land.

And we know that this seed was called through Isaac and later through Jacob, so that the Jews were given the land. You will find most of the time that the promises that apply to the seeds or descendants have to do with the real estate, that God has given it to the physical descendants of Abraham rather than to the physical descendants of Canaan, for example.

He's taken it from the Canaanites and given it to the Abrahamites or the Israelites. But when it comes to the actual covenant itself, a blessing the world and them being a blessing and so forth, this, Paul says, applies to the seed, Christ, and those who are in him. Now, at the same time, I should point out that Paul uses the word seed as being primarily singular, but also having a plural aspect.

If I would turn your attention again to Galatians 3, where this discussion is found, which we saw a couple of sessions back. In Galatians 3, verse 16, Paul says, Now to Abraham and his seed, where the promise is made, he does not say, and to seeds as of many, but as of one, to thy seed, which is Christ. But then at the end of the chapter, verse 29, he says to the Christians, collectively, And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and the heirs, plural, according to the promise.

Now obviously, you are Abraham's seed in this verse means both singular and plural. We are one in Christ, and Christ is the seed. If we're in him, then we're him.

We're the seed, singular. But we are individuals also, and we are the heirs, plurally. And so Paul acknowledges there's a combining or a mixing of the singular and the plural elements here.

But he points out that the seed, singular, is Christ, and the seeds, plural, are those who are in Christ. The heirs of the promise are the plural people, not who are physically descended from Abraham, but who are Christ's, who is the one seed to whom the promises are made. The thoughts are rather mysterious, but the fact that Paul presents it, and that he is an inspired apostle of Jesus Christ, means that he's right.

Now, as far as the promise of the land to the seeds or the descendants of Abraham, and the numerousness of them, we can say that the promises that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars of heaven could apply to the Church, because certainly, though the Jews are very numerous, they have never been as numerous as the stars of heaven. They've never been innumerable. At their height, before World War II, I think there were twelve to fifteen million of them in the world.

There's never even been so many as a billion Jews. You can number them. There's a big number, but they're not innumerable, certainly not the stars of heaven for multitude.

But if you take into consideration the promise, not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles, who believe in Christ. You can also add the biological Arabs, for that matter, and they're

very numerous, could be a billion of those. You've got the Jews, you've got the Arabs, you've got Christians who are the seed of Abraham, and in other sense, and you really have a number of people that you could never number.

It would be almost impossible to identify all of them, even if you saw them, just because some of them are seed only by spiritual qualification and connection. But it would be true to say that if you include Christians in the number, it is an innumerable number. There's no one who knows for sure how many Christians there are.

And as far as the promise of the descendants getting the land, I sought to show a while ago in one of our earlier lectures that the promise of the land was conditional. The Jews were given the land conditionally. And you might say, that sounds like you're talking about both sides of your mouth.

It's either forever, unconditional, or it's not forever, it's conditional. No, it is forever conditionally. That is to say, so long as you meet the conditions, it is forever.

God will always keep his side of the bargain, and therefore he's not going to withdraw it. He didn't make a covenant that would expire on such and such a date so many years off. There was no expiration date on this promise.

The expiration date was whenever you fail to meet the conditions. Then, of course, it's no longer yours. And he made that very clear to them, that if they violate his covenant, he'll take the land from them.

It's his land, their tenants with him on his property. And if they do the same thing the Canaanites do, the land will vomit them out just like it vomited out the Canaanites before them. So when God says, I've given this land to your descendants forever, it is, of course, implying, so long as you keep the, if you keep the covenant forever, I'll keep this promise forever.

It's a little bit like when a couple gets married and they promise to be faithful to each other and to, you know, nurture and cherish each other until death parts them. No one ever in their wedding vows states any conditions to that. They never say unless you commit adultery, of course.

That would be rather distasteful at a wedding to say, well, I will be faithful to you unless you commit adultery against me. I mean, you don't raise issues like that at a wedding. The assumption is you're not going to do that, are you? I mean, you wouldn't be making these promises to me if you're going to be planning to do that.

But it is unstated. The Bible makes it clear, it seems to me, that if one party does commit adultery, then there are grounds for divorce. Although the grounds were not stated in the wedding vows, they are implied.



And when a person says, I will stay with you and cherish you and so forth until death do us part, this means, of course, unless you abandon me for someone else, well, then I'm not going to, I don't consider myself bound to stay faithful to you when you're off married to someone else now. That is not required. That is, it is implied.

It is a condition implied behind the vows, the conditions in all of this. But it's God saying, I'll give you this land forever, assuming, of course, that you stay with me forever. But as soon as you break covenant with me, well, then I'm taking the land away from you.

It should not be thought that these are unconditional promises. There are no unconditional promises in the Bible. God himself said, whenever I make a promise to a people to build them up and so forth, if they rebel against me, then I will repent of the promises and the good I said I benefit them with.

That's a category of God's policy, that there are no unconditional promises. And I would recommend, if anyone doubts that, reading Jeremiah 18, verses 7 through 10, where God makes that very plain. Now he does say that Abram's seed will be as the stars of the heavens.

And Abram believed this, and his faith toward the Lord was counted as righteousness toward him. But he did not and thus sets a precedent that those who will be just before God must be those who believe him. And by believing, they are counted as just, as Abram was.

Then he said to him, verse 7, I am Jehovah, or Yahweh, or Yahweh, various pronunciations are possible, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to inherit. And he said, Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit? So he said to him, 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. Then he brought all these to him and cut them in two down the middle and placed them, 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. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and behold, a horror of 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 in a good old age, but in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

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. And 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 Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites land. Now this chapter has of course two promises.

One of them is that Abram is going to have offspring from his own body, and those offspring ultimately will be as numerous as the stars. The other has to do with his reaffirmation that the land will be inhabited by his offspring. This actually was stated earlier to Abram in chapter 12, and God had said that, you know, To your offspring I will give all this land.

In verse 7, chapter 12, verse 7, Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, To your descendants I will give this land. And so he built an altar there. Now what this does is simply designate a little more about what the borders of the land are that he's talking about, that they will inherit, and to reaffirm it with a visible sign.

Now Abram, when God says, I'm going to give this to your descendants, Abram says, How do I know that? Now that doesn't sound very trusting. We've just heard that he believed the Lord, and it was counted him for righteousness, now he's questioning God about that. I don't suppose that Abram really disbelieved.

He may have had some doubts at this time, or he may not have had doubts at this time. He may have wanted some visible sign. God was accustomed to doing things visibly sometimes for him.

That's when he appeared in Melchizedek and blessed him and so forth. And there are, it's possible that Abram was just, you know, he didn't see much. He didn't see much of God.

God appeared to him rarely. And the rest of the time he was just wandering around in a land that didn't in any way appear to be his. And it didn't very much seem like it would be his, and he might have said, he might have just been thinking, well God, it would help a lot if you gave me some kind of, you know, some sort of a token that I could hold on to a little more than just the verbal word.

Now, by the way, Christians should be able to just trust God and take him at his word without symptoms. But God is willing at times to accommodate weak faith. And here he did so.

And God said, okay, here's what you've got to do. Take a three-year-old heifer, verse 9, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon. And we read that the larger animals he cut in half, and the birds were too small, he didn't cut

them in two, but the larger animals, he cut them in half and he put the pieces of the animals apart from each other with some gap in between.

And then later on, of course, we read that a burning oven and a smoking lamp were seen passing between the pieces in verse 17. This is very strange to our ears to read such a strange thing as that, but it was not very strange in those days. It was a fairly common way of ratifying a covenant among ancient Middle Eastern peoples.

In fact, there is a... I wish I had the Bible I mislaid. I had my wide margin Bible here last week, and I don't know where it's gone. I can't take it home without realizing I did so.

I'm working from a Bible that I don't have my marginal notes in, but I had written in the wide margin Bible something from a Babylonian inscription that was found that contained an actual covenant made between one person and another person named Mati'ilu. And it said something like this, you know, if I, Mati'ilu, do not keep my covenant that I make this day, then this thigh of this animal that is torn off is the thigh of Mati'ilu that shall be torn off if I do not keep my covenant. And similar things, he went through different parts of the animal and how the animal was maimed, saying, may I be so maimed if I don't keep my covenant.

And it is known from such instances that the cutting of animals in two generally was followed by the two covenanting parties, the people who were the parties to the agreement would usually pass between them. And the assumption was, or it might have even been said generally, that if I do not keep the covenant I'm here making today, I will be cut in two like these animals. The treatment these animals have received at my hands is the treatment I'm welcoming on myself if I do not keep this covenant.

And the verbal or symbolic way of invoking such a curse on oneself was done by both parties to the covenant passing between the parts of the animal. At a later time in Jewish history, they would simply verbally invoke a curse. You'll often find in the Old Testament a person saying, the Lord do so to me and more if I do not do such and such a thing that they're promising to do.

We do not read what it is that they're saying the Lord should do unto them. It's going to feel like there was some kind of a gesture that went along with the statement, perhaps a drawing of the finger across the throat, indicating having throat cut or something like that, so that the person gesturing would say, may the Lord do so to me and more if I don't keep my covenant. To invoke a curse upon oneself or a horrible judgment upon oneself if they broke their own covenant was their way of affirming their sincerity in their promise.

But the cutting of animals in two was an earlier form of making a similar self-imposed curse. May I be cut in two like these animals if I don't keep this covenant. Now Abram took the animals and by the way in verse 5 and 6 it would appear that it was nighttime

because God took Abram out under the stars.

But the gathering of these animals must have taken place the next day and the setting up of the altar and whatever he did the next day because we find that darkness begins to come on him as the sun's going down in verse 12. So it's the next day that he gathers these animals, cuts them as he does, and yet he didn't know what to do about it. You see if he and God are going to pass between these pieces to make a covenant together or to ratify God's covenant, then it would appear that God has to show up.

Ordinarily covenants were made between two men and they would cut their pieces and then they just passed between the pieces as an emblem of their binding themselves to the covenant. But if Abram and God were going to be a covenant together then God would have to show up to pass between the pieces and Abram just had to wait around for him to show up. But apparently as he waited more time passed than seemed appropriate.

Eventually the vultures themselves began to come down and try to pick at these carcasses. God hadn't shown up yet. The carcasses were rotting in the sun and the vultures would come down and Abram waved them away.

He had to wave the vultures away. And then it says in verse 12 when the sun was going down a deep sleep fell on Abram and behold a horror and great darkness fell upon him. Now this sense of horror and darkness coming over his spirit I believe was the prophetic burden.

It is said of prophets in the scripture that they had the burden of the Lord. That which burdened the heart of God came to burden their heart. They shared God's burden because he put his spirit upon them.

And by the way all of us have his spirit upon now and you may know the burden of the Lord yourself many times. You feel the grief that God feels about certain situations. You feel the anger that he feels in certain situations.

That was the exclusive privilege of prophets in the old days. They had his spirit upon him and his burden was upon them. Abram is later in chapter 20 referred to as a prophet.

And perhaps although he did very little prophesying as we think of it, it may be simply because he like the prophets after him had the burden of the Lord. He began to have this horror come over him. This sense of darkness over his spirit.

He was falling asleep. Now it does not explain why he felt this horror. When I was younger and read this I thought well he probably is horrified because he was falling asleep and realized that no one would be awake to wave the vultures away and the vultures might take off with the stuff before God came along.

And he felt like oh man I'm falling asleep I can't do this you know I'll fall asleep and then the vultures will get the carcasses. But I don't any longer think that that was the issue there. I think that the horror and the great darkness that came upon him was a spiritual experience which came was immediately afterwards explained by a prophetic oracle which God gave him probably in his sleep.

Oh he may have been awake when God spoke to him. It says in verse 13 then God 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 400 years. Now we know because we lived later than Abram that this happened.

The Jews Abram's descendants went into Egypt. They became slaves there. They were oppressed there.

They were very badly treated there for 400 years before God delivered them. And verse 14 says and also that nation whom they serve will I judge. Afterward they will come out and with great possessions.

That happened of course later in the days of Moses who happened to be recording this story. God fulfilled his promise some 400 years later or more in the days of Moses and the Jews came out to take the land of Canaan from the Canaanites. But God says to Abram now as for you you should go to your fathers in peace.

You should be buried at a good old age but in the fourth generation. Now in this instance generation seems to mean century and a generation may have been regarded to be a century long in those days because he has already mentioned 400 years. But in the fourth generation they shall return here.

That is the Jews would come out of Egypt out of their bondage and they would come in fact to the land of Canaan again. Now they would do so with swords unsheathed. They would do so as warriors conquering the land of the Canaanites and bringing God's judgment on the Canaanites.

And God says in the fourth generation they will return here for the iniquity of the Amorites another term Canaanites is not yet complete. Now what God is saying is the Canaanites will suffer judgment. The Amorites will be judged at the sword points of the Jews when they do come in and conquer and slaughter them and take land from them.

But this is going to be delayed. Remember what this whole event. God said you will inherit this land.

That means they'd have to take it from the Canaanites. And Abram said how do I know that? He says well let's do this little thing and so cut these pieces up and so forth. And what God what the message that God had for Abram was that it is going to happen but it's going to seem like it's not happening because your your descendants are not going

to immediately take this.

They're going to be in the land of that they don't know in Egypt. He doesn't name Egypt but it turned out to be Egypt for 400 years. It's going to seem as though they will never show up to conquer this land.

It'll seem as though God will never show up to deliver it into their hand. There will be a delay of 400 years and this purpose for this delay is that the Canaanites who will be judged at that time are not yet ripe for judgment. The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

And here we see a tremendous benevolence and mercy on the part of God in that we know the Canaanites were idol worshippers, infant sacrificers, debauched orgy worshippers and yet God says but they're not quite ripe for judgment yet. And he basically gave the Canaanites 400 more years to repent before he brought the Jews in to conquer them and judge them. That's the mercy and the patience of God with the debauched people like the Canaanites.

But it was God knows when a society's iniquities are so full that he cannot endure any longer and he must bring judgment upon them. The Canaanite society was not quite at that point and therefore there would be a delay of their judgment and a delay of Abram's seed taking the land for about 400 years he's told. Now it's possible that the little ritual of waiting for God to show up with around these carcasses and the vultures coming down to take the carcasses and Abram having to wave them away.

I mean why did God delay? Why didn't God just show up right away? Why did God keep Abram waiting? Very possibly in order to symbolize this very thing that was the message. You expect me to show up and keep my covenant. You expect me to show up and pass between these pieces and I will but not immediately.

It'll take longer than you think. You've got the piece of set you think it's time for me to show but I'm not going to show as quickly as you think. It'll be a long wait and the vultures coming down that Abram had to wave away might conceivably represent the Egyptians themselves who would oppress the Jews before God would show up to deliver them and like Abram waved away the vultures God would wave away the enemies of the Jews and deliver them out of their hands and fulfill his promises with them.

I don't want to read more into this than is intended but it seems to me there must be some reason why Abram was made to wait. I mean if it was normal to have to wait there's probably no reason they'd have to mention this little procedure of having to wave away the vultures and all that. It seems as if God was delaying his appearance in order to symbolically convey this notion that there's going to be a delay in my showing up to deliver your people from Egypt and to bring them into the promised land and fulfill the promises I'm making to you today.

And I believe that when Abram began to experience this horror and spiritual darkness come over him he was beginning to feel probably in a way that he didn't understand until God explained it in the following verses he began to feel the grief and the horror of his own descendants who would be oppressed under the heel of the Egyptians for 400 years that that that horrible burden that would come upon his descendants I think a bit of that was being laid upon his spirit so that he prophetically could know what his descents were going to be going through before God would show up 400 years later to let them out. So there's several things here that probably are all parts of saying the same thing. One is God's clear explanation which is in verses 13 through 16.

I mean he just plainly explains it's gonna be 400 years your descent to be somewhere else then we'll come back here and we'll judge the Amorites it'll be right time isn't the right time yet. But the horror of great darkness that came on Abram in verse 12 is very possibly symbolic way in which Abram was made to feel a bit of that and even prior to that the ritual animal pieces and God not showing up as quickly as Abram expected him to might be another way of depicting symbolically the delay that would that would have to endure before God would actually keep this covenant promise of giving Abram seed the land. Now when God actually did show up in verse 17 it says it came to pass when the Sun went down and it was dark that behold there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch which passed between those pieces.

And then we have God verbalizing the terms of the covenant of the land of the perimeters and so forth of the land that would be given to him. Now the interpretation of this burning oven or smoking oven what's it say yes smoking oven and a burning torch. There's been a pretty standard interpretation of this that most evangelicals seem to hold and that is that the oven represents God the Father and the torch represents Jesus the Son.

Now I can't think of any excellent reason for making that identification but that is what almost every commentator says. And perhaps they say it simply for lack of any better way of explaining the phenomenon what I mean I don't know of any place else in the Bible where God is called a smoking oven and I certainly know of no place where Jesus is described as a burning torch. But for lack of some other explanation scholars have often said this represents God the Father and God the Son passing through the pieces and the significance being that Abraham who is one of the parties of the covenant doesn't have to personally pass through the pieces.

And they say the significance of this is this that ordinarily two parties entering into covenant together would both pass through the pieces indicating they both have obligations that they have to meet in the covenant. But that God did not require Abram on this case to pass through suggests that there are no obligations on Abram's part that this is unconditionally going to be fulfilled to Abram. And that God the Father and God the Son themselves passed between saying that the whole obligation to fulfill this

promise is on Godhead on God and Jesus part that the Father and Jesus agree among themselves covenant together to fulfill these promises to Abram.

Abram doesn't have to do a thing he's not even made to pass through it's strictly a matter that falls on the faithfulness of God to fulfill. Now if you're like me you might say I'm not so sure that this means that although if you read enough commentators you'll be overwhelmed by the number of people who say that it means that there simply is no proof in Scripture that it means anything like that though it might. I suggest there are some other possibilities in terms of its meaning.

The smoking oven as it's translated here in the New King James is called a smoking furnace in the King James Version. And one thing that is interesting is that twice in Scripture in I believe it's in or Deuteronomy I guess it's in Deuteronomy early Deuteronomy God speaks of having brought the Jews out of Egypt out of the iron furnace and later Jeremiah picks up the same terms and says that God had brought them out of the iron furnace. If I had my other Bible I would have written them and I had them written in the margin I could give you the references there but if you have a concordance you can easily find if you just look at a source of course look up iron furnace.

Or furnace and you'll find quickly that in I think it's in Deuteronomy and then also in Jeremiah God refers twice to the back to the Egyptian bondage as an iron furnace that his affliction that his people were in. Now God has just referred to the 400 years of the Egypt prophecy and therefore there is a possibility I cannot be dogmatic about it but it is there is a possibility that the furnace or the smoking oven might well represent the very captivity that God has just predicted. But then what would a burning torch represent? Well there may be some aid in Scripture in answering that question as well.

If you would look over at Isaiah chapter 62 Isaiah 62 1 says for Zion's sake I will not rest and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until her righteousness goes forth as brightness and her salvation or deliverance as a lamp that burns. Now interesting in the passage in Genesis we're reading instead of a burning torch it says a burning lamp that it says in the King James Version that a smoking furnace and a burning lamp were seen passing through the pieces. Now in Isaiah 62 1 the salvation of God's people and by the way in Isaiah 62 it's probably their deliverance from the Babylonian captivity a later captivity additional to their Egyptian captivity later in their history but their deliverance and salvation was described like a lamp that burns.

Now it is not too far a stretch and I just offer this as a humility but it seems to me at least as likely as the alternative explanation that this the smoking furnace or oven represents the 400 years of captivity the iron furnace from which God would deliver them and the lamp that burneth or the burning torch represents God's salvation or deliverance of his people. Why would it be called that? I don't know. Why does he call their salvation a lamp that burns? I'm not really sure why how it's like that maybe in that a lamp gives



light and is that it's a testimony and it's you know God's salvation of his people becomes a visible reality that gives light to the nations I don't know I'm only guessing but all I can say is God does use that term.

His reasons for using it are not altogether clear but there's no question but that he uses it in Isaiah 62 one that the salvation of God's people their deliverance is likened to a lamp that burns and so with Abram seeing passing between these pieces a burning oven or burning furnace smoking and a torch or a lamp that burns both of which can be emblems referred to elsewhere in Scripture as the as the Egyptian captivity and of God's deliverance from it this would have a total repeat of what God had just said that the Jews would be 400 years in captivity and then they'd be delivered and so there's a possibility that these elements of the affliction of God's people and God's deliverance pass symbolically between the pieces in order to say these are united wherever there is the affliction of God's people God's deliverance is inevitable God's deliverance is promised God's deliverance is inseparably joined with the with God with the affliction of God's people wherever they are afflicted they can anticipate the deliverance of the Lord also and that would apply specifically to the Egyptian captivity that was just spoken of now I realize in saying that I'm the only person I've ever known who said that about this every other commentator I know says it represents the father and the son passing through the pieces and therefore if you want to be in good company you might want to take that view but I have any biblical reason to say that that's that's the correct view it's strictly up for grabs and I it just occurred to me several years ago as I was teaching this that I knew those images from elsewhere in Scripture and that there and in view of the fact that the prophecy has to do with the Egyptian captivity and that those very images are used later of that same phenomenon it occurred to me perhaps this is a meaning of the of the vision that he had so that he has promised that he will his descendants will have the land but he's also promised it won't be right away they will be captives in a foreign land for a very long time first but then when the iniquity the Amorites is full God will bring his Abrams people back and they will possess the land of all these Canaanite people that are named in verses 18 through 21 now chapter 16 now Sarah Abrams wife had born him no children and she had an Egyptian maid servant whose name was Hagar so Sarah see now the Lord has restrained me from bearing children please go to my maid perhaps I shall obtain children by her and Abram heeded the voice of Sarah then Sarah Abrams wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan so he went into Hagar and she conceived and when she saw that she had conceived her mistress means Sarah I became despised in her eyes then Sarah I said to Abram my wrong be upon you I gave my maid into your embrace and when she saw that she had conceived I became despised in her eyes the Lord judged between you and me so Abram said to Sarah I indeed your maid is in your hand do to her as you see as you please and when Sarah I dealt harshly with her she fled from her presence now there's a there's quite a bit here and I it was good to read that much before commenting because we see something of

Abrams leadership style in his home he's not a very strong leader he's a meek individual we saw that meekness in dealing with Lot when he could have gotten angry a lot for causing problems in the family and throwing him out of the land altogether he generously gave him his choice of territories and in so doing seemed to really blessing from God for it but meekness needs to be overcome at times when it's time to be in authority I have all in the years that I was single and always shunned any kind of authority over others I found it very easy and in fact it more easy than not to be meek much easier to just kind of let others have their way and to not press for my opinion and my and assert myself I always saw that as Christlike and frankly I still do but it was hard to make the transfer when I had to and authority that had to be exercised and a wife and a family to guide where I'd rather just let well do what you want you know I mean you have your way it may not be what I prefer but I can live with it you know and and it was easy it was hard to make the transition for me from the meekness that I as a single person practiced in all my relationships just let everyone have their own way and I'll just take whatever the scraps are that left is fine with me I didn't consider to sacrifice it just an easy way might have been even laziness on my part easier than fighting over it I just let people have their way and I'll just take whatever God gives as a result to my mind that's what we make this look like but but becoming the head of a family goes requires me to go against my own tendencies in this respect there are times when I have to say well my wife my children might prefer this but I sense that God would have us do X and I'm gonna have to press for that I have to demand that even if they don't like it because I'm supposed to be the head here I'm supposed to take charge and actually my wife likes it less when I don't take charge you know she actually wants me to take charge more than I do and I have had to learn how to say no and to put my foot down which is really against my own nature and I can sort of relate with Abram in a situation like this his wife makes a suggestion and he just goes along with it later on there's trouble in the family he won't take responsibility your problem you deal with it Sarah and she's not capable she gets upset and beats her say written the servant runs off Abraham first of all Abram should have been more in charge of the situation in the beginning but even when complexity comes up in the family he's he doesn't really cope deal with it directly and he's not the only one Moses was a rather meek individual in terms of his family when his child was born he wanted to circumcise the child his wife didn't want to so he didn't later on God got upset with Moses and almost tried to kill him in Exodus chapter 4 you read of it and and the only way that Moses escaped the judgment of God was it his wife finally gave in and circumcised the kid but it seems clear that Moses had deferred to his wife on a matter where he shouldn't have deferred he should have circumcised his child as was commanded all the descendants of Abraham but his wife was a Midianite and she didn't like apparently circumcision and find it revolting and so Moses to please his wife had not done what he in circumcising his son later on David is seen to be to make he was a very valiant man in battle but when it came to raising his children he did not he didn't question their bad behavior and when they murdered each other and raped each other he got angry but he never faced it he never confronted it he never disciplined his family

and you know these are good guys Abram Moses David these are in the Bible but they had their flaws and one of their flaws was they were weak leaders in their family and it remains a problem among godly people sometimes as well as ungodly people that men are often weak leaders and what one of the challenges before the godly husband and father is to find the balance between genuine meekness the refusal to assert your own way unnecessarily the willingness to let someone else have their way and to defer to the wishes of others on the one hand and yet to put your foot down say no but I've got to take the lead here and the lead means I make the decisions and sometimes that's not what other people are going to want now Sarah I initiated everything in this story Sarah I said listen I'm not having any kids God is restraining me from bearing why don't you have a child by Hagar now that might sound like a wild thing for a woman to suggest to her husband why didn't you go out and have an affair now it wasn't really that at all she wasn't suggesting that he have an affair she a product of her own culture was not unfamiliar with polygamy polygamy was not own father Tara had had more than one wife Sarah I was born to one of them Tara's wives and Abram was born to another of Tara's wives so she had come from a polygamous family and her husband for some reason had never taken a second wife after 75 years of having a barren wife he had not done what most men do when they're barren wives in those days they'd marry another one that was the main reason for polygamy it would appear in most the cases we know about in the Bible that a man has a wife who doesn't have children can't have children so in order that the family might not remain childless he takes another wife hoping that children Abram however had resisted this tenancy and a very normal thing to do in that culture but he had not done it he had a barren wife but he never he never considered or at least never initiated taking a second wife now it's not so much that Sarah I wanted to have another wife for Abraham that was her equal but rather her slave girl it was customary that if a woman wished she could give her slave to her father to her husband and any children born by that slave would in one sense belong to the the owner of the slave the woman Sarah I would then own the child to be as if she was her womb was dead but she owned the womb of her slave woman and therefore through her her slave girl's womb she could have a child now this is of course rather esoteric but it's nonetheless the way that was figured if I can't have a child through my womb I can have one through my slave woman's womb and so it was considered not so much that Abram was taking another fully free wife of the same status of Sarah it's just simply that he was taking what they called a concubine you know the same thing happened when Rachel found that she couldn't have children she gave Jacob her husband her maidservant to have children by and then when Leah stopped having children she gave Jacob her servant this was not uncommon apparently in those days having a large family was the priority especially in a day where there's tremendous infant mortality rate and so forth to to have as many children as you could so that some might survive to carry on your family name was just considered a very important thing to people in that culture and even more important than monogamy and we have to remember too that we live in a culture where marriages are ostensibly formed on the basis of love and and the desire

for exclusive intimacy and so forth but in biblical times it wasn't always the case sure there was love in some of those marriages and some of them there weren't some marriages were arranged by parents between parties who never saw each other until they got married Isaac and Rebecca for example their marriage was arranged by their parents and they never laid eyes on each other until the day they married each other never met each other never had a conversation no one can say that they married on the basis of love and yet we read that Isaac loved Rebecca when he married her and the expectations were not the same in those days I mean the women didn't expect necessarily to have the kind of relation with their husband that women in our society expect to have with their husband and I'm sure that women even then didn't much like having to share their husband with another woman and you do see rivalry between Jacob's wife for example you find rivalry between Elkannah's wives that's the father of Samuel he had Hannah and Peninnah as his wives and they there was rivalry there in fact although the Bible nowhere comes out and condemns polygamy outright every case that the Bible gives of polygamous marriages we see unhappiness unhappiness in the family you'll never find a polygamous marriage mentioned in Scripture that is not also characterized by unhappiness on the part of the wives and by the way if mommy ain't happy ain't nobody happy the wife is unhappy that either and also you find in all those cases the children of different wives of the same husband are almost always at odds with each other in this case there's hostility already between Hagar and Sarah as soon as Hagar gets pregnant suddenly she feels superior to her mistress now Hagar was a slave a piece of property belonging to Sarah before but now she realizes hey I'm carrying Abrams baby Sarah I can't do that I actually may arguably have a higher status than Sarah in this family and so she started acting uppity towards Sarah I and wouldn't wouldn't follow orders anymore and started acting like her superior and Sarah I got pretty upset about that and complained to Abram as she should do she should come to Abram say listen now this is your problem it's in your household now Abram could have said well listen honey you're the one who suggested this thing it's the it's on your plate you asked me to do this you can bear the consequences but that's not really the way it was right to do that's sort of what Abram did but really Abram shouldn't have agreed with Sarah in the first place unless he was going to take charge and take control of the circumstances obviously if Hagar would have a child by him and Sarah I couldn't there's the possibility that this kind of thing might happen Hagar might start feeling superior it happened all the time where there were more than one wife that the ones who had the most children always felt superior to the ones who didn't have children and mocked them and were rivals I mean there was cattiness and nastiness between the multiple wives of the same men many times and usually over who had the most babies now Hagar as I say was not a full wife she was a slave wife she's what you'd call a concubine you might say what's the difference between a multiple wives and concubines Solomon for example had 700 wives and 300 concubines what's the difference in a wife and a concubine they're all bed partners to the man and they all bear children to the man but the difference is that a wife has the status of a free person in a society where slavery

was a was an institution taken for granted where slaves have no rights a free woman who is a wife had certain status and certain rights and so forth and freedom whereas a concubine was a slave who sort of was a surrogate wife was a was a child bearing slave for a man she was not didn't have the status of a wife she's not a free person she was still a slave and her children arguably were slaves also and though of course a man might adopt and grant freedom to the child of the concubine yet life is a free woman the concubine is a slave and that was certainly a difference between Sarai and Hagar which meant of course for Hagar to react this way to Sarai was entirely inappropriate because Hagar although she had been married to Abram as a concubine and it does refer to her as Abram's wife in verse 3 Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian and gave her to her husband and Abram to be his wife talking his wife but not in the full sense she was still a slave as is clear from the following narrative she still had to submit Sarah she still was owned she was a concubine wife not a free wife and by the way Paul makes a big issue about this in Galatians 4 where he says that Abram had two sons one by a free woman Sarai and one by a slave woman Hagar and Paul in the second half of Galatians 4 which we will not take the time to look at right now but you can see it on your own Paul likens Hagar to the old covenant and Sarai to the new covenant because Hagar is a slave and her children are in bondage and therefore Ishmael who became the son of Hagar is a picture in Paul's analogy of the Jews physical descendants of Abraham but are in bondage because they're under this the bondage covenant Hagar the the old covenant at Sinai but Isaac who is the promised seed born of a free woman is like the Christian who is the child of promise born of the new covenant the free woman and so Paul makes an issue about this that Hagar represents the old covenant Sarai represents the new covenant and their children are respectively in bondage or free depending as their mothers were in bondage or free so Hagar's continuing status as a slave is an issue here she does not have the right to act like she's a free woman and yet eventually she does she begins to act like she's equal to and maybe superior to Sarai Sarai comes to Abram as a woman should to get her husband to solve the problem why well let's face it two women under the same roof is hard enough two women who are fighting under the same roof is hard enough and for the solution of that difficulty to be left up to one of those two women to resolve the conflict is asking for even more trouble and you may have heard that the Chinese of course you know the Chinese don't have letters and alphabet and so forth they have a different character for each word in their vocabulary but many of the characters are made up of other characters of other words and I'm told that the Chinese character for the word impossible is simply the characters for two women under one roof and that's true I mean that's not a joke that's supposedly a true I don't know where the Chinese got the impression that that would make a good illustration of what's impossible but it's certainly godly women that's a different story you know by human nature it is much probably impossible for unregenerate women to live in eventually gonna both want the same kitchen unless the roof has two kitchens under it two two apartments but Hagar and Sarah I were now two women two mistresses of the same man two wives of the same man were properly under the same roof and

they were not getting along forever so you solve the problem Sarah what was he naive and what happened is what anyone might predict who knows human nature she solves the problem okay she starts beating up on set down Hagar and Hagar flees to save her life and here she's a pregnant woman getting beat up on it there is a possibility Sarah's hoping to cause her to miscarry after all that baby became a matter of a wedge between them and between her husband and she was not well I wish she had never got pregnant in the first place it starts treating her hard so Sarah dealt harshly with her so that Hagar fled from her presence now a runaway slave is criminal slaves are owned they're not allowed to run away but Hagar felt like her life was in danger and she fled from the household it says now the angel of the Lord verse 7 found her by a spring of water in the wilderness by the spring on the way to sure now sure is in Egypt so apparently she who was an Egyptian handmaid was on her way back to Egypt probably going back home hoping to escape to her homeland and not be within the reach of her owners so she was on her way there she stopped by a spring of water because it's mostly desert between there and they knew what whenever you find an oasis you take advantage of that and drink and fill up your water bottles and so forth and it says the angel of the Lord found her there and he said Hagar Sarah is made where have you come from now where are you going and she said I'm fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarah and the angel of the Lord said to her return to your mistress and submit yourself under her hand might seem strange to our near the mistress the word mistress is simply the feminine version of master if a slave is owned by a man then then the slave had a master if the slave was owned by a woman then the slave had a mistress what's interesting in our modern vernacular we don't have slavery and masters and mistresses in that sense nowadays when you hear that someone has a mistress it suggests that he's having an affair with somebody and it's interesting that such a relationship such a woman would come to be called a mistress in view of the historic precedence for that word it perhaps suggests that the man who has a mistress as we would say a paramour an affair that she really is his master in a sense that she you know he she really has control over him I don't know I don't know exactly how it came to be in modern English that the word mistress which historically meant someone who owns a slave came to mean a woman that isn't there with a married man or something that she certainly is in a position to blackmail him and control him and so forth and I don't know anyway I clarify that because we don't know the word mistress except in that sense in our modern English but the frequent use of it here you just you know mistress simply is the feminine of master so which is you know my mistress has been beating me means my master by the woman who is master has been beating me now he says return to your mistress and submit yourself under her hand he said in verse 9 then verse 10 then the angel of the Lord said to her I will multiply your descendants exceedingly so that they shall not be counted for multitude and the angel of the Lord said to her behold you are with child and you shall bear a son you should call his name Ishmael which means God hears because the Lord has heard your affliction he shall be a wild man his hand shall be against every man and every man's hands against him and he'll go in the presence of all his brethren now a couple

things to observe here this communication came from someone who is called the angel of the Lord you might notice if you have the new King James and maybe some other modern translations that the word angel is even capitalized the angel capital of the Lord this is simply the translators opinion there is no there is no guidance for capitalization in the Hebrew text the translators decide when they think something should be capitalized and the fact that some translators have capitalized the word angel here means that they recognize the angel something more than an angel it doesn't say an angel or but the angel of the Lord there is apparently a distinction in the Old Testament between an angel just any old angel and the angel the word angel both in the Hebrew in the Old Testament in the New Testament Greek means messenger and when it says the angel the Lord it's very likely that we should better understand just in the generic the messenger of the Lord and the messenger of the Lord the angel the Lord whenever he appears in the Old Testament talks as if he is God notice he says to Hagar in this place in verse 11 or before that in verse 10 I will multiply your succintly was the angel doing that or God you'll find that in conversations between people and the angel the Lord which happened frequently in the Old Testament the angel the Lord always talks as if he is God and for this reason many evangelicals maybe most evangelical scholars believe that the angel the Lord in contrast with an angel the Lord is always a reference to another theophany an appearance of Christ in the Old Testament the angel the Lord always talks as if he is God and yet it sounds as if he's some distinct and God's not the Lord he's the angel the Lord the messenger of the Lord and so many feel that this expression whenever it's found in the Old Testament should be identified with Christ himself a pre-incarnate appearance of theophany as we usually call it or Christophany now Hagar is told to go back and submit now she's actually been under an unkind owner but the need for slaves to submit to masters even when they're unkind is something affirmed even later in the New Testament where Peter tells servants in first Peter chapter 2 that they should not only submit to good masters but to harsh ones as well he says in first Peter chapter 2 and verse 19 earth 18 servants be submissive to your masters with all fear not only to the good and gentle but also to the harsh so the missive even to the harsh masters then in chapter 3 verse 1 he says wives likewise be submissive to your own husbands that even if some do not obey the word they may without the word be won by the conduct of their wives so even wives who have unsaved husbands some of whom might not be very gentle some might even be harsh yet by their submission to them they may win their husbands it's clear that persons who are in a subordinate role in a relationship whether it's a servant and a master a child and a parent a wife and a husband or any other comparable thing or a citizen under a ruler that where there are divinely appointed hierarchical relationships that discomfort on the part of the person in the submissive role in the subordinate role is not grounds for abandoning the relationship there are many women who abandon marriages because their husbands were rough or harsh with them now no husband has any right before God to be harsh with his wife but on the other hand if a man's heart does not necessarily constitute grounds for divorce or for abandonment of the marriage any more than for a

master to be harsh with his servant unjustly is grounds for the servant to run away from that situation or for children to run away from home if they count their parents to be overly harsh or for citizens overthrow their government to come out from under them if they count them to be too harsh now I mean that the Bible indicates that there are many relationships in our lives that we are in we might be in more than one of them a child is submitted to his parents later on she may be submitted to a husband he may be submitted to a master or an employer or government leaders or whatever almost everyone virtually everyone is submitted to somebody is involved in some hierarchical relationship where their obligation is to be the subordinate party and submit to 40 and we need to understand that when God has ordained a submissive role to a certain category of persons that that submission is to be maintained even at great discomfort it says so in the New Testament and certainly Jesus the servant of the Lord endured great discomfort and inconvenience even enduring the cross in order to be faithful servant to him that sent him and so Hagar is not let off the hook just because she has been badly treated certainly Sarah I was in the wrong but Hagar was also in the wrong she Hagar should have appealed to Abram and had Abram you know you know stir him from his wimpy lethargy and make him take charge in his family he should have prevented this woman carrying his baby from being so abused Abram was not a strong leader in his home though although he could take 318 guys and go beat four armies with them but when it comes to the fans the good at David the same way good good warrior Moses to great warriors these guys love it when they go out and and tangle with other men when it comes to power conflicts with women in their family they're not very very adept managers of their homes verse 13 then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her you are the God who sees me this actually the God who sees is in the Hebrew L Roy L then ROI Roy which means the God who sees or the seeing God it's a name God revealed in Genesis for she said have I here him who sees me therefore the well is was called beer lahai Roy which means the well of him who lives and and sees me Roy means sees and lahai has is a form of the Hebrew word to see have you ever heard Jews when they toast they say l'chaim that means to life and it's obviously related to this word lahai which means to live God who lives and sees is or beer is simply this the Hebrew word for a well in fact many towns you'll find in the Old Testament called beer something beer Sheba beer this beer that and it means the well of the well of Sheba or the well of the living and seeing one in this case observe it is between Kadesh and Barad we read so Hagar bore Abram a son and Abram named his son whom Hagar bore Ishmael it's interesting it was predicted by the angel of the Lord that the name would be Ishmael Hagar may have communicated this to Abram so he just named this child that or it may have been predicted maybe Abram made that choice I got by other knowledge that it should be so and the it was just predicted by God that that's what he would name him Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram now I've got a problem here because we come to chapter 17 which requires a great deal of comment and we have only 11 or 12 minutes left of this session what I may end up doing is take part of chapter 17 just so we don't waste 10 good minutes that we desperately need in our study



through Genesis but we will not hope to make it through chapter 17 we'll just end up somewhere in the middle let's go ahead now chapter 17 opens when Abram was 99 years old and yet chapter 16 ended when he was 86 years old so 13 years has transpired between chapter 16 in chapter 17 that's 13 years since Ishmael was born so Ishmael at the opening of chapter 17 is 13 years old Abram is 99 Sarai we shall find is 89 all of this becomes a significant part of seeing the scenario of the what's going on here now when Abram was 99 years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him I am Almighty God walk before me and be blameless and I will make my covenant between me and you and will multiply you exceedingly and Abram fell on his face and God talked with him saying as for me behold my covenant is with you and you should be the father of many nations no longer shall your name be called Abram but your name should be called Abraham for I have made you father of many nations now Abram is a name that means exalted father but Abraham adding one syllable to it means father of a multitude and so he says I want you to call it off exalted father call yourself father of a multitude because I have made you father of many nations well that hadn't happened yet but God speaks of it in the past tense this is what we call the prophetic perfect tense where God speaks of some future thing as if it is already passed because God has already determined it in his eternal counsels there's no way to prevent it from taking place God is going to make it happen he can speak of it as if it's already been accomplished in the past I will make you exceedingly fruitful and I will make nations of you and kings shall come from you and I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you and their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your seed after you also I give to you and your descendants after your seed after you the land in which you are a stranger all the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession and I will be their God once again we don't read of any conditions here stated that the Jews would have the land of Canaan is again affirmed just as before an everlasting possession same detail as before no conditions are stated here but conditions are stated elsewhere and we cannot assume that this was both conditional and unconditional the fact that no conditions are stated here cannot cancel out the fact that conditions are stated elsewhere and that we just say that the places where the conditions are stated are places where they are spelling out God is spelling out what he implies in the other cases he considers implicit the conditions where he does not state them now this is the first order of business in this chapter actually there's three orders of business in this chapter the first is that Abram is to change his name to Abraham the second as we shall see is that Sarah is to have her name changed to Sarah and in God is told I'm sorry that's the third thing the the second thing is that Abram is supposed to circumcise himself and Ishmael so there's three things this chapter the change of Abram's name to Abraham the institution of circumcision as a sign of the covenant between God and Abram and then the change of Sarah's name in the announcement that Sarah will actually have a child which Abram had not figured on at this point up until this point so there's three important things here we have time only look at the first and so we've read about the first in the first eight verses one thing I would observe is how seldom Abram actually had

appearances of God to him when's the last time we read of God appearing to him back in chapter 15 well it's been at least 13 years since then now for us it passes in a moment we've passed immediately from chapter 15 to 16 to 16 to 17 it all goes by rather quickly but when you're living out in the desert and you don't even have a Bible and your whole relationship with God is based on those few times God appears to you and tells you what he wants you to know next and in between times you just have to live with the memory of what he said last time and 13 years goes by just think of what you were doing 13 years ago and how much time is left since then suppose you had no word from God in all that time sometimes we think that the Old Testament characters heard from God all the time and it could seem like that reading the story of Abraham because almost every chapter of his life that we read of there's an appearance of God to him telling him something or another what we might not notice or might forget is that in the 12 chapters that record his life a hundred years are covered and just in the simple transition from chapter 16 to 17 there's 13 years passed without mention and those are 13 years during which Abram is doing what he's raising a boy he's not hearing anything from God and in fact he seems to think at the point as we'll come out later in this chapter this boy is the proceed actually Abram believed that God had now fulfilled the promise of giving him a seed he was not expecting any further promise or any further fulfillment this of course comes as a shock to him later in the chapter when God mentions that Sarah is also going to have a child however at this point he is told to start calling himself the father of a multitude even though he has no multitude that he is father of and it by the way remember these names would be the meanings of them are not known to us in English so readily because we don't speak Hebrew but to the people around him when he introduced himself my name is Abraham to those who know his language who he is communicating to he said my name is father of a multitude glad to meet you Oh father of a multitude is it for your children oh I only have one well isn't it rather brassy for you to call yourself father multitude a little arrogant well actually guess maybe it might seem so to you but God has promised me that I will be the father of multitude well why don't you wait until that comes true to start calling yourself that well because God has told me to call myself that even though it hasn't come true yet and Paul makes an issue about this whole transaction in Romans chapter 4 and he sees it as a one of the evidences of Abrams great faith that he began to call himself by that name before it was any wise fulfilled and if you'll check Romans chapter 4 out begin with verse 16 Romans 4 16 in the verses that follow it says therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace so that the promise might be sure to all the seed not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham who is the father of us all now here's another place where Paul affirms that the seed to whom the promises are is all of us who have faith and he's writing largely to a Gentile group not just to Jews so Paul includes Gentiles and Jews who believe as in the category of Abram seed to whom the promises apply as it is written I have made you father of many nations that is to say we who are not descended for Abraham he is our father nonetheless therefore we hear his seed and the promises to the many nations who are of faith in the presence of him whom he

believed God who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did God said I have made you the father of a multitude I've made you the father of many names we just read it a moment ago in Genesis 17 but but it hadn't been true yet but got Paul's as well as his God calls things that don't exist yet as though they already did God certain about his accomplishments even before they occur that he can talk about them as a done deal and he does so he calls things that aren't yet in reality as though they had already come into reality not because he's dishonest but because he's certain now by the way the word of faith people use a verse like this to say you should say you are well when you're not well you should say you are rich when you're not prospering because you're supposed to speak things that they were you're supposed to have the God of faith they say and God speaks things that are not as they were and therefore you'd have the God kind of a should make God kind of confessions well it's calling things that are not as though they were sure enough but the difference is that God only called such things which were not as though they were when he had in fact promised to bring them to pass when he was in fact going to do the thing that he said we do not have a blanket promise and this is where I differ from the word people they think we do but we do not have a promise of divine health or prosperity not in the sense that they talked about it in the scripture we do have God provision promised and we do have God's healing exhibited in the scripture we do not have a blanket promise that anyone who says so can be healed when they want to be and can be prosperous when they want to be I realized some verses of scripture interpreted by the word of faith people to say that we do have such promises and that's where we differ but we do not in my opinion and you can look at the verses with me as we go through some time we will do that later this year but the point is that when God has made a promise then he can talk about it and so can Abram as though it's already come true and so it says in verse 18 who Abram contrary to hope in hope believe so that he became the father of many according to what was spoken so shall your descendants be and not being weak in faith he did not consider his own body already dead since he was about a hundred years old and the deadness of Sarah's womb he did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief but he was strengthened in faith giving glory to God and being fully convinced that what he was had promised he was able also to perform this is why Abram called himself Abraham before he was in Abraham God did God said you are I have made you father many nations well it wasn't really in fact a reality yet but God wanted him to start talking like it was I promised it to you therefore you start calling yourself father of a multitude from now on Abram did he believed God he believed God was able to do the thing he said and so he began to adopt this name which reflected his faith in God's unfulfilled promise that is as yet unfulfilled it certainly came to be fulfilled and it was because Abram believed it that it was counted him for righteousness is because he believed it that God was able to bring to pass the things that he said and we do need to lay hold of God's promises and confess them as true even before they're fulfilled when we know what they are well we're out of time for this chapter so I've saved the better part of chapter 17 for next time