



The Sermon

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Genesis 15:7-21

"The Smoking Oven & Flaming Torch"

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TRANSCRIPT

Well, we are involved in a verse-by-verse study through the book of Genesis, as you know. And we are committed to the Word of God; and we know that when the Bible speaks, God speaks, and so we preach through books in the Bible here at Trinity Bible Church. And this morning we have come to Genesis chapter 15, and beginning in verse 7, and we will look until the end of the chapter, verse 21, Lord willing. So I want to begin by reading the passage and setting it back in front of your eyes and your hearts. Many of you read the passage before you come to church, and so this will be a reminder to you yet again. The title of this message is "The Smoking Oven & Flaming Torch," and I think it'll be obvious why I've titled it this.

Beginning in verse 7, "And He said to him, 'I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.' He said, 'O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?' So He said to him, 'Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, and a three-year-old female goat, and a three-year-old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

"Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. God said to Abram, 'Know

for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.'

"It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.'" This is the reading of God's word. Let us go to the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we have heard Your word read. "The grass withers, the flower fades away, but the word of the Lord abides forever." We know that this text is abiding this very moment. It has life. It has power. It has truth. It brings impact upon our lives. It shapes us. It molds us. It convicts us. It comforts us. It challenges us. It reveals Yourself to us. It reveals ourselves to ourself. And so, God, we pray that the full light of Scripture would shine into our hearts this day, and that Your word would accomplish Your eternal purpose. Honor Your word now. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. [End]

The greatest Bible teacher and theologian of our generation was R. C. Sproul, so says John MacArthur; has to be true. And R. C. Sproul has said, "If I was marooned on an island and had only one book, it would be the Bible. And if I could have only one verse in the entire Bible, it would be Genesis 15, verse 17." This was his favorite verse, the favorite verse of the greatest Bible teacher and theologian of our day. And Dr. Sproul went on to say about verse 17, "These words set my soul on fire. It is the passage I turn to when I'm assaulted with doubt; for it fuels my hope, and restores my faith." I don't want to miss whatever it was that he saw in verse 17.

Sproul went on to say, "People ask me why is that verse so important. Maybe you're asking yourself, 'So what is it with verse 17?'" Sproul answered, "The elements of fire and smoke in this verse are a dramatic theophany, a visual manifestation of God." Sproul concludes, "The torch that moved between the pieces of the carved animals was God Himself." In other words, it was God Himself who guaranteed that what He has said will come to pass, and I will explain that in a little bit.

So this raises a very important question for us today, "What is a theophany?" because that's what we have in verse 17. This is a theophany. You may not be familiar with that word. It's actually two Greek words brought together and that just very simply means "the appearance of God."

Now God is invisible, and no one has ever seen God or can see God, because God has no physical structure to Him. Whenever the Bible says "the arm of the Lord" or "the eyes of the Lord," that's just an accommodation to our weakness to let us know that God is strong, God is all-seeing, but God does not have eyes, God does not have arms, God is a spirit being. That is the uniqueness of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, that the invisible God, the second Person of the Trinity actually took on substance, took on a human body, and the invisible God became visible to us. But for the first Person and third Person of the Trinity, there's nothing to see; that's why the Holy Spirit is referred to as wind. You can't see the wind, you can only feel it, and only see the effect of its power when it moves.

A theophany is rare. It is when God chooses to make Himself known visually through some aspect of physical creation. For example, in Exodus 3, the burning bush; and there was a flame, a fire in that burning bush that continued to burn, and it would not be extinguished. And the voice out of the bush spoke to Moses, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the ground that you stand upon is holy ground." That was God in that flame making Himself known to Moses. It was a pillar of fire that led Moses and Israel through the wilderness, as God, in a theophany, made Himself visually seen through some aspect of physical creation.

Most often God chooses to reveal Himself as fire or as light. In Exodus 33, Moses said, "Lord, show me Your glory." And God said, "Go hide in the rock and be shielded," and God passed by as bright, shining light. And it was the manifestation of the being of God. That is actually what we see in this passage before us. It is the self-revelation of God through a physical means in visual form. It is invisible God making Himself known in a visible form, as God appears on the scene in this passage.

And so I want us to study this passage because, it is extraordinarily, extraordinarily significant, so much so that R. C. Sproul would say this is the greatest verse in the entire Bible for him. And that whenever he is plagued with doubt about his salvation or about the word of God, this is his go-to text. So let us look at this today. There are jewels in this text that we need to dig out in order to understand what is being said. So as we walk through this passage today, it begins in verse 7 with what I want to call "the self-revelation of God," the self-revelation of God. That is God revealing Himself, not just audibly, but visually; but in verse 7 it will be audibly. And some theologians include the audio portion as a theophany.

And so, "And He said to him," - God said to Abram - "I am the Lord." You talk about an anchor point. "I am the Lord; not I was, not I will be. I am every moment of time and eternity, without beginning, without end. I am the Lord." "Lord" here is Yahweh, Jehovah. It is the name that God has chosen for Himself. God has named Himself. And that too is a revelation of God to us.

God's own name reveals much to us about who God is. And the name Yahweh or Jehovah means very simply this: "I am the self-existent One. I'm not dependent upon anyone for anything. I am self-sustaining. I have life in Myself. There is nothing missing inside of Me. I do not need My creatures for anything, My creatures need me for everything."

It means that God is independent. While we are dependent upon God, God is independent from us, and He is independent from anything else. He has His being self-contained within Himself. He has zero needs. We bring nothing

to God that He needs. He did not create us to fill some gap in Him, He created us so that we would reveal His glory and the greatness of who He is.

So He says, "I am the Lord who brought you out of the Ur of Chaldees." God sovereignly, actively, powerfully, irresistibly called Abram out of paganism, out of hedonism, out of being a moon-worshiper. God passed over everyone else in the Ur of Chaldees, and the sovereign finger of God pointed at Abram and called him out, and Abram was drawn out.

He says, "to give you this land." The "land" here referring to the land of Canaan, because God has singled out this piece of land in which He will do His greatest work. It will be in this land that He will give the prophets. It will be in this land that Christ will be born. It will be in this land that the majority of scripture will be written. And so God has called him out in order to call him in.

And it becomes, really, a glorious picture of what God has done in your life, if you're a Christian, if you're a true believer. God has called you out of darkness. He's called you out of the evil world system. He's called you out of paganism and secularism and hedonism and all of the other "isms" of this world. He's called you out, you are no longer a part of the system, and He has called you into the kingdom of God. And everyone who is called out is called in, and everyone who's called in has been called out. And no one gets to have one foot in both worlds: you're either in or you're out, you're either in darkness or you're in the light, you're either in the world or you are in the kingdom of heaven.

Oh, this leads, second, in verse 8, to the question to God, because Abram now responds to God, and he asks this question: "He" - Abram - "said, 'O Lord God.'" It's interesting, "Lord" hears a different word for God. It's Adonai, which means the Sovereign One, the Supreme One. And Abram has come to understand that very well, because it is this God who has overruled in his own heart. It is this God who has overruled in his own life. It is this God who has overruled in his own resistance. It is this Sovereign One who

has conquered his own heart now; and we saw that last week in verse 6 when he believed in the Lord.

"O Lord God," – God here is Yahweh – "how may I know that I will possess it?" It's an honest question. It's a question that you and I would have probably asked if we'd been standing there that day. And there is no rebuke from God to Abram for asking this question, it's a genuine question.

"Lord, what proof can You give me that I will possess the land? I hear You saying it, that I will possess the land, and my descendants after me. I hear You saying that through me all the families of the earth will be blessed. I hear you saying that those who bless these descendants will be blessed and those who curse these descendants will be cursed. Lord, there's so many people living in this land already." And we see that list at the end of the chapter, all of these names: the Kenites, the Hittites, the Termites – I mean, all of them; they're all in the land. "So how do I know this is going to come to pass?"

And it's a question that we almost ask at times, yet with a different variation: "Lord, how do I know that You will forgive all my sins? Even now as a Christian, I still sin. How would I know, how will I know? I need proof that You have wiped the entire slate clean? How do I know You will provide for me? How do I know that You will guide me and direct me? I mean, I read it here. How do I know that this will come to pass? The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. How do I know that is going to be true in my life?" And that is the kind of question that Abram is asking: "God, how do I know You will bring Your word to pass?"

Well, that leads us now to verse 9 in the confirmation, "the confirmation from God." God will now begin to give some visible, tangible, objective evidence to Abram that God is a promise-keeping God, that all of God's promises are yea and amen, that God will be the executor and the administrator of His own word, that not a promise in the Word of God will fail.

So we read in verse 9, "So He" - God - "said to him," - Abram - 'Here's your proof. Bring me' - and He asks now for five things - 'bring Me' - number one - 'a three-year-old heifer,' - number two - 'a three-year-old female goat,' - number three - 'a three-year-old ram,' - I feel like I'm back at Texas Tech; we had the largest collegiate rodeo on campus - 'and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon.'" God had very specific requirements, and Abram knows, "I'm going to have to follow this to the letter. I mean, God has spelled it out specifically, exactly what I am to show up with and to bring." And that's what he does.

We read in verse 10, "Then" - which carries the idea of "immediately." I like that about Abram; he's a man of action, he's sitting on go. There's a readiness about him to obey. Abram doesn't even need to pray about it. What in the world would you pray about? God has spoken; do it. Your prayers are just filibustering. Do it.

"Then he" - Abram - "brought all these to Him" - to God - "and cut them in two," - Now that's strange. Obviously God has told Abram, "Now that you've brought these, I want you to cut them in two. So take the heifer and just divide him 50/50 right down the middle. Bring me the other animals; I just want you to cut them in two. I want you to slaughter them, I want you to kill them, and I want you to divide them out in two pieces; not three, not four; two pieces, each one of these - "and laid each half opposite the other."

So this is half of the heifer on this side, other half of the heifer on the other side. Then he is to take half of the female goat, put half on this side, the other half on this other side. And then he is to take half of the ram, put it right there on that side, the other half of the ram on the other side. They are just dead carcasses. And so Abram does what God requires him to do.

And in order to understand what's going on here, this is very unfamiliar to us. But God is establishing a covenant. A covenant is a binding contract involving two parties. That is irrevocable, is permanent, that is to be entered into by these two parties. And in order to establish a covenant in

ancient times, they were not written, they were enacted. And in ancient times, they would do what God is requiring of Abram here. And God requires it, because He understands this communicates with Abram, "You will clearly understand." We're not familiar with this, Abram was familiar with this; this was an ancient practice. And by cutting these animals in half, the two parties will walk through the middle; and what it indicates is, "If either one of us fails to keep the terms of the contract, of the promise, of the covenant, of the compact, then I am to be cut in half, and it's a call for the death penalty, that the other party should put me to death, if I do not keep the binding obligations and stipulations and requirements of this covenant."

And so they would take hand-in-hand, as you were, and walk together through this row of dead bodies that have been cut in half, and you are saying, "May it be done to me. May I cease to exist if I should break these terms." And that is what is taking place here. So the word "covenant" literally means a cut. And this was a cutting ritual of cutting animals to make a contract.

So we read in verse 11, "The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses," – unclean birds that eat dead animals – "upon the carcasses," – these animals that had been laid out – "and Abram drove them away." We're really not told that there's any significance to the birds of prey. I mean, it's not supposed to be a picture of the Babylonians or a picture of the, you know, whatever, whatever. Abram's driving them away really is just signifying, "I'm going to do what God has called me to do in this, and I'm going to keep the table set for whatever it is that God is going to have us to do."

So this leads now to verse 12, "the prediction of God," the prediction of God. So God makes a prophecy. He says in verse 12, "Now when the sun was going down," – this would indicate to us this is the next day after what we looked at last time together in verses 1 through 6, which was also nighttime. So this is the next night after the previous night of verses 1 through 6. And so this is coming in rapid fire succession. This is a concentrated time in which God is on the move and God is at work in the life of Abram.



Just like with us, there are times when it seems like things are just kind of going along in routine fashion; and then we hit certain points in our spiritual life, and suddenly God is working in rapid fire succession, and things are unfolding fast. And that's what's happening here; things are unfolding fast, "and a deep sleep fell upon Abram," verse 12. In reality behind the scene, it is God who is putting Abram into a deep sleep.

And we need to ask the question, "Why? Why would God be putting Abram to sleep?" And the answer, as we will find out in just a little bit, is, "Abram, you're going to have nothing to do with this contract, it's all going to depend upon Me," God is saying. "So Abram, you just go to sleep, and leave it to Me, because the execution of this is not in your hands, it is entirely in the hand, the will, the rule of God and God alone."

It's not a synergistic, bilateral covenant; this is going to be a unilateral covenant, the Alpha and the Omega, the sum and the substance of its fulfillment will depend exclusively upon God and God alone. Abram will have nothing to do with it. The only thing he will bring to the table is, "Stay asleep, and God will do this."

"So a deep sleep fell upon Abram," - and notice next - "and behold, terror and great darkness." It could be translated, "the terror of great darkness fell upon him," and that is because there is about to be a theophany. And whenever God chooses to manifest Himself in a visual way, even a vocal way, it brings terror and fear.

Think of Isaiah chapter 6: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. And the seraphim cried out one to another, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty; heaven and earth is full of Your glory.' And the thresholds of the foundation began to shake, and then Isaiah began to shake," - and Isaiah says - 'Woe is me, for I am ruined, for I have unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of glory.'" It was a traumatic experience.

Think of John on the island of Patmos when he saw the glorified Christ. It says that he fell at His feet like a dead man. John just went unconscious, he fainted. He couldn't even stay conscious in the presence of almighty, glorified, holy Son of God. If there was to be a theophany here today, we would all just go unconscious. We would be so overwhelmed with terror that Holy God is in our midst. And so, we read, "Behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him," because of this close encounter of another kind, this close encounter with God.

And so, we read in verse 13 - here comes the prophecy. First, a national prophecy, then an individual prophecy, then He'll go back to a national prophecy. And let me just say this on the front end: the what the reason God knows the future is because God has already foreordained the future. He knows what He has already sovereignly chosen to come to pass. God knows the future because He's already foreordained the future; He therefore controls the future. And so God now makes known what He has already predetermined to do in reality from before the foundation of the world.

And so, He says in verse 13, "God said to Abram, 'Know for certain,' - you can just drop anchor on this. You can bet on this, you can bank on this - 'know this for certain.' - It would be a false humility for you to say, "Well, I just don't know." No, that's unbelief. - 'You need to know this for certain, that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs.'"

We know from the rest of the Bible what this is. We know from the rest of the book of Genesis and the book of Exodus that this is referring to the future generations of the nation Israel when they were taken down into Egypt, when Joseph was sold there, and how the nation began to grow and multiply; and they were there for four hundred and thirty years. So the land of which He is referring to here is Egypt. And the Israelites were strangers, they were foreigners, they were exiles, they were aliens in this foreign land of Egypt under the thumb and heel of Pharaoh.

It says, "where they will be enslaved," - verse 13 - "where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years." Four hundred is a round number. We know from exodus 12 it's exactly four hundred and thirty years. That's a long time to be held in captivity out of your land, under the dominion of a tyrant.

Verse 14, "But I will also judge the nation they will serve." And God is calling out the Egyptians long before this even comes to pass, and God says, "I will come down hard on the Egyptians, I will judge them." And this is fulfillment of what God has already said to Abram in chapter 12, verse 3, "I will curse those who curse you." And so God will bring judgment upon Egypt. And if we had time, we could turn and we could read the ten plagues that God brought down like a heavy sledgehammer upon the nation, culminating with the death of the firstborn son.

And then even after the exodus when they went after the children of God to bring them back to captivity, God parted the Red Sea, the children of God went through, Pharaoh's hordes went through afterwards, and God just drowned them all. And so all of that is tied up in verse 14, "I will also judge the nation they will serve, and afterward they will come out" - referring really to the ten plagues - "after that they will come out with many possessions." And this is exactly what happened.

In verse 15, now "the personal prediction." "As for you," - referring to Abram - "you shall go to your father's place in peace." "Your father's place" is a euphemistic way to say the grave, "that your fathers and your forefathers have been laid in a grave" - meaning death - "and you too will go to your father's place. You'll go in peace. They did not go in peace, because they were moon-worshippers. They did not go in peace, because they did not know the one true, living God. But you, Abram, will go to your grave in peace, because things are right between you and Me. The enmity has been removed, and we now have a personal, saving relationship. You will go in peace and well-being. It will be well with your soul when you die."

And then He adds at the end of verse 15, "and you will be buried at a good old age." In other words, "You will live a long and full life, and that will be My blessing for you."

He then, in verse 16, returns back to the "national prediction"; and this is really worth paying attention to: "Then in the fourth generation they will return here." The "here" refers to the land of Canaan. "So you're going to go down to Egypt, you're going to be there four hundred plus years, and then I'm going to bring you out. You're going to have a lot more possessions because the Egyptians are going to load you up just to get you out, and you're going to come back here to the land of Canaan. And it will be, ultimately, Joshua who will lead the children of God across the Jordan River into the land of Canaan to possess it." - Right? - "And they will go in and conquer all of the Canaanite nations."

But at the end of verse 16 is a very interesting statement that we really need to just give some careful thought to. It says, "They will return here, for" - and the word "for" gives an explanation - "for the iniquity" - and the word for "iniquity" here means depravity and perversity and guilt - "the iniquity of the Amorites - "that's one of the tribes, one of the nations or tribes living in the Promised Land. And they really represent the other tribes, the whole. It's like sometimes God refers to Israel as Jacob, just the one tribe representing the whole; or the White House representing the entire United States - except for me.

"They will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet complete." Now what does that mean? Well, the iniquity of the Amorites have not yet reached their full perversity. It will go from evil to greater evil, to even greater evil. There will be descending depths of depravity, it will not stay at a certain level. But once on the slippery slope, it will continue to descend downward into darker and deeper acts of depravity. But that there is also a limit that God has set. And this gives us unique insight into the ways of God.

Pay attention! There is a limit to which iniquity may run before God steps in and brings judgment. There is a limit with God that a nation may go before God says, "Enough is enough!" And we will be studying it the first part of next year. Sodom and Gomorrah hit the point of no return. Sodom and Gomorrah cross the line with God, they hit the point of no return. And God opened the heavens and fire, and brimstone came down upon the Sodomites.

And God is very patient, and God is very long-suffering with a nation and with the people. But there comes a point when the iniquity of that nation has become complete, that there will be no tomorrow for that nation. And when God shuts it down, it is shut down. That is what is taking place here, that there is a limit to the patience of God; and the Amorites will hit the point of no return.

Now think about this, the long suffering and the patience of God, who is far more long-suffering than any of us in this room. That's still four hundred and thirty years away. And acts 14, verse 17, says, "God permitted the nations to go their own way." And God will permit that the Canaanites and the Amorites and the Hittites, and in all of them, God will just permit them to go their own way, until they hit the point where the cup that contains their iniquity is filled to the top and it is complete; and then God will come down and crush it. And that is exactly what's taking place here.

So, two things I need to bring to your attention before we move on. Number One: "When Joshua will invade the land of Canaan, it will not be an unjust act of oppression." Sometimes we think about Joshua going into the land and just slaughtering all those nations, and it's like, "Wow, you're taking their land; that's unjust." No, it was perfectly just, because they had put themselves under the judgment of God with their idolatry and their perversity and their depravity; and it was Joshua who was the instrument in the hand of God that brought about the vengeance of God upon them.

So we can look at history sometimes in an inverted, upside-down manner, and think something is unjust that happens in the world. No, that really may

be just the judgment of God upon those people because of their iniquity. So that's the first thing we need to understand. And even as you understand the Bible and its unfolding story, you need to be aware that even when the children of God crossed Jordan and went into the land and they just smashed those nations, it was the justice of a holy God that was brought to bear upon those nations.

The second thing that we need to think about before we move on is I wonder where we are as a nation today in the United States of America. I wonder if we are fast approaching this very line in the sand; or more, probably, we have already crossed it; and according to Romans 1, we have to be at Level Three of God turning us over to a reprobate mind. And if you can't decide if you're a man or if you're a woman, you have a reprobate mind. If you can't decide which bathroom to go to, you have a reprobate mind. If you think you have a right over your body so you can kill whatever is inside of your body, you have a reprobate mind. If you think you should love someone of your own gender, you have a reprobate mind, and you can no longer think with clarity and with accuracy; you are living in a world of total darkness. And that is what will take place with the Amorites, and that is what is unfolding before our very eyes this day in the United States of America. And as someone has well said, "If God does not judge America soon, He will have to raise up Sodom and Gomorrah and apologize, because we have gone way beyond."

Not only is God our only hope, God is our biggest threat. Selah, pause and meditate. This brings us to verse 17, and really the heart of this passage, so stay connected. In verse 17, I want you to see "the manifestation of God." God shows up. God shows up suddenly. And God does more than speak; God makes Himself known visually before the watching eyes of Abram.

Verse 17, "It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark," – and it needed to be very dark so that there would be sharp contrast with what is about to follow. The darker the night, the brighter the light – "and behold there, appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch." What is this? It's exactly what it says. And really, the two are tied together, it's really

one. There is a smoking oven out of which is shooting and leaping a flaming torch out of the smoking oven. So it is really one object.

And this smoking oven is red hot. It is glowing orange. It is literally a fire pot, a blazing furnace. It's so hot that you can literally feel its smoldering heat. I've been told by some scientists who like go into places where they make metal and aluminum, et cetera, that the furnaces are so hot that the ground is rumbling and shaking, and you can feel the heat before you even can even see where the furnace is, it is so hot. And that's exactly what is taking place here. And it's so hot there's smoke that's just spewing out of this oven like an erupting volcano with unbearable heat and fire.

And it says, "a flaming torch," which would then be shooting even higher upward out of it, a blazing fiery torch that's shining brighter than ten thousand suns in the sky above, and it's just leaping forth out of this smoldering oven; and it's God! It's God. It's how God has chosen to reveal Himself, as a blazing fire, with intense holiness ever-burning, ever-consuming all that does not conform to Himself, ever-purging the dross of sin, ever-powerful, ever-judging, ever-testing, ever-smoldering in burning love and burning wrath, and ever sending forth the torch of truth and life and light and holiness. And none can stand before Him.

That's what we have here. It is a theophany. And whatever, whoever you understand God to be, whatever you think God is like, if you do not have this image of God, it is an incomplete understanding of the knowledge of God. If you don't have this picture, you are a two-legged table; it can't hold up the reality of who God is. And this is really at the essence of Isaiah chapter 6, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty," and the thresholds began to shake, and Isaiah began to shake. It's the holiness of God that burns like a fire and consumes all that is unholy and all that is not dressed in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. It will all be consumed eternally in the pit of hell.

Now just a theological footnote here: "God is omnipresent," which means God is everywhere present. There is no place where God does not exist,

because God is a spirit. He's not confined to one location like you and I are confined, because we live inside a physical body. We can only be in one place at one time, because God is without a physical body. God can be everywhere with the fullness of all that He is. There's never less of God over here and more of God over here. The fullness of God is everywhere: in the heights of heaven, on the earth – now listen to this – and in the depths of hell. God is in hell inflicting the punishment. They could only wish they were separated from God.

Now another theological footnote: "There is the transcendence of God, and there is the imminence of God." The transcendence of God is that God is high and lifted up in the heights of heaven, and there is the imminence of God that He is close and near.

Now one more theological footnote: "There are certain places in the universe where God chooses to make Himself known more than in other places." This is one place where God chooses to make Himself known, in this way; but He is this everywhere. God chose to make Himself known in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ more so than in other places at other times of history. Colossians 1:15, "The invisible God became visible in the person of His Son."

There are places where God manifests the fullness of who He is more so than in other places, all right. This is one of those places. And today, God chooses to make Himself known where His word is preached and taught with purity and accuracy. God chooses to make Himself known today through the lives of His people, as they walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

Now look at this in verse 17. This is what rocked R. C. Sproul's vote. This is what should have an effect on us today. This smoldering oven with the flaming torch pass between these pieces. They're supposed to be two people walking through these cut pieces. Abram's not invited. Abram has been put asleep by God, deep sleep, and he remains asleep. And there is only one party of this covenant who will walk between these cut animals.



This will be not a bilateral covenant, this will be a unilateral covenant. Its execution will depend not upon two parties, but upon one party. It will not depend upon God and Abram, or God and anyone else – Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, you, me. This is God undertaking the entirety of this covenant, and God is binding Himself to this obligation: "I will fulfill it."

Now listen to this. And God is saying, "If I do not fulfill this, then may I die! If I do not fulfill this, then cut Me in half! If I do not fulfill this, then I, immortal God, must become mortal!" And God swears by Himself that He will bring the covenant to pass. It is irrevocable. It is immutable. It is unconditional. It is eternal.

God binds and pledges Himself to keep this. That's a big deal, because God has entered into the new covenant for the remission of your sins. And it doesn't matter what you do; He has grace upon grace to wash away all of your sins. Did you get that? Your salvation, and keeping your salvation, is not dependent upon God and you. This is a unilateral covenant; it is dependent upon God and God alone. And if you should ever have one sin brought to your account and stand at the judgment, then God would die and God would cease to be God. That is the binding obligation under which God is placing Himself.

No wonder R. C. Sproul says, "Whenever I have doubts, whenever I have discouragement, whenever I need hope, I come back to verse 17 to see how God has pledged Himself to me, and how God has pledged Himself to you." You're not on a performance treadmill with God, that if you can reach a certain point, then you can keep it; if not, we're going to take it away from you. That doesn't even rise to the level of theology.

So, verse 18, and we bring this to close: "On that day the Lord made a covenant," – Literally, God cut a deal. The verb "made" is *karat*, which means to cut. That's why you have diamonds with a certain number of *karats*, because they're cut. God cut a covenant. And the word "covenant" means to cut. God cut a covenant, a contract, a binding obligation, a contractual agreement by which God alone has pledged Himself to keep no

matter what, saying - 'To your descendants' - referring to future generations - 'I have given this land,' - referring to the land of Canaan; and God now spells out the specifications - 'from the river of Egypt' - that's either the Nile River, or it's a tributary to the East; or it's a wadi, which is a dry riverbed that during flood seasons becomes full. We're not certain exactly what that is - 'as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.'" That's to the north up where the garden of Eden once was. And then this long list that I don't need to read again - et cetera, et cetera, et cetera - that all these people who have occupied the land of Canaan will be dispossessed of their land. They will no longer be the landowners, because the battle belongs to the Lord, and God will fight the battle for Joshua, "and every step, every step that you place your foot, God will give it to you."

So, what are we to take from this? How do we conclude this? What's your take home? God is a covenant-keeping God, who has bound Himself to keep His word, and has said that He will cease to exist, that heaven and earth will pass away before His word does not come to pass, that He Himself will pass away before His word does not come to pass. And if God has said to you, "Come, let us reason together"; says the Lord, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as snow," you can take that to the bank. The God who says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," you can take that to the bank, you can believe that, because God's own eternal existence is at stake, because it was only God and God alone that passed through those dead carcasses, as God has obligated Himself to Himself before Himself, for His own glory and for His own name, that He will fulfill every promise, being confident of this very thing that, "He who began a good work in you shall perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

Listen, God's going to take you all the way home to heaven. He loses not a one of His sheep; you can bank on that. You are as safe in the hands of God as if you've already been to heaven ten thousand years; that's how safe and secure you are in His grace.

So that's why R. C. Sproul would say, "For me, this is my landmark text." And I don't know what your landmark text is. I don't know what mine is, I guess. I still like Romans 11:36. But the truth of this has got to be in the depth of our soul, and that we can never be talked out of this or persuaded otherwise. God is a promise-keeping God.

If you've never committed your life to Christ, let me just tell you with all certainty, that if today you would repent of your sins and deny yourself and take up a cross and take that decisive step of faith to follow Christ, I promise you He will receive you with open arms, and He will immediately forgive all of your sins of the past, all of the sins of the present, and all of the sins in the future, until the day you die. The entire record of your sin would be immediately canceled out, and He would clothe you with the perfect righteousness of His Son Jesus Christ. It's the greatest offer, the greatest invitation that you'll ever hear in your life. Nothing will ever top that. So turn from your sin. Turn from the world. Turn from dead religion. Turn to Christ. Throw yourself upon His mercy. He's the friend of sinners. He's come for someone just like you. He will save you, both now and forever. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father, what a passage this is. What a strange passage, in many ways strange to us who live in Western civilization, this practice so unusual; yet the meaning of it behind it is so rich and robust and so encouraging. God, thank You, that You will do what You've said You will do, and You will never equivocate on Your word, and there are no exception clauses, and there's no way out of what You have said You will do; and You have promised to forgive us forever. So thank You that we would now be sons of Abraham because of the son of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.