

# Genesis 15:1-21

Genesis 15:1 – After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”

15:2 – But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”

15:3 – And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”

15:4 – And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.”

15:5 – And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

15:6 – And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

15:7 – And he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.”

1. Focus on the future is in 15:1
2. Focus on the past begins 15:7 to indicate that YHWH is working his plan. YHWH will go on to say he will not fail to fulfill this plan he called Abram into.
3. Abram was called to be given this land.

15:8 – But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?”

3423 [e]	3588 [e]	3045 [e]	4100 [e]	3068 [e]	136 [e]	559 [e]
ī-rā-šen-nāh.	kī	'ê-dā'	bam-māh	Yah-weh,	'ă-dō-nāy	way-yō-mar;
אֶרְשָׁנָה:	כִּי	אֵדַע	בְּמָה	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵי	וַיֹּאמֶר 8
I will possess it	that	shall I know	by what	GOD	Lord	And he said
V-Qal-Imperf-1cs   3fse	Conj	V-Qal-Imperf-1cs	Prep b   Interrog	N-proper-ms	N-proper-ms	Conj-w   V-Qal-ConseclImperf-3ms

יָדַע

- yada /yaw-dah/
- "to know",
- "to perceive",
- "to understand"
- experiential knowledge
- הַמָּה (mah) is an interrogative pronoun used to ask questions regarding identity, nature, or reason.
- This word is used to inquire about the specifics of a situation, object, or action, seeking to understand more about the subject in question.
- The use of הַמָּה reflects a desire to gain insight and clarity, whether in everyday life or in spiritual matters.

1. Earlier in 15:2-3 Abram had asked what good is it to prosper since he has no child.
2. Now Abram asks, “How am I to know?”
3. Neither time does YHWH rebuke Abram, the man of faith.
4. Abram is asking for experiential knowledge, or empirical evidence (information gained through observation or experimentation used to support a claim or theory).

15:9 – He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”

1. Animals:
  - a. Heifer (three years old) – cut in half and separated
  - b. Female goat (three years old) – cut in half and separated
  - c. Ram (three years old) – cut in half and separated
  - d. Turtledove – not cut in half
  - e. Young pigeon – not cut in half

**15:10 – And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.**

1. This is NOT a sacrifice because there is no altar, no offering of the animals to deity and no ritual with the blood or meat.
2. This is NOT divination because the entrails are not examined and no meal is offered to deity.
3. This is NOT an incantation since no words are spoken to accompany the ritual
4. Abram is asleep as seen in 15:12
5. This could be:
  - a. A covenant ceremony
  - b. A royal land grant ceremony
    - i. Examples of this include killing the animal as a self-curse if the stipulations are violated.
    - ii. But, the animals are killed by slitting the throat or cutting off the head (one a donkey, a second a lamb) indicating the fate of a violation
    - iii. An Aramaic treaty has a calf cut in two along with a statement that this will be the fate of the one who breaks the treaty.
    - iv. Some similarity, but here the deity would be taking a self-curse and the symbolic items pass between the animal pieces
  - c. Purification
    - i. Based on the torch and the firepot
    - ii. But, no reason for cutting up the animals
    - iii. And, YHWH does not need purified and Abram is asleep and observing
  - d. Some kind of ceremony that portrays the fate of the nations that currently live in the land, the purification of the land which is confirmed with the spoken covenant or promise.

**15:11 – And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.**

**15:12 – As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.**

87 [e]	5921 [e]	5307 [e]	8639 [e]	935 [e]	8121 [e]	1961 [e]
'ab·rām;	'al-	nā·pə·lāh	wə·tar·dē·māh	lā·bō·w,	haš·še·meš	way·hī
אֲבְרָם	עַל-	נָפְלָה	וַתִּרְדָּמָה	לְבֹא	הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ	וַיְהִי 12
Abram	upon	fell	then a deep sleep	was going [down]	the sun	And when
N-proper-ms	Prep	V-Qal-Perf-3fs	Conj-w   N-fs	Prep-l   V-Qal-Inf	Art   N-cs	Conj-w   V-Qal-ConseclImperf-3ms

**תִּרְדָּמָה** - tardemah /tar-day-maw/ means "deep sleep", "trance"  
 - used in Gen. 2:21 where God caused a deep sleep to come on Adam  
 - used in Hebrew Bible to describe a divinely induced sleep for purpose of revelation

5921 [e]	5307 [e]	1419 [e]	2825 [e]	367 [e]	2009 [e]
'ā·lāw.	nō·pə·leṭ	gūə·dō·lāh	ḥā·šē·kāh	'ē·māh	wə·hin·nēh
עָלָיו:	נָפְלָת	גְּדֹלָה	חֹשֶׁךְ	אִימָה	וַהֲגִיחַ
upon him	fell	great	and darkness	terror	and behold
Prep   3ms	V-Qal-Prtcpl-fs	Adj-fs	N-fs	N-fs	Conj-w   Interjection

1. Stars are shining in verse 15:5 (apparently), but just now the sun starts to set.
  - a. 15:11, the birds of prey who hunt during the day were a problem
  - b. This event has moved into the second day:
    - i. 15:5 – day one night time
    - ii. 15:11 – day two day time
    - iii. 15:12 – sun is setting on day two
2. Abram's fear is being fully conscious of YHWH presence and character

15:13 – Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.”

15:14 – But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

15:15 – As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.

15:16 – And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

15:17 – When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

8574 [e]	2009 [e]	1961 [e]	5939 [e]	935 [e]	8121 [e]	1961 [e]
tan·nūr	wə·hin·nēh	hā·yāh;	wa·'ā·lā·tāh	bā·'āh,	haš·še·meš	way·hī
תַּנּוּר	וַהֲגִיחַ	הָיָה	וַעֲלֹטָה	בָּאָה	הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ	וַיְהִי 17
a firepot	that behold there appeared	it was	and dark	went [down]	when the sun	And it came to pass
N-csc	Conj-w   Interjection	V-Qal-Perf-3ms	Conj-w   N-fs	V-Qal-Perf-3fs	Art   N-cs	Conj-w   V-Qal-ConseclImperf-3ms

**תַּנּוּר** - *tannuwr* /tan-noor/ means a large stationary oven or furnace made of earthenware or a brick structure  
 - used in a household to bake bread  
 - used as an industrial appliance as a kiln with clay pots or for smelting metals  
 - often associated with heat and fire to symbolized judgment or purification

**לָפִיד** - *lappiyd* /lap-PEED/ - meaning "torch", "flame", "lamp"

428 [e]	1506 [e]	996 [e]	5674 [e]	834 [e]	784 [e]	3940 [e]	6227 [e]
hā·'ēl·leh.	hag·gə·zā·rīm	bēn	'ā·bar,	'ā·šer	'ēš,	wə·lap·pīd	'ā·šān
הָאֵלֶּה:	הַגְּזָרִים	בֵּין	עָבַר	אֲשֶׁר	אֵשׁ	וּלְפִיד	עֹשֵׂן
these	pieces	between	passed	that	burning	and a torch	smoking
Art   Pro-cp	Art   N-mp	Prep	V-Qal-Perf-3ms	Pro-r	N-cs	Conj-w   N-msc	N-ms

**אָבָר בֵּן** also in "To pass over", "to cross", "to go through" Exodus 33-34; Josh 3-4

1. The torch is portable, hand-held for carrying light
2. The “smoking firepot” could be:
  - a. Any of a number of vessels used to carry heat to heat things up:
    - i. An oven to heat food
    - ii. A kiln to heat pottery
3. Together in the ANE these implements (torch, firepot) occasionally appear as symbolic representation of deities such as the sun god (Shamash) or the fire god (Girru, Gibil, Gibil, Kusu) appear together in a number of types of purification ceremonies.
  - a. Abraham would have been familiar with the torch and firepot being associated with these gods.
  - b. Never is there seen a ritual where the torch and firepot pass between a divided animal or several divided animals.
4. Cultural Examples:
  - a. The only example of ritual participants passing between the pieces of several cut-up animals occurs in a Hittite military ritual. It is done in response to a defeat. The Hittite ritual included the army passing between the parts on their way to be sprinkled with water to purify themselves in an attempt to create a better result the next time they go to battle. This ANE example does not fit the context of Genesis 15.
  - b. The torch and censer appear frequently in Mesopotamian rituals.
  - c. There are examples of rituals that include passing between the pieces of a single animal.
  - d. No example of a torch and censer passing between a single animal or a group of divided animals
  - e. There are many examples of oaths being taken (including self-curse oaths) with divided animals present.
    - i. Never passing between the animals
    - ii. Never with a deity taking a self-curse oath
      1. The animals cannot represent either YHWH or Abraham for a self-curse
5. Since the next verse speaks of a covenant, it seems that an oath by YHWH is involved here.
6. If the ritual is a purification ritual it must be the purifying of the location, the setting or the ritual itself.
  - a. It does not seem the ritual is purifying Abraham
  - b. YHWH is not purifying himself.
7. The divided animals cannot represent YHWH taking a self-curse, but it could represent the nations that are currently in the land. But, that doesn’t make a solid connection
8. “Abar Ben” or “pass between” is also in Exodus 33-34 and Josua 3-4
  - a. Exodus 33:19-23 -
 

*“And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory **passes by** I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”*
  - b. Joshua 4:10-11 -
 

*“For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was*

finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. The people passed over in haste. And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the Lord and the priests **passed over before** the people.”

15:18 – On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

15:19-21 – the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”





