

*First Things – Genesis*  
**Genesis 15:7-18**  
**“The God of the Blood Alley”**

- 1. THE TIMES OF OUR COMMUNION WITH GOD**
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1. In Northern California, there is a stretch of highway called State Route 37. It runs for 21 miles from Novato to Vallejo.
2. One particular section of this road has been plagued by fatal accidents. From 1976 to 1996 a total of 31 people lost their lives there, earning that stretch of highway the nickname, “Blood Alley”.
3. Toward the close of Genesis chapter 15, we read about another sort of “blood alley”, formed between a row of severed animals.
4. Though the scene may appear strange to a modern reader, it was a clear and understandable sign to Abram of the covenant His God had made to Him.
5. In the end, the Lord God Jehovah walked that blood alley Himself, and testified of the grace He would grant to Abram and His descendents.
6. As we survey this passage, we find a number of truths that speak to us of the kind of relationship we have today with the God of Abram.
7. It is a relationship based on a *new* covenant that is foreshadowed by the old one described for us in this text.
8. Galatians 3:29 says, *“And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*
9. With that in mind, if we belong to Jesus Christ, what transpires in this text is of great importance to us as the heirs of the promises given to Abram.
10. There are three aspects of our relationship to God that I want us to look at in this chapter. First of all, we find here something that speaks to us about:

**I. THE TIMES OF OUR COMMUNION WITH GOD**

1. In James 2:23, we are told that Abraham was called “the Friend of God”. That friendship was forged through the time that Abraham spent in communion with God.

2. Genesis 15 records one of those periods of communion. We don't know exactly how long this whole episode took, but it could have been as much as two days.
3. The whole chapter is taken up with the revelation of God to Abram, and the response of Abram to that revelation. It was a time of communication and connection between the Lord and His servant.
4. One of the privileges of being a Christian is that we have constant access to the presence of God because of what Christ has done for us.
5. We can "come boldly to the throne of grace" and commune with our God at anytime and in any place. It is a privilege that we enjoy and should utilize every day of our lives.
6. As we observe Abram during this time of communion with God, we find some lessons about our times of communion with the Lord. For instance, we learn here that:

**A. We must contribute to this communion**

1. In verse 7, the Lord spoke to Abram and said, *"I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it."*
2. Responding to that word, Abram asks in verse 8, *"Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"*
3. There is an exchange, a conversation, going on between the Lord and Abram. That conversation is the heart of communion.
4. For us, that conversation comes from reading the Word of God and spending time with Him in prayer. That is our mode of communion with God.
4. In this conversation, the Lord gave Abram some instructions. He said to him in verse 9, *"Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon."*
5. Abram is instructed to bring some things to the Lord as a part of their communion together. We are reminded here that there is no such thing as a costless communion.
6. For us, there are practical costs to communion with God. We must give the time to it that is necessary. We must forsake other activities in order to give our attention to the Lord.
7. There are also spiritual costs to our communion with God. In verse 10, Abram killed these animals and offered them up to God.

8. We are called to offer to God the sacrifices of praise (Heb. 13:15), and to offer up our own bodies as a sort of living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1).

9. The point is this; if you put nothing into your communion with God, don't be surprised if you get nothing out of your communion with God.

10. Hebrews 11:6 says that God "...is a rewarder of them that **diligently** seek him." If the time you spend with the Lord is half-hearted, haphazard, and hurried, then you will probably miss out on the reward of genuine communion with God.

11. Abram reminds us that we must contribute to our time with the Lord. Notice further, we are reminded in this text that in these times with God:

### **B. We must contend for this communion**

1. Look at verse 11. It says, "*And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*"

2. Abram slew the animals, and then divided their carcasses in a specific manner. It was not long, however, before the desert vultures smelled the death in the wind.

3. They flew down to try to get an easy meal, but Abram drove them away from the sacrifice.

4. The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon preached two separate sermons on this one verse in chapter 15.

5. In one of those messages, Spurgeon said, "Brothers and sisters, we never attempt to worship God without finding many difficulties in the way."

6. Then Spurgeon added this line:

*"What various hindrances we meet,  
In coming to a mercy seat!"*

7. You can rest assured that whenever you set your mind to commune with God, the devil will do whatever he can to interrupt and disrupt that time.

8. He will send the buzzards of busyness to remind you of all you *could* be doing. He will send the vultures of vice to tempt you into sin and away from prayer.

9. Along will come the crows of commotion distracting you from focusing on the Lord and His Word.

10. But like Abram, if we are to commune with the Lord, we must drive these all away, and earnestly contend for our time with God.

11. It is in communion with God that He reveals Himself to us. Abram reminds us of the importance of those times in our own lives as followers of Christ.

12. As we look again at this text, we see here not only something about *the times of our communion with God*, but we see here further a reminder of:

## **II. THE TRUTH OF OUR CONFIDENCE IN GOD**

1. Though Abram was a man of great faith, a faith that was “counted to him for righteousness” in verse 6, at times he still sought from God confirmation and assurance for his faith.

2. He is like the man in Mark 9:24, who said to Jesus, “*Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*”

3. That is what we find in verse 8. The Lord told Abram that He had brought him out of Ur that He might give him the land of Canaan.

4. Upon that word from God, Abram asks, “*Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?*” He asked, “Lord, how will I know it’s mine?”

5. How the Lord responded to that question from Abram speaks to us of the truth that gives us confidence in our God. Why is it we can trust wholly in the Lord? Notice in the text that:

### **A. It is based on what God sees**

1. Verse 12 says that as the sun was going down, Abram fell asleep. Then it says that, “*...an horror of great darkness fell upon him.*”

2. The horror and darkness there speak of what Abram must have felt being so close to the presence of God. Though we may be familiar with God, we are always fearful and in awe of Him and His glory.

3. While Abram was in that state, the Lord began to speak. In verses 13-16, God gives a remarkable word to his trembling servant. He says:

*“Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.”*

4. In these verses we have a seven-fold prophecy from God that was literally and completely fulfilled, and then recorded for us in the book of Exodus.

5. And how did God know all this would come to pass? It is because He sees all things. He knows the end from the beginning.
6. God does not watch the parade of time as we do, standing on the curb of life. God sees all of time in an instant. He inhabits eternity.
7. In Isaiah 45:21, God says, “...who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD?...”
8. Though we cannot see over the wall of the future, we know the God who stands above that wall and can see what lies ahead.
9. Our confidence in Him rests in the fact that His knowledge is greater than ours, and we can therefore trust that His way is best.
10. Look again at our text. We see further that our confidence in God is based not only on what God sees, but we see also that:

**B. It is based on what God says**

1. Abram asks, “How will I know that this land is mine?” Once again God gives to Abram what He has all along – His word.
2. It is true that God confirms that word with a covenant at the close of this chapter, but Abram still must go forward in faith trusting solely in what His God had said to Him.
3. Faith must rest itself upon the Word of God. He may be pleased to give us signs and confirmations along the way, but in the end it is His word that we must cling to.
4. I was not there to see the Jesus nailed to the cross. But I have the Word of God to tell me that it happened.
5. I have not peered into that vacant garden tomb, but I believe it is empty because God has recorded it in His Word!
6. My feet have never stood on golden streets, and my eyes have never seen any pearly gates. Yet, I live each day believing they will because God cannot lie, and He has given me His word!
7. Faith may have its questions, and doubts may come to all of us from time to time, but our confidence must ultimately rest upon what God has said in His Word!
8. Every believer must know what it means to sing:

*‘Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,  
Just to take Him at His word,*

*Just to rest upon His promise,  
Just to know, thus saith the Lord!*

9. In this text, we are pointed to *the times of our communion with God*. We also see here *the truth of our confidence in God*. Lastly, I want you to notice with me:

### **III. THE TERMS OF OUR COVENANT FROM GOD**

1. Look back now at verse 10 of this chapter. After Abram had gathered the animals as God had instructed him, it says, *“And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.”*

2. In other words, Abram cut the animals into two halves, and laid the pieces across from one another in a line, with the two birds on either side at the end of the two rows.

3. While this process may seem strange to us, it was familiar to Abram. This was the process of a covenant that was used by men in those days. It was sometimes called “cutting a covenant”.

4. We find a record of a similar process in Jeremiah chapter 34. Apparently, after the animals had been divided, the two parties of the covenant would then walk the path between the divided animals.

5. By this they were symbolically saying that if either party broke their side of the agreement, they were to endure the same death that had come upon those animals.

6. With that in mind, as we read this text, we see not only a covenant that God made with Abram, but we are reminded of the new covenant that God has made with us through Jesus Christ.

7. Look at this with me. We see in this covenant from God that:

#### **A. It is on sacrificial grounds**

1. It is important to note that all the animals that God told Abram to get were animals that would be used in the future sacrificial system of Israel.

2. Each of these animals was slain and their blood was shed. This was a covenant based on sacrifice and shed blood.

3. The old writer A.W. Pink says, “Note that death passed upon them all, for without the shedding of blood is no remission of sin and where no remission is there can be no inheritance.”<sup>ii</sup>

4. The “blood alley” between those animals that formed the basis of this covenant points us clearly to the final sacrifice for sin, and the precious blood of Jesus that was shed for us on the cross.

5. Today, no man can enter into a relationship with God apart from the new covenant that has been mediated by Jesus, who shed His own blood to make it a reality.

6. Though modern sensibilities deem it a gory and gruesome gospel, we still believe that we were not redeemed from our old lives by corruptible things, such as silver and gold,

*“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:”* (I Peter 1:18-19)

7. The old Bible commentator, Matthew Henry rightly says, “Where there is no atonement, there is no agreement.”

8. The grounds of this old covenant, just like the new covenant, are sacrificial, and based on the blood of the innocent being shed for the guilty.

9. As we look at this covenant further, we see not only that it is on sacrificial grounds, but we see also that:

#### **B. It is by sovereign grace**

1. Consider again the scene that is before us in this text. Everything is in place for a traditional covenant ceremony.

2. The animals have been offered and divided. Between them lies the blood alley through which the parties of the covenant must pass.

3. Look back at the text. While Abram was still asleep, it says in verse 17, *“And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.”*

4. The smoke and the fire are common symbols of the presence of God. So here we see that God comes down and walks through the blood alley.

5. What is surprising about this is that rather than God and Abram walking through this blood-covered path together, side by side, as the two parties of the covenant, God walks the blood alley *all by Himself*.

6. In other words, God was taking the responsibility for carrying out this covenant all upon Himself. It would be fulfilled, not because of anything Abram had done, but based purely upon the grace of God.

7. If one of the parties of the covenant were to break their part of it, God was willing to bear the curse of that broken covenant Himself.

8. D. A. Carson says of this text, “[God] has sworn in this symbolic act that whatever curses fall, they are to fall on Him.”<sup>iii</sup>

9. Is this not exactly what we find at the heart of the gospel? Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, bore the curse of our sins on His body at the cross.

10. The covenant of our salvation is purely of God’s sovereign grace! It is not dependent upon our worthiness or our righteousness.

11. Our salvation is completely dependent upon the work of our God! He saves us and keeps us by His sovereign grace!  
It is “grace that is greater than all our sins!”

1. In John 8:56, Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.”

2. Though Abram lived 2,000 years before Christ, and we 2,000 years after Him, today we both rejoice in the truth of what Jesus has done for us.

3. Because of His work on the cross, we can have communion with the God of heaven. We can spend time with Him, and fellowship with Him.

4. Because of what Jesus has done, we have a sure word from God regarding our future. We can live every day believing that what God has promised will come to pass.

5. Most of all, because Jesus walked the blood alley alone for us, we have the sure covenant of salvation by the grace of God.

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<sup>i</sup> Spurgeon, Charles H., “Abram and the Ravenous Birds”, *spurgeongems.org*, accessed 5/19/11, <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols7-9/chs420.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Pink, A.W., *Gleanings in Genesis*, (Moody Press, Chicago, 1976), p. 169

<sup>iii</sup> Carson, D.A., *The God Who Is There*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010), *Amazon Kindle Edition*