

The Bible in Context Ep 28: The Covenant of Land Gen 15 Part 2

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Welcome back to the Bible In Context. Here we are again.

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Yep, we're going to dive into the rest of the Covenant ceremony at the end of Genesis 15. So, last time we left off, we were just talking about the ceremony. And it's kind of a... reminds me of Fantasia a little bit. If you've ever watched Fantasia, the Disney movie where there's like floating brooms and... Okay, yeah. It's weird. No, it's been a while, but yeah. And this scene just reminds me of what's going on there and...

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Yeah, so why don't you kind of describe the scene one more time and then we can kind of talk through specifically there's a couple significant issues that we need to wrestle with in this scene. Yeah, there's a lot to talk about in this passage. You know, actually though, I think we watched Fantasia with our oldest like last year and the brooms were scary. Yeah, well I think this would be kind of a scary scene. We haven't watched it in a while.

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Yeah, so we just got done with Abram. He's been questioning Yahweh. Like I don't have an heir I don't possess anything yet. Are you gonna give me these things and Yahweh says yeah Let's make a covenant and so I will put my name on the line to show you you're gonna get these things I mean that that's significant because yeah, we're putting his name on the line there. That's not just like okay your your meaningless reputation his name

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That is the way that he is going to redeem the nations. He's showing his honors. The nations will flock to him and he'll save them. They'll come to him. They'll come back to the garden. So without his name, God is still God, but without his name, he's not redeeming his family. Right, right. So, all right, he's gonna show himself as reliable through these covenants. And...

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So Abram, he, we talked about last time, this kind of fits in with normal suzerain vassal treaties, which is kind of like a higher king and a, uh, a lesser noble that owes allegiances to that king. Um, it bears some markings to normal covenants in the ancient Near East. So.

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Yahweh comes down to walk through these pieces to put his life on the line, his name on the line there, and he comes down as, in verse 17, that he comes down as a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch to pass through the pieces. Now what does that represent?

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So we see Yahweh show up in a pillar of fire at the Exodus. And I think that's what this is a call to. That's what a lot of scholars notice. And I feel like it's a pretty, pretty clear one. I mean, fire and smoke is where he shows up. And.

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Well, we also see the smoke, the cloud of smoke on top of Sinai. You also get the idea, I feel like it might call to the cloud of incense that's always in the tabernacle in the temple. So these elements are just very representative of Yahweh's presence really throughout the Old Testament, I suppose, not just the Exodus, but I do think it links very closely with the Exodus, especially as he passes through these dead animals. I don't know if this is what the author is directly trying to do, but I think there's

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him passing through the waters, which if you have been listening for any amount of time, you know how the waters are associated with death. So here we have again Yahweh in the form of fire passing through the waters to protect his people. Which as well in this passage we do have direct foreshadowings of the Exodus. So I think that all the more just links this.

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fire and smoke of Yahweh to the Exodus of Israel. So before Yahweh passes through these pieces, he tells Abram, know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not their own. There'll be servants there and they will be afflicted for 100 years, but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve afterwards. They shall come out with great possessions. You shall go down to your fathers in peace and be buried in a good old age. So we have the Exodus here foreshadowed. And at this point, it's foreshadowed in very familiar terms. Right.

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specific. Yeah, so far we've talked about some of these elements already in the Exodus motif. So we see in this that there will be a king that oppresses Abraham's children. That king is afflicted, again the same word there used in the Exodus for afflicted. They come out with a mixed multitude and great possessions. Here we see them having great possessions as they come out, and then they are brought back to the land, just like the elect one that goes through an Exodus is often rested.

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in Yahweh's dwelling, brought back to the dwelling of Yahweh.

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And then there is the commission to subdue that we often see at the end of an exodus. And here we have him being told they're going to come back and take control of this land to subdue this land and possess it. Right. So, okay, what's going on in verse 16? This is the highly controversial passage that I just basically skipped over in my sermon and said, listen to the

podcast, because I didn't have time to like flesh it all out on Sunday morning. Just punt it in. I haven't figured it out by then.

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And what I meant by that is I'm going to let Caleb explain it. Oh, okay. Well, this is all from a book that I actually handed this book to Nate a couple days before his sermon. It messed me up. Yeah, I feel kind of bad about that. Because I thought I understood this passage until I started reading. There's a whole chapter dedicated to this one verse in this book, and it completely flipped my understanding of what was going on in this passage.

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I'll let Caleb try to, it's a pretty nuanced argument. It really is. So this book is The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest by John Walton. If the conquest confuses you or all the killing that happens in the book of Joshua, I highly recommend this book. It's really great to help understand all those passages, some of the key vocabulary and narrative elements that you wouldn't get by just reading through the story. Or at least, it's such a long story you may not remember the beginning from the end, and

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really do some good work on the conquest. So yeah, we probably should read the verse that we're talking about. Yeah, let's do that first. That might help. So verse 16, this is Genesis 15 verse 16. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. So that's the ESV version. And I'll let you explain a better translation. Okay, real quick. What is this?

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interpret this for us. What does this sound like it's saying? Yeah, what it sounds like it's saying, if you're just reading the English here, it sounds like that after the fourth generation, they're going to come back into the land of Canaan, but they have to wait to get back there because God is waiting for the Amorites to finish sinning or for their sin to get so bad that...

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that it's time for them to be subdued once again. So that's the sense that I got out of it. That's how I was going to preach it until you gave me that book. Well, yeah. So, I mean, there are several confusing words in this passage. Here's the fun part. Let's try to get this to translate to audio. Maybe we can start with just saying, okay.

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the phrase that came back here in the fourth generation. Isn't that like Hebrew slang for after you die? Yeah, I mean a lot of people have taken this and said, well the Exodus happens...

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roughly 400 years after they get there, and this is a couple hundred years before that. So I mean, we're, I don't know, 500-something years away from the Exodus, and so they'll take that

and just say, well, the fourth generation, that means about 400 years. But that doesn't make sense. That doesn't track. Yeah. No. Again, we're farther away from that. Now, can you think of another place in the Bible where the fourth generation is mentioned? Yeah. Exodus 34, 7?

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Yeah, it's where all the attributes of Yahweh, he's listing them off to Moses, and he says that I'll visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation.

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Now, that's usually a troubling verse. We'll table that for now. Right. But it shouldn't be a troubling verse, but we're going to table that for now. It kind of is like a Hebrew slang for continuing on into the future. It doesn't mean like right at the fourth generation this cuts off, but usually a person will see their third and fourth generation. You'll see your grandkids and your great grandkids maybe. So the fourth generation basically is the end of your lifespan. Right.

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is he's basically saying that okay after you've passed on this is what's going to happen. Yeah that's all that means when it says they should come back here in the fourth generation it just means sometime long after you're dead. Now why would he bring Israel back to conquer the land long after Abram's dead? Is it because the Amorites have to sin enough to be destroyed or is something else going on here? Well the next word that we should talk about is the word

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the word iniquity and the word here in Hebrew is avon. This word is often translated as iniquity or

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sin, something like that, something that you commit. But what this word actually means, and if you look at its occurrences, it means something along the lines of punishment or calamity, not sin or iniquity. You can even think back to where this word appears in the story of Cain where he says that my avon is more than I can bear. It's not his sin that he's bearing, it's his punishment that he's bearing, the calamity that has come upon him that he is bearing. And you can see that, I think a lot, when he is leaving, he's not

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So that's why these words get often confused because usually avon, punishment or calamity, come upon someone because of their sin. But

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It doesn't mean sin or iniquity. It means the punishment. And there can even be calamity for things that don't come from sin, just something bad happens to someone. They've had a vone visited upon them. On the whole, this word does, if you look up all of its occurrences, it does make a lot more sense as punishment or calamity rather than sin or iniquity, which is committed.

So does that make sense now for the calamity of the Amorites is not yet complete? That doesn't entirely make sense yet.

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So what about that word complete that actually needs to be reevaluated as well. Is the word Shalem which is the same root for Shalom, you know, peace be with you, may you be whole or complete. That's what it's saying. So something here has not been not filled up, not complete or even given out in its full measure. There's a corresponding way that this is used in Ruth. I think it's chapter two verse 12 where the wages that were owed to someone were not Shalem. They were not complete.

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had not yet been given out in full measure. So, so far we have that Abram's children will come back long after he is dead because the calamity of the Amorites has not yet been paid out. And that's the last word we need to look at is that word not yet. In Hebrew, it's ad-hina and it often has the connotations of not just

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the word yet, but it's something that has not yet happened, but also will not continue into the future. It talks about sometimes priests or guards, they've stood and guarded Jerusalem ad-Hinna up to this point, and they're expected to continue to do that in the future. And so here is a more wooden translation of this verse, of Genesis 15 verse 16. And in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the calamity of the Amorites is

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And will continue to not be complete now. Here's what that means that that was a little confusing. It's a bit of a wooden translation It means basically Abraham after you were dead your children shall return here since the destruction of the Amorites Will continue to be put off and deferred

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Now this actually flows with the narrative pretty well. Why would it be important that the Amorites are not destroyed until after Abram's dead? Yeah, because the Amorites were in covenant relationship with Abram and helped him.

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in the war that he just won. Yeah, they're Abram's friends. Right. Yeah, I mean the previous narrative, Chapter 14, we just saw not only how they're friends, but like you just said, they were his military allies. So Abram probably didn't want these guys destroyed. And they're going to be eventually, when they come back to the land, they fall into the group of the Canaanites, which are cursed by Noah.

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and do all these terrible practices that we'll read about in Deuteronomy. But at this point, Yahweh is putting off that destruction for the sake of Abram and his friends. So just to reiterate this narrative tension a little bit, in chapter 10, we saw how Ham gave birth to Canaan, Canaan gave birth to all these nations that are in Canaan, and the Amorites are part of that. So we should feel a little tension whenever we see, oh, Abram and Amorites are friends. They're covenanting together. That's weird. Cool. But...

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What's the deal? Because they have been cursed by Noah in Genesis nine and we're going to see in Deuteronomy and places like that They are in this

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sinful lump of the the canaanites that are doing all these abhorrent practices and would destroy the yawistic identity of israel if if they continued if their cultural identity was not wiped out so they will Be subdued under israel when they returned to the land but again for the sake of abram because he Has made friends with these guys. He's covenanted with them. They've come to him because they see yawis blessings on him That is going to be put off until abram has long gone

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So I think that verse gets quite a hefty retranslation. I think it's very helpful, at least in the story. Yeah. And I think this retranslation does very much fit better with the rest of the narrative. After this verse in chapter 16, we come back to this is where the smoking fire pot and a flaming torch pass through the pieces. And

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Yahweh covenants with Abram that he will possess this land, his offspring will possess this land. And there's this little note in verse 17 about when the smoking fire pot and flaming torch are passing through the pieces that the sun had gone down, which I mean, that's pretty interesting because earlier we're told to look at the stars. Right. So the stars are already out. Yeah. So the sun is just now going down. I had never noticed that before.

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points out this little chronological, you know, quote unquote mistake here. And I think this is showing that this is not to be read as a, possibly as a literal timing note about like, Hey, this is the time of day it was, but this is, has a lot more meaning. I mean, either way, this is an odd statement to put in here. This is all surrounded by an Exodus prediction and

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Exodus imagery with Yahweh coming as smoke and flame. And so at what time of day do the Israelites pass through the waters? During the night, wasn't it? It was. And then what happens as soon as they reach the other side? Uh, does it turn day? It does. The sun rises. And that happens again and again in Genesis. The sun rises whenever creation is done. There's light.

And then you also have, well, Jacob, the sun rises after he is rescued by Yahweh during his wrestlings, which we'll get to that.

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Sunrises as Sodom is being destroyed and lock comes out of the city So sunrise is linked to the completion of an exodus Interesting the Sun will rise with healing in its wings Malachi

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It becomes a staple of Old Testament imagery. So yeah, he's passing through, he's mimicking, passing through the waters and the sun has gone down, it's dark. And so it's just another call back to the Exodus. And I just thought that was worth bringing up there because I thought that was really cool. It's a little statement that some have seen and said like, well, this text was just spliced together and doesn't make any sense, but it's a little thematic marker, just something else adding to the Exodus connotations of this passage.

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Right. Well, good deal. I think we have hit a lot of small points in chapter 15 that have helped tie it together. I wish the past couple of episodes didn't sound like a commentary where we're just hitting little issues. We were able to treat the story a little larger, but I hope that's.

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Hope that's helpful and helps us read it a little better. And I think next time we're going to do a bit of a recap so that we can put our eyes on the story so far, and then we'll continue on digging into Hagar's story. That sounds like a plan. Awesome. See you next time.