

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS CHAPTER 15

In this chapter we have a solemn treaty between God and Abram concerning a covenant that was to be established between them. In the former chapter we had Abram in the field with Kings; here we find him in the mount with God; and, though there he looked great, yet, methinks, here he looks much greater: that honour have the great men of the world, but "this honour have all the saints."

The covenant to be settled between God and Abram was a covenant of promises; accordingly, here is,

- I. A general assurance of God's kindness and good-will to Abram, **#Ge 15:1**.
- II. A particular declaration of the purposes of his love concerning him, in two things:--
 1. That he would give him a numerous issue, **#Ge 15:2-6**.
 2. That he would give him Canaan for an inheritance, **#Ge 15:7-21**.

Either an estate without an heir, or an heir without an estate, would have been but a half comfort to Abram. But God ensures both to him; and that which made these two, the promised seed and the promised land, comforts indeed to this great believer was that they were both typical of those two invaluable blessings, Christ and heaven; and so we have reason to think, Abram eyed them.

Ver. 1.

Observe here,

- I. The time when God made this treaty with Abram: *After these things*.
 1. After that famous act of generous charity which Abram had done, in rescuing his friends and neighbours out of distress, and that, *not for price nor reward*. After this, God made him this gracious visit. Note, Those that show favour to men shall find favour with God.
 2. After that victory which he had obtained over four kings. Lest Abram should be too much elevated and pleased with that, God comes to him, to tell him he had better things in store for him. Note, A believing converse with Spiritual blessings is an excellent means to keep us from being too much taken up with temporal enjoyments. The gifts of common providence are not comparable to those of covenant love.
- II. The manner in which God conversed with Abram: *The word of the Lord came unto Abram* (that is, God manifested himself and his will to Abram) *in a vision*, which supposes Abram awake, and some visible appearances of the Shechinah, or some sensible token of the presence of the divine glory. Note, The methods of divine revelation are adapted to our state in a world of sense.
- III. The gracious assurance God gave him of his favour to him.
 1. He called him by name--*Abram*, which was a great honour to him, and made his name great, and was also a great encouragement and assistance to his faith. Note, God's good word does us good when it is spoken by his Spirit to us in particular, and brought to our hearts. The word says, *Ho, every one* (**#Isa 55:1**), the Spirit says, *Ho,*

such a one.

2. He cautioned him against being disquieted and confounded: *Fear not, Abram.* Abram might fear lest the four kings he had routed should rally again, and fall upon him to his ruin:

"No," says God, "Fear not. Fear not their revenges, nor thy neighbour's envy; I will take care of thee."

Note,

(1.) Where there is great faith, yet there may be many fears, [#2Co 7:5](#).

(2.) God takes cognizance of his people's fears though ever so secret, and *knows their souls*, [#Ps 31:7](#).

(3.) It is the will of God that his people should not give way to prevailing fears, whatever happens. Let the sinners in Sion be afraid, but fear not, Abram.

3. He assured him of safety and happiness, that he should for ever be,

(1.) As safe as God himself could keep him: *I am thy shield*, or, somewhat more emphatically, *I am a shield to thee*, present with thee, actually caring for thee. See [#1Ch 17:24](#). Not only the God of Israel, but a God to Israel. Note, The consideration of this, that God himself is, and will be, a shield to his people to secure them from all destructive evils, a shield ready to them and a shield round about them, should be sufficient to silence all their perplexing tormenting fears.

(2.) As happy as God himself could make him: I will be *thy exceedingly great reward*; not only thy rewarder, but thy reward. Abram had generously refused the rewards which the king of Sodom offered him, and here God comes, and tells him he shall be no loser by it. Note,

[1.] The rewards of believing obedience and self-denial are exceedingly great, [#1Co 2:9](#).
[2.] God himself is the chosen and promised felicity of holy souls--chosen in this world, promised in a better. He is the *portion of their inheritance and their cup*.

Ver. 2.

We have here the assurance given to Abram of a numerous offspring which should descend from him, in which observe,

I. Abram's repeated complaint, [#Ge 15:2,3](#). This was that which gave occasion to this promise. The great affliction that sat heavy upon Abram was the want of a child; and the complaint of this he here *pours out before the Lord, and shows before him his trouble*, [#Ps 142:2](#). Note, Though we must never complain of God, yet we have leave to complain to him, and to be large and particular in the statement of our grievances; and it is some ease to a burdened spirit to open its case to a faithful and compassionate friend: such a friend God is, whose ear is always open. Now his complaint is four-fold:--

1. That he had no child ([#Ge 15:3](#)): *Behold, to me thou hast given no seed*; not only no son, but *no seed*; if he had had a daughter, from her the promised Messiah might have come, who was to be the seed of the woman; but he had neither son nor daughter. He seems to lay an emphasis on that, *to me*. His neighbours were full of

children, his servants had children born in his house.

"But to me," he complains, "thou hast given none;"

and yet God had told him he should be a favourite above all. Note, Those that are written childless must see God writing them so. Again, God often withholds those temporal comforts from his own children which he gives plentifully to others that are strangers to him.

2. That he was never likely to have any, intimated in that *I go*, or

"I am going, childless, going into years, going down the hill apace; nay, I am going out of the world, going the way of all the earth. I die childless,"

so the LXX.

"I leave the world, and leave no child behind me."

3. That his servants were for the present and were likely to be to him instead of sons. While he lived, *the steward of his house was Eliezer of Damascus*; to him he committed the care of his family and estate, who might be faithful, but only as a servant, not as a son. When he died, *one born in his house would be his heir*, and would bear rule over all that for which he had laboured, **#Ec 2:18,19,21**. God had already told him that he would make of him *a great nation* (**#Ge 12:2**), and his seed *as the dust of the earth* (**#Ge 13:16**); but he had left him in doubt whether it should be his seed begotten or his seed adopted, by a son of his loins or only a son of his house.

"Now, Lord," says Abram, "if it be only an adopted son it must be one of my servants, which will reflect disgrace upon the promised seed, that is to descend from him."

Note, While promised mercies are delayed our unbelief and impatience are apt to conclude them denied.

4. That the want of a son was so great a trouble to him that it took away the comfort of all his enjoyments:

"Lord, what wilt thou give me? All is nothing to me, if I have not a son."

Now, If we suppose that Abram looked no further than a temporal comfort, this complaint was culpable. God had, by his providence, given him some good things, and more by his promise; and yet Abram makes no account of them, because he has not a son. It did very ill become the father of the faithful to say, *What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless*, immediately after God had said, *I am thy shield, and thy exceedingly great reward*. Note, Those do not rightly value the advantages of their covenant-relation to God and interest in him who do not think them sufficient to balance the want of any creature -comfort whatever. But,

(2.) If we suppose that Abram, herein, had a eye to the promised seed, the importunity of his desire was very commendable: all was nothing to him, if he had not the earnest of that great blessing, and an assurance of his relation to the Messiah, of which God had already encouraged him to maintain the expectation. He has wealth, and victory, and honour; but, while he is kept in the dark about the main matter, it is all nothing to him. Note, Till we have some comfortable evidence of our interest in Christ and the new covenant, we should

not rest satisfied with any thing else.

"This, and the other, I have; but what will all this avail me, if I go Christless?"

Yet thus far the complaint was culpable, that there was some diffidence of the promise at the bottom of it, and a weariness of waiting God's time. Note, True believers sometimes find it hard to reconcile God's promises and his providences, when they seem to disagree.

II. God's gracious answer to this complaint. To the first part of the complaint (#Ge 15:2) God gave no immediate answer, because there was something of fretfulness in it; but, when he renews his address somewhat more calmly (#Ge 15:3), God answered him graciously. Note, If we continue instant in prayer, and yet pray with a humble submission to the divine will, we shall not seek in vain.

1. God gave him an express promise of a son, #Ge 15:4. This that is born in thy house *shall not be thy heir*, as thou fearest, but one that shall *come forth out of thy own bowels shall be thy heir*. Note,

(1.) God makes heirs; he says,

"This shall not, and this shall;"

and whatever men devise and design, in settling their estates, God's counsel shall stand.

(2.) God is often better to us than our own fears, and gives the mercy we had long despaired of.

2. To affect him the more with this promise, he took him out, and showed him the stars (this vision being early in the morning, before day), and then tells him, *So shall thy seed be*, #Ge 15:5.

(1.) So numerous; the stars seem innumerable to a common eye: Abram feared he should have no child at all, but God assured him that the descendants from his loins should be so many as not to be numbered.

(2.) So illustrious, resembling the stars in splendour; for to *them pertained the glory*, #Ro 9:4. Abram's seed, according to his flesh, were like the dust of the earth (#Ge 13:16), but his spiritual seed are like the stars of heaven, not only numerous, but glorious, and very precious.

III. Abram's firm belief of the promise God now made him, and God's favourable acceptance of his faith, #Ge 15:6.

1. He *believed in the Lord*, that is, he believed the truth of that promise which God had now made him, resting upon the irresistible power and the inviolable faithfulness of him that made it. *Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* Note, Those who would have the comfort of the promises must mix faith with the promises. See how the apostle magnifies this faith of Abram, and makes it a standing example, #Ro 4:19-21. *He was not weak in faith; he staggered not at the promise; he was strong in faith; he was fully persuaded.* The Lord work such a faith in every one of us! Some think that his believing in the Lord respected, not only the Lord promising, but the Lord promised, the Lord Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant. He *believed in him*, that is, received and embraced the divine revelation concerning him, and *rejoiced to see his day*, though at so great a distance, #Joh 8:56.

2. *God counted it to him for righteousness*; that is, upon the score of this he was accepted of God, and, as the rest of the patriarchs, by faith he *obtained witness that he was righteous*, #Heb 11:4. This is urged in the New Testament to prove that we are justified by faith without the works of the law (#Ro 4:3; Ga 3:6); for Abram was so justified while he was yet uncircumcised. If Abram, that was so rich in good works was not justified by them, but by his faith, much less can we, that are so poor in them. This faith, which was imputed to Abram for righteousness, had lately struggled with unbelief (#Ge 15:2), and, coming off a conqueror, it was thus crowned, thus honoured. Note, A fiducial practical acceptance of, and dependence upon, God's promise of grace and glory, in and through Christ, is that which, according to the tenor of the new covenant, gives us a right to all the blessings contained in that promise. All believers are justified as Abram was, and it was his faith that was *counted to him for righteousness*.

Ver. 7.

We have here the assurance given to Abram of the land of Canaan for an inheritance.

1. God declares his purpose concerning it, #Ge 15:7. Observe here, Abram made no complaint in this matter, as he had done for the want of a child. Note, Those that are sure of an interest in the promised seed will see no reason to doubt of a title to the promised land. If Christ is ours, heaven is ours. Observe again, When he believed the former promise (#Ge 15:6) then God explained and ratified this to him. Note, To him that has (improves what he has) more shall be given. Three things God here reminds Abram of, for his encouragement concerning the promise of this good land:--

1. What God is in himself: *I am the Lord Jehovah*; and therefore,

(1.)

"I may give it to thee, for I am sovereign Lord of all, and have a right to dispose of the whole earth."

(2.)

"I can give it to thee, whatever opposition may be made, though by the sons of Anak."

God never promises more than he is able to perform, as men often do.

(3.)

"I will make good my promise to thee."

Jehovah is *not a man that he should lie*.

2. What he had done for Abram. He had brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees, *out of the fire of the Chaldees*, so some, that is, either from their idolatries (for the Chaldeans worshipped the fire), or from their persecutions. The Jewish writers have a tradition that Abram was cast into a fiery furnace for refusing to worship idols, and was miraculously delivered. It is rather a place of that name. Thence God brought him by an effectual call, brought him with a gracious violence, snatched him as a brand out of the burning. This was,

(1.) A special mercy:

"I brought thee, and left others, thousands, to perish there."

God called him alone, #Isa 51:2.

(2.) A spiritual mercy, a mercy to his soul, a deliverance from sin and its fatal consequences. If God save our souls, we shall want nothing that is good for us.

(3.) A fresh mercy, lately bestowed, and therefore should be the more affecting, as that in the preface to the commandments, *I am the Lord that brought thee out of Egypt* lately.

(4.) A foundation mercy, the beginning of mercy, peculiar mercy to Abram, and therefore a pledge and earnest of further mercy, #Isa 66:9. Observe how God speaks of it as that which he gloried in: *I am the Lord that brought thee out*. He glories in it as an act both of power and grace; compare #Isa 29:22, where he glories in it, long afterwards. *Thus saith the Lord who redeemed Abraham, redeemed him from sin.*

3. What he intended to do yet further for him:

"I brought thee hither, on purpose to give thee this land to inherit it, not only to possess it, but to possess it as an inheritance, which is the sweetest and surest title."

Note,

(1.) The providence of God has secret but gracious designs in all its various dispensations towards good people; we cannot conceive the projects of Providence, till the event shows them in all their mercy and glory.

(2.) The great thing God designs in all his dealings with his people is to bring them safely to heaven. They are *chosen to salvation* (#2Th 2:13), *called to the kingdom* (#1Th 2:12), *begotten to the inheritance* (#1Pe 1:3,4), and by all *made meet* for it, #Col 1:12,13; 2Co 4:17.

II. Abram desires a sign: *Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?* #Ge 15:8. This did not proceed from distrust of God's power or promise, as that of Zacharias; but he desired this,

1. For the strengthening and confirming of his own faith; he believed (#Ge 15:6), but here he prays, *Lord, help me against my unbelief*. Now he believed, but he desired a sign to be treasured up against an hour of temptation, not knowing how his faith might, by some event or other, be shocked and tried. Note, We all need, and should desire, helps from heaven for the confirming of our faith, and should improve sacraments, which are instituted signs, for that purpose. See #Jud 6:36-40; 2Ki 20:8-10; Isa 7:11,12.

2. For the ratifying of the promise to his posterity, that they also might be brought to believe it. Note, Those that are satisfied themselves should desire that others also may be satisfied of the truth of God's promises. John sent his disciples to Christ, not so much for his own satisfaction as for theirs, #Mt 11:2,3. Canaan was a type of heaven. Note, It is a very desirable thing to know that we shall inherit the heavenly Canaan, that is, to be confirmed in our belief of the truth of that happiness, and to

have the evidences of our title to it more and more cleared up to us.

III. God directs Abram to make preparations for a sacrifice, intending by that to give him a sign, and Abram makes preparation accordingly (**#Ge 15:9-11**): *Take me a heifer, &c.* Perhaps Abram expected some extraordinary sign from heaven; but God gives him a sign upon a sacrifice. Note, Those that would receive the assurances of God's favour, and would have their faith confirmed, must attend instituted ordinances, and expect to meet with God in them. Observe,

1. God appointed that each of the beasts used for this service should be three years old, because then they were at their full growth and strength: God must be served with the best we have, for he is the best.
2. We do not read that God gave Abram particular directions how to manage these beasts and fowls, knowing that he was so well versed in the law and custom of sacrifices that he needed not any particular directions; or perhaps instructions were given him, which he carefully observed, though they are not recorded: at least it was intimated to him that they must be prepared for the solemnity of ratifying a covenant; and he well knew the manner of preparing them.
3. Abram took as God appointed him, though as yet he knew not how these things should become a sign to him. This was not the first instance of Abram's implicit obedience. He divided the beasts in the midst, according to the ceremony used in confirming covenants, **#Jer 34:18,19**, where it is said, *They cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts.*
4. Abram, having prepared according to God's appointment, now set himself to wait for the sign God might give him by these, like the prophet upon his watch-tower, **#Hab 2:1**. While God's appearing to own his sacrifice was deferred, Abram continued waiting, and his expectations were raised by the delay; when *the fowls came down upon the carcasses to prey upon them*, as common and neglected things, *Abram drove them away* (**#Ge 15:11**), believing that the vision would, at the end, *speak, and not lie*. Note, A very watchful eye must be kept upon our spiritual sacrifices, that nothing be suffered to prey upon them and render them unfit for God's acceptance. When vain thoughts, like these fowls, come down upon our sacrifices, we must drive them away, and not suffer them to lodge within us, but *attend on God without distraction*.

Ver. 12.

We have here a full and particular discovery made to Abram of God's purposes concerning his seed. Observe,

I. The time when God came to him with this discovery: *When the sun was going down, or declining, about the time of the evening oblation, #1Ki 18:36; Da 9:21*. Early in the morning, before day, while the stars were yet to be seen, God had given him orders concerning the sacrifices (**#Ge 15:5**), and we may suppose it was, at least, his morning's work to prepare them and set them in order; when he had done this, he abode by them, praying and waiting till towards evening. Note, God often keeps his people long in expectation of the comforts he designs them, for the confirmation of their faith; but though the answers of prayer, and the performance of promises, come slowly, yet they come surely. *At evening time it shall be light*.

II. The preparatives for this discovery.

1. *A deep sleep fell upon Abram*, not a common sleep through weariness or carelessness, but a divine ecstasy, like that which the *Lord God caused to fall upon Adam (#Ge 2:21)*, that, being hereby wholly taken off from the view of things sensible, he might be wholly taken up with the contemplation of things spiritual. The doors of the body were locked up, that the soul might be private and retired, and might act the more freely and like itself.

2. With this sleep, *a horror of great darkness fell upon him*. How sudden a change! But just before we had him solacing himself in the comforts of God's covenant, and in communion with him; and here *a horror of great darkness* falls upon him. Note, The children of light do not always walk in the light, but sometimes clouds and darkness are round about them. This great darkness, which brought horror with it, was designed,

(1.) To strike an awe upon the spirit of Abram, and to possess him with a holy reverence, that the familiarity to which God was pleased to admit him might not breed contempt. Note, Holy fear prepares the soul for holy joy; the spirit of bondage makes way for the spirit of adoption. God wounds first, and then heals; humbles first, and then lifts up, *#Isa 6:5,6, &c.*

(2.) To be a specimen of the methods of God's dealings with his seed. They must first be in the horror and darkness of Egyptian slavery, and then enter with joy into the good land; and therefore he must have the foretaste of their sufferings, before he had the foresight of their happiness.

(3.) To be an indication of the nature of that covenant of peculiarity which God was now about to make with Abram. The Old- Testament dispensation, which was founded on that covenant, was a dispensation,

[1.] Of darkness and obscurity, *#2Co 3:13,14.*

[2.] Of dread and horror, *#Heb 12:18, &c.*

III. The prediction itself. Several things are here foretold.

1. The suffering state of Abram's seed for a long time, *#Ge 15:13*. Let not Abram flatter himself with the hopes of nothing but honour and prosperity in his family; no, he must know, of a surety, that which he was loathe to believe, that the promised seed should be a persecuted seed. Note, God sends the worst first; we must first suffer, and then reign. He also lets us know the worst before it comes, that when it comes it may not be a surprise to us, *#Joh 16:4*. Now we have here,

(1.) The particulars of their sufferings.

[1.] They shall be strangers; so they were, first in Canaan (*#Ps 105:12*) and afterwards in Egypt; before they were lords of their own land they were strangers in a strange land. The inconveniences of an unsettled state make a happy settlement the more welcome. Thus the heirs of heaven are first strangers on earth, a land that is not theirs.

[2.] They shall be servants; so they were to the Egyptians, *#Ex 1:13*. See how that which was the doom of the Canaanites (*#Ge 9:25*) proves the distress of Abram's seed: they are made to serve, but with this difference, the Canaanites serve under a curse, the Hebrews under a blessing; and the *upright shall have dominion in the morning, #Ps 49:14.*

[3.] They shall be suffers. Those whom they serve shall afflict them; see **#Ex 1:11**. Note, Those that are blessed and beloved of God are often sorely afflicted by wicked men; and God foresees it, and takes cognizance of it.

(2.) The continuance of their sufferings--*four hundred years*. This persecution began with mocking, when Ishmael, the son of an Egyptian, persecuted Isaac, who was *born after the Spirit*, **#Ge 21:9; Ga 4:29**. It continued in loathing; for it was an abomination to the Egyptians to eat bread with the Hebrews, **#Ge 43:32**; and it came at last to murder, the basest of murders, that of their newborn children; so that, more or less, it continued 400 years, though, in extremity, not so many. This was a long time, but a limited time.

2. The judgment of the enemies of Abram's seed: *That nation whom they shall serve, even the Egyptians, will I judge*, **#Ge 15:14**. This points at the plagues of Egypt, by which God not only constrained the Egyptians to release Israel, but punished them for all the hardships they had put upon them. Note,

(1.) Though God may suffer persecutors and oppressors to trample upon his people a great while, yet he will certainly reckon with them at last; for his *day is coming*, **#Ps 37:12,13**.

(2.) The punishing of persecutors is the judging of them: it is a righteous thing with God, and a particular act of justice, to recompense tribulations to those that trouble his people. The judging of the church's enemies is God's work: *I will judge*. God can do it, for he is the Lord; he will do it, for he is his people's God, and he has said, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay*. To him therefore we must leave it, to be done in his way and time.

3. The deliverance of Abram's seed out of Egypt. That great event is here foretold: *Afterwards shall they come out with great substance*. It is here promised,

(1.) That they should be enlarged: *Afterwards they shall come out*; that is, either after they have been afflicted 400 years, when the days of their servitude are fulfilled, or after the Egyptians are judged and plagued, then they may expect deliverance. Note, The destruction of oppressors is the redemption of the oppressed; they will not let God's people go till they are forced to it.

(2.) That they should be enriched: *They shall come out with great substance*; this was fulfilled, **#Ex 12:35,36**. God took care they should have, not only a good land to go to, but a good stock to carry with them.

4. Their happy settlement in Canaan, **#Ge 15:16**. They shall not only come out of Egypt, but *they shall come hither again*, hither to the land of Canaan, wherein thou now art. The discontinuance of their possession shall be no defeasance of their right: we must not reckon those comforts lost for ever that are intermitted for a time. The reason why they must not have the land of promise in possession till the fourth generation was because *the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full*. Israel cannot be possessed of Canaan till the Amorites be dispossessed; and they are not yet ripe for ruin. The righteous God has determined that they shall not be cut off till they have persisted in sin so long, and arrived at such a pitch of wickedness, that there may appear some equitable proportion between their sin and their ruin; and therefore, till it come to that, the seed of Abram must be kept out of possession. Note,

(1.) The measure of sin fills gradually. Those that continue impenitent in wicked ways are treasuring up unto themselves wrath.

(2.) Some people's measure of sin fills slowly. The Sodomites, who were sinners before the Lord exceedingly, soon filled their measure; so did the Jews, who were, in profession, near to God. But the iniquity of the Amorites was long in the filling up.

(3.) That this is the reason of the prosperity of wicked people; the measure of their sins is not yet full. The wicked *live, become old, and are mighty in power*, while God is *laying up their iniquity for their children*, #Job 21:7,19. See #Mt 23:32; De 32:34.

5. Abram's peaceful quiet death and burial, before these things should come to pass, #Ge 15:15. As he should not live to see that good land in the possession of his family, but must die, as he lived, a stranger in it, so, to balance this, he should not live to see the troubles that should come upon his seed, much less to share in them. This is promised to Josiah, #2Ki 22:20. Note, Good men are sometimes greatly favoured by being *taken away from the evil to come*, #Isa 57:1. Let this satisfy Abram, that, for his part,

(1.) He shall *go to his fathers in peace*. Note,

[1.] Even the friends and favourites of Heaven are not exempted from the stroke of death. Are we greater than our father Abram, who is dead? #Joh 8:53.

[2.] Good men die willingly; they are not fetched, they are not forced, but they go; their soul is not required, as the rich fool's (#Lu 12:20), but cheerfully resigned: they would not live always.

[3.] At death we go to our fathers, to all our fathers that have gone before us to the state of the dead (#Job 21:32,33), to our godly fathers that have gone before us to the state of the blessed, #Heb 12:23. The former thought helps to take off the terror of death, the latter puts comfort into it.

[4.] Whenever a godly man dies, he dies in peace. If the way be piety, the end is peace, #Ps 37:37. Outward peace, to the last, is promised to Abram, peace and truth is his days, whatever should come afterwards (#2Ki 20:19); peace with God, and everlasting peace, are sure to all the seed.

(2.) He shall be *buried in a good old age*. Perhaps mention is made of his burial here, where the land of Canaan is promised him, because a burying place was the first possession he had in it. He shall not only die in peace, but die in honour, die, and be buried decently; not only die in peace, but die in season, #Job 5:26. Note,

[1.] Old age is a blessing. It is promised in the fifth commandment; it is pleasing to nature; and it affords a great opportunity for usefulness.

[2.] Especially, if it be a good old age. Theirs may be called a good old age, *First*, That are old and healthful, not loaded with such distempers as make them weary of life. *Secondly*, That are old and holy, old disciples (#Ac 21:16), whose hoary head is *found in the way of righteousness* (#Pr 16:31), old and useful, old and exemplary for godliness; theirs is indeed a good old age.

Ver. 17.

Here is,

I. The covenant ratified (#Ge 15:17); the sign which Abram desired was given, at length, when the sun had gone down, so that it was dark; for that was a dark dispensation.

1. The *smoking furnace* signified the affliction of his seed in Egypt. They were there in the *iron furnace* (#De 4:20), the *furnace of affliction* (#Isa 48:10), labouring in the very fire. They were there in the smoke, their eyes darkened, that they could not see to the end of their troubles, and themselves at a loss to conceive what God would do with them. Clouds and darkness were round about them.

2. The *burning lamp* denotes comfort in this affliction; and this God showed to Abram, at the same time that he showed him the *smoking furnace*.

(1.) Light denotes deliverance out of the furnace; their salvation was as a *lamp that burneth*, #Isa 62:1. When God came down to deliver them, he appeared in a bush that *burned, and was not consumed*, #Ex 3:2.

(2.) The lamp denotes direction in the smoke. God's word was their lamp: this word to Abram was so, it was a light shining in a dark place. Perhaps this burning lamp prefigured the pillar of cloud and fire, which led them out of Egypt, in which God was.

(3.) The burning lamp denotes the destruction of their enemies who kept them so long in the furnace. See #Zec 12:6. The same cloud that enlightened the Israelites troubled and burned the Egyptians.

3. The passing of these between the pieces was the confirming of the covenant God now made with him, that he might have strong consolation, being fully persuaded that what God promised he would certainly perform. It is probable that the furnace and lamp, which passed between the pieces, burnt and consumed them, and so completed the sacrifice, and testified God's acceptance of it, as of Gideon's (#Jud 6:21), Manoah's (#Jud 13:19,20), and Solomon's, #2Ch 7:1. So it intimates,

(1.) That God's covenants with man are made by sacrifice (#Ps 50:5), by Christ, the great sacrifice: no agreement without atonement.

(2.) God's acceptance of our spiritual sacrifices is a token for good and an earnest of further favours. See #Jud 13:23. And by this we may know that he accepts our sacrifices if he kindle in our souls a holy fire of pious and devout affections in them.

II. The covenant repeated and explained: *In that same day*, that day never to be forgotten, *the Lord made a covenant with Abram*, that is, gave a promise to Abram, saying, *Unto thy seed have I given this land*, #Ge 15:18. Here is,

1. A rehearsal of the grant. He had said before, *To thy seed will I give this land*, #Ge 12:7; 13:15. But here he says, *I have given it*; that is,

(1.) I have given the promise of it, the charter is sealed and delivered, and cannot be disannulled. Note, God's promises are God's gifts, and are so to be accounted.

(2.) The possession is as sure, in due time, as if it were now actually delivered to them. What God has promised is as sure as if it were already done; hence, it is said, *He that believes hath everlasting life* (#Joh 3:36), for he shall as surely go to heaven as if he were there already.

2. A recital of the particulars granted, such as is usual in the grants of lands. He

specifies the boundaries of the land intended hereby to be granted, **#Ge 15:18**. And then, for the greater certainty, as is usual in such cases, he mentions in whose tenure and occupation these lands now were. Ten several nations, or tribes, are here spoken of (**#Ge 15:19-21**) that must be cast out, to make room for the seed of Abram. They were not possessed of all these countries when God brought them into Canaan. The bounds are fixed much narrower, **#Nu 34:2,3**, &c. But,

(1.) In David's time, and Solomon's, their jurisdiction extended to the utmost of these limits, **#2Ch 9:26**.

(2.) It was their own fault that they were not sooner and longer in possession of all these territories. They forfeited their right by their sins, and by their own sloth and cowardice kept themselves out of possession.

(3.) The land granted is here described in its utmost extent because it was to be a type of the heavenly inheritance, where there is room enough: in our father's house are many mansions. The present occupants are named, because their number, and strength, and long prescription, should be no hindrance to the accomplishment of this promise in its season, and to magnify God's love to Abram and his seed, in giving to that one nation the possessions of many nations, so precious were they in his sight, and so honourable, **#Isa 43:4**.