

Grade 8

Unit 1, Lesson 5

AIM: To understand God's covenant with Abraham and its blessings for all.



Theme: God's Covenant with Abram

God's covenant

Genesis 15:1-6 (NRSV)

1 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

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?" **3** And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir."

4 But the word of the Lord came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir."

5 He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

6 And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 17:15-27 (NRSV)

15 God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. **16** I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

18 And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!" **19** God said, "No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. **20** As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. **21** But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year."

22 And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

23 Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. **24** Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. **25** And his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. **26** That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised; **27** and all the men of his house, slaves born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Teacher's Preparation

Covenant: Hebrew bereth means 'eat together' that signifies mutual obligations. Breaking a covenant involves serious consequences.

Abraham was a Mesopotamian. When his family moved from Ur, he moved with them to Haran. His father Terah died there. It was only then, Abraham responded to God's call though out his life.

When God spoke to Abraham and made a covenant, he was the head of an extended family, not a nation. The story of God's covenant is a story of blessings to all the families of the world. It continues to influence the whole world. Even the mission of Christ is a continuation of it. Circumcision was adopted as a religious rite to mark out specifically those who were included in the Covenant relationship. The rite never existed among the ancient Babylonians and Assyrians. Later circumcision was performed on the eighth day of the boy's life.

Student Introduction

What words or phrases do people use when making serious promises?

How do people feel and say when a promise is broken by a very trusted person?

Can you imagine that we are enjoying the blessings of a promise made thousands of years ago?

This promise, known as the 'Covenant', was made between none other than God Himself and Abraham. The promise was never broken or outdated.

Let us learn the details of this unbreakable contract between God and Abraham.

BIBLE exploration

Abram had just now won a surprise victory over the kings he fought with. They had taken his nephew Lot and family captive So Abram had no choice but to battle the kings to rescue his nephew. But he knew the kings could come back at him at any time and attack. He was full of such thoughts and was frightened.

God spoke to him in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." The assurance "I am your shield" guaranteed Abraham that God's invisible shield will protect him against any possible attack. In addition to this God promised Abraham that he would have a great reward.

Abraham was a wealthy man already. What he lacked, was a son as his heir. Knowing his current disappointing condition he let God know that he had no children. His constant worry was that a slave born in his house would be his heir. Abram opened up his heart to God and prayed complaining to God about his circumstances. His words clearly show his lack

of understanding about God's plan for him. But it was helpful for many others who lived later. We have read in psalms about various people complaining to God about life's negative experiences. Such psalms encourage us to pour out hearts to God and complain as we go through our own struggles.

At this point Abram was still learning the basic lesson that God's delays are not denials. God had promised Abraham a son but he was waiting too long for the baby's arrival. It agonized him to watch the children of others growing up. One great thing about Abram is that still he continued to trust what the Lord had said. The Lord who knew Abram's need called him outside of the house and said: "Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them". You have learned from your science classes that there are billions of galaxies and millions of stars in each of them. Even with the most updated Hubble Telescope, astronomers cannot figure out the exact number of stars. There was no way Abram could count all the stars.

And he believed the Lord (15:6). Interestingly the Hebrew verb 'believe' and 'amen' come from the same root. It means the security of a faithful and committed relationship. Of course Abram had more reasons to doubt than believe.

To begin with, Sarai was childless and beyond the child-bearing age. And Abram himself was too old to have a son. The situation is as hopeless as it can be. But still Abram was convinced deep inside him that the Lord's words are true and will come to pass. Therefore Abram discarded all the factors working against him, and expected a son of his own. He was hoping against hope. It is recorded in Romans 4:21 that he was 'fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised' (Romans 4:21). The Lord would give him physical as well as children of faith every century in all the nations (Romans 4:16-17)

Abram's trust in God teaches us that we need to respond to the gospel with faith. Abraham was powerless and so he had to look to the power of the One who had promised him. Similarly we too need to depend on God's power to obey the gospel message. The promise did come true after many years of waiting. The foundation for faith is that God always keeps His word. God accepted Abram's faith: "He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (v.6).

God spoke to Abram again (17:1-6) and revealed more details about the covenant. As Abram fell on his face in worship God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. 5 No longer will you be called Abram[b]; your name will be Abraham, [c] for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. "

Sarai will also have a part (v.7; 15) in the covenant. Just as He changed Abram's name into Abraham, her name will be changed to Sarah meaning princess. In effect she will be mother of many nations. Kings will come from here. God's promise of a son was not through a substitute wife – Sarah learned that in through the hard way. In God's mind she should be the mother of the promised son. Change of name here is a sign of the covenant. It meant a change of personality and a very different life in the future.

It was just too much for Abraham who is now ninety nine years old. God knew he needed reassurance and confirmed that Sarah herself would bear him a son. God even revealed the son's name: Isaac ('he laughs'). Abraham had laughed when God broke the details of the promise. In the next appearance God extended the covenant to Isaac who is yet to be born of Sarah (19-22). Isaac is brought to the level of a participant in the original covenant: "I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant or his descendants after him" (v.19b). The heirs of covenant are Abraham's descendants through Sarah only. That means the children of Isaac.

Though not included in the covenant, God blessed Ishmael, Abraham's son from Hagar. Ishmael's people will live under the blessing of God for He said: "I will make him into a great nation," (v.20b).

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In obedience to God's command Abraham circumcised all male members of his house hold. This reminds us of Abraham's willingness to walk before God and be blameless. This was expected of Abraham.

God chose Abraham and his descendants not because they were in any way greater than other people. It was not even after he started to fulfill the requirements of the covenant. The Scripture tells that God's righteousness was reckoned to Abraham just as he trusted God even before he was circumcised (Gen. 15:6; 17:23-24). Faith was what God required then and that has not changed in our time. The Scriptures clarify this in Romans 4:11. Faith comes first. Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith in God. Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.



activities



Questions for Discussion:

Q: Abraham stood up for his nephew Lot. Do you think we have the responsibility to rescue those who are in Satan's (sin's) bondage? Explain your answer.

Q: Do you know of any experiences in your life when God blessed you with something impossible

Q: What quality makes Abraham our spiritual father?

Q: We often say "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;" what do we mean by this?

lesson review

- 1. God spoke to Abraham when he was afraid of his enemies and gave words of encouragement and hope.**
- 2. Every time God spoke to Abraham, He added more details of the covenant and reassured him.**
- 3. Sarah had a very important part in the covenant; kings will come from her.**
- 4. The unborn Isaac was brought to the level of a covenant partner.**
- 5. In God's working out of blessing, there are often delays that are designed to teach us patience and help us grow in faith.**
- 6. We should never forget that God always keeps His promises.**

Values

for LIFE

Just as Abraham had to go through struggles to grow in faith, we too have to live through various trials and tribulations to grow in our faith.

God chose Abraham though he was weak and was slow in spiritual growth; that offers us hope

God revealed the details of the covenant little by little. Similarly we have to learn the Scriptures a little at a time. So it becomes necessary to actively engage in private and corporate worship on a regular basis.

No matter what our present circumstances are, God always keeps His promises

Faith in Action

- Start recording in your journal God's promises that God is fulfilling in your life.
- Remember and write some of God's blessings in a sheet of paper.
- Try to keep your in God even in negative circumstances.
- While in worship service, remember how reverently Abraham worshipped God by falling on his face.

Memory Verse

By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son.

Hebrews 11:17

prayer

Gracious Lord, you are the God of Father Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You have spoken to Abraham in his deep need and blessed him. You have continued your covenant relationship with Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants. We thank you for all the blessings through the New Covenant through Jesus Christ. Lord, be merciful to us and make us worthy to receive your blessings. Amen

