

God's Covenant with Abram

October 1, 2017

Bible Background • GENESIS 15

Printed Text • GENESIS 15:1–6, 17–21

Devotional Reading • PSALM 33:1–9

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: **ANALYZE** God's promise to Abram; **EVALUATE** Abram and Sarai's plight by reflecting on times of desperation we have experienced; and **CHOOSE** methods to bear witness to the hope and fulfillment God has brought to us.

In Focus

Natalie and her husband, Reece, desperately wanted to have children. After waiting the first two years of marriage, they had been trying to get pregnant. Four years later, it still had not happened. They then decided to employ modern medicine and utilize in vitro fertilization, which was expensive. Still they had no success. Natalie felt being childless was possibly their lot in life. "Maybe this is a sign, honey," she told her husband. "God may not have intended for us to have a child of our own." "Don't give up, baby. We just have to believe God and pray. I know we'll be parents, I feel it!" he commented. "We just need to give it time."

Seven months later, Natalie was getting nauseous all of a sudden. Initially she thought it was something she had eaten. However each morning for a week, she got sick. Reece convinced her to go to the doctor, concerned it might be something serious. After a tense period of waiting, the doctor returned to deliver some important news. "Congratulations, Natalie. You're going to be a mom," the doctor announced. "Excuse me?" she replied. The doctor repeated what she had said. Tears began to stream down Natalie's face as she fully grasped the doctor's words. "Are you okay, Natalie?" the doctor asked, handing her a tissue. Natalie wiped her eyes and said, "Yes, I just can't believe it."

How do you maintain faith in situations where you feel like giving up? In today's lesson, we will learn how God's covenant with Abram encouraged him to keep believing.

Keep in Mind

"In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt, unto the great river, the river Euphrates"
([Genesis 15:18](#)).

Words You Should Know

A. Vision ([Genesis 15:1](#)) makhazeh (Heb.)—A divine revelation while awake providing insight as in a dream.

B. Covenant (v. 18) berith (Heb.)—An agreement or understanding between two parties which results in a mutual promise being fulfilled by each.

Teacher Preparation

Due to past disappointments and failures, people fear a continued downward spiral of unfulfilled dreams and goals. How can people find hope to reach fulfillment in life? Although childless, Abram based his hope for descendants on the promises of his covenant with the faithful God.

- A. Look up the word “promise.” Think about what promises God has fulfilled in your life.
- B. Ask yourself what it means to have a covenant with God in today’s context.
- C. Pray that the Holy Spirit guides you in helping students to experience renewed hope.

O—Open the Lesson

- A. Begin the class with prayer.
- B. Have students read the In Focus story.
- C. Ask the class, “What does it mean to have a covenant with God in today’s context?”
- D. Have students read the Aim for Change.

P—Present the Scriptures

- A. Ask volunteers to read the Focal Verses.
- B. Read and discuss the Background section.
- C. Use The People, Places, and Times to aid in teaching your lesson.

E—Explore the Meaning

- A. Use More Light on the Text to help provide an in-depth discussion of the lesson.
- B. Answer the questions in the Discuss the Meaning section.

N—Next Steps for Application

- A. Discuss the Make It Happen section and how to apply it throughout the week.
- B. Close class in prayer, thanking God for His covenant with us.

Words You Should Know

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Say It Correctly

Eliezer. eh-lee-AY-zer.

Rephaims. reh-FEYE-eems.

Heir. AIR.

Euphrates. you-FRAY-teez.

KJV

Genesis 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

2 And Abram said, LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?

3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

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.

18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:

19 The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites,

20 And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, 21 And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

NLT

Genesis 15:1 Some time later, the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great."

2 But Abram replied, "O Sovereign LORD, what good are all your blessings when I don't even have a son? Since you've given me no children, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth.

3 You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir."

4 Then the LORD said to him, "No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir."

5 Then the LORD took Abram outside and said to him, "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!"

6 And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

17 After the sun went down and darkness fell, Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses.

18 So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day and said, “I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River—

19 the land now occupied by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites,

20 Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites,

21 Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”

The People, Places, and Times

Abram/Abraham. Abram was known as the father of a multitude, the patriarch of the Jewish nation. His story is mostly chronicled in the book of Genesis. Abram was the epitome of a righteous man because of his stalwart faith. Eventually God chose to change Abram’s name to Abraham to indicate his destiny as the father of many nations. Abraham’s adherence to God’s Word allowed him to become a father even in his old age with the birth of Isaac. He was a heroic figure often referenced throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Heir. An heir is someone who is legally entitled to property or family rank as the result of a person’s death. In the Old Testament, a father’s property was divided among the male children of his legitimate wives. The firstborn son would gain the largest portion due to his rank. One of the eldest’s responsibilities would be to take care of his mother, if she was still living. If the a man had no sons, the inheritance went to his daughters, who had to marry within their tribe or risk losing their inheritance. If the man died childless, his property would be divided among his brothers, uncles, or his male servants. The hope in this distribution system was to have the property stay within the family as part of their legacy.

Background

Previously, Abram and his wife, Sarai, had departed Haran because of a severe famine. They decided to go to Egypt. Sarai was beautiful, so the Pharaoh questioned Abram about her. Out of fear that the Pharaoh would kill him to have Sarai, Abram told a half truth and stated that Sarai was his sister instead of his wife. As a result, Sarai was taken to Pharaoh’s home. In exchange, Abram received cattle, camels, donkeys, and slaves. The Lord soon struck Pharaoh’s household with plagues because of Abram and Sarai’s deceit. Pharaoh asked why Abram lied to him about Sarai. Angry, he sent them both away.

After departing Egypt, Abram rescued his nephew, Lot, from four kings in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot had lodged near the city of Sodom, and following his arrival, five kings near Jordan were invaded by an alliance of four kings. When the four kings defeated their enemies, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and the four kings seized their property as well. During their invasion, they took Lot and all of his possessions. One of the survivors escaped and informed Abram of the matter. When Abram heard the news about Lot, he assembled over 300 men and attacked them from as far as Hobah to Damascus. He brought back Lot, all of the soldiers’ wives, and their goods. Melchizedek, the king of Salem, blessed him for his servitude. When the king of Sodom, however, offered to let Abram keep the possessions, Abram refused. He wanted no one but God to get credit for his wealth.

In spite of his shortcomings, how did Abram demonstrate his faithfulness to God?

In Depth

1. Promise of an Heir ([Genesis 15:1–6](#)) After all of the events at Sodom and Gomorrah, the Word of the Lord appeared to Abram in a vision. God often revealed His Word to people through visions and dreams. God informed Abram not to be afraid. This command was followed by saying that He would be a shield or protector for him and would reward him for not accepting the soldiers' belongings offered to him by the king of Sodom. Not concerned about earthly riches, Abram desired a child. Abram's reverential response was "Lord," referring to Him as the all-powerful, "You have given me no descendants, so one of my servants will be my heir."

The all-knowing God was aware of Abram's childless plight. In response, He promised Abram that he would have a son of his "own body" who would be his heir. More amazingly, God told Abram that he would have multiple descendants.

God is also aware of our plight as well. When we face impossible situations, not only can God provide for us and work things out, but also He can do "exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think" ([Ephesians 3:20](#)).

Are you facing an impossible situation and depending on God to work things out?

2. Presence of God (v. 17)

The presence of God is often showcased through symbolism throughout the Old Testament. Abram's interaction with God demonstrates His presence through symbolism: a smoking firepot and blazing torch. God showcased Himself by passing between the divided animals. This action was an outward expression of God's covenant with Abram that He would fulfill His promise to him.

Scholars have suggested that the firepot and torch represent several things. Some say they are the Israelites' trials and deliverance; others say the firepot signified the Israelite's affliction and God's Word for the people in Egypt, while the torch represented the Lord's comfort and direction. No matter the opinion, all agree that the symbols represent a manifestation of God's divine presence with Abram. The believer can experience this same presence as a partaker of the Abrahamic blessing.

Do you "see" any symbolism of God's presence in your faith journey?

3. Promise of Geographic Inheritance (vv. 18–21)

God goes into detail about His covenant with Abram. He explains the specifics of the land He would give to Abram's lineage. It would extend from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River, a land inhabited by ten different people groups: Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Gergashites, and Jebusites. God outlined what actions He would take on Abram's behalf. He identified the locations and which people would be displaced. All of this occurred to solidify His commitment to Abram and strengthen his faith.

Some might think the child and the land were Abram's prize, but the real prize was God Himself and Abram's communion with Him. The revelation that Abram would have land that his descendants would inherit only bolstered his faith in God. Delay was not denial, but a preparatory pause for the greater portion of the blessing. In the same way, as believers, we may not have the promise of an earthly real estate, but we do have an inheritance to claim when God creates a new heaven and a new earth. That land will be ours to enjoy eternally.

As the heirs of Christ, what inheritance can we anticipate?

Search the Scriptures

1. How could it be perceived that Abram seemed ungrateful to God ([Genesis 15:2](#))?

2. In what ways does God reinforce His covenant to Abram (vv. 17–21)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What covenant or promise has God made to you? Why can you depend on God to fulfill His promise?
2. Summarize the signs or confirmations God has provided for you as you await His promise in your life.

Lesson in Our Society

We live in a microwave society; we want everything now. This is troublesome because whenever what we desire is delayed or seems impossible, we become disappointed and lose hope. We naturally experience discouragement when people, situations, and circumstances say no. That's when faith in God is needed. Many believe that money and other people are the ultimate controllers of our destiny. On the contrary, God can alter lives and change disappointments to delight. Never esteem man's thinking over God's words. Believers live by different standards. God can do what society deems impossible. All He wants is our commitment to His Word.

Over the last few years, we have seen our share of injustices regarding police and the judicial system. Our emotions might urge retaliation, and we might want to take matters into our own hands out of personal desperation. Still, in our spirits, we know that is not how Jesus would respond. How do we hold on to hope and God's promises in the midst of such turmoil?

Look at the life of Jesus. He was innocent of all crimes and was still persecuted. He could have retaliated with a heavenly army, but He chose not to. Jesus suffered so that we may follow His example. Since God is just, we can trust that He will hand out His justice to those who deserve it in its proper season. Our role is to be a positive voice in our community and to do all that we can to peacefully effect change.

How does God's faithfulness to His promises in the past teach us to have hope for the future?

Make It Happen

Like Abram, it is legitimate to voice your concerns to God. His ear is always available to listen to the concerns of His children. What are you believing God for in your life? Have you lost hope because of disappointment, or will you continue to believe?

- Compare and contrast how God's promises were true in biblical times and how they are still true today.
- Consider the importance of legacy and devise ways now that you can be a blessing to future generations.
- Reflect on how you discerned God's promises specifically for you.

More Light on the Text

Genesis 15:1–6, 17–21

1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

Visions and dreams are important ways for God to speak to people in both the Old and New Testaments—God uses visions and dreams to commission prophets ([Ezekiel 1:1](#)), instruct about coming offspring ([Matthew 1:20–24](#)), and make promises of rewards and warn of punishment (Daniel 2; Revelation 6–7).

God lets Abram know that He is his shield (Heb. *magen*, mah-GEN). This type of shield is a small military shield or decorative piece and calls to mind the image of God as not only a protector but also the glory of Abram's house (cf. [Psalm 3:3](#)). Abram and his descendants will face many opponents and oppressors, and God promises to be their protector.

The clause, "and thy exceeding great reward" (KJV), assures that God will be both protector and reward. The NLT reads, "and your reward will be great," suggesting that God's reward will exceed expectations. Both are possibilities in the Hebrew language. Whether God Himself is the reward or the provider, the point is that Abram will receive a reward for his faith. Certainly, his relationship with God and the Lord's ongoing protection are rewarded but the passage also promises that Abram's offspring will eventually have land and wealth (vv. 14, 18).

2 And Abram said, LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? 3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

Abram's response is to ask God what He can possibly give to him as a reward since Abram has no children. There is no one to inherit his household and carry on his name; a man who is not even a blood relation will inherit his household. Abram even uses the Hebrew word for son ironically here, calling Eliezer of Damascus literally, "the son ruling my house" (Heb. *ben*, BEN). Offspring, especially male offspring, were a sign of prosperity and security in antiquity. Male children typically inherited the property and carried on the family name. Occasionally daughters could also inherit their parents' property ([Joshua 17:3–6](#)), but Abram has neither sons nor daughters. His anguish is clear—he could not consider anything a reward so long as he has no children. The best he can hope for is to pass his inheritance to a foreigner in his house.

4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. 5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

God responds, saying that the household steward will not inherit Abram's house, but instead, Abram will have a child of his own, who will be his heir. Eliezer of Damascus is called "this one," suggesting that he is closer to Abram because he currently lives in his household, but the actual heir ("that one"), the one yet to be born, is the one who is part of God's promise. What is closest to us is not always what God has in mind, and Abram is reminded of that when he is taken outside of his household ("abroad") and told to count the stars if he can. Again the idea of distance is connected to Abram's offspring and God's promise. His offspring will be as countless as the stars, which are also far removed from his personal household.

6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

This verse is central to both Jewish and Christian faiths as it reveals that righteousness is connected to trusting God. Paul cites this verse to remind the churches in Rome and Galatia that faith and trust in God are what matters ([Romans 4:3](#); [Galatians 3:6](#)). Paul's point is that it does not matter whether a person is Jewish or Gentile; trust in God is what matters. Abram was considered righteous before the circumcision covenant was established (Genesis 17). Therefore, his trust in God established his relationship with God. The verses that follow detail a faithful person unafraid to question God. Yes, Abram believed God, but he also needed reassurance, so he asked God how he will know that he will inherit the land. God's response is to ask Abram to bring Him sacrifices (v. 9), after which He promises once again that Abram's descendants will inherit the land (vv. 13–16).

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.

During the night, God spoke to Abram in a terrifying dream (v. 12), warning him that his descendants will be oppressed immigrants in a foreign land for 400 years (ten generations). Nevertheless, God will punish the

oppressors, Abram's people will leave with great wealth (v. 14), and Abram will live a long life and be buried in peace (v. 15). Not all divine dreams and promises are entirely about peace and prosperity, but God is with His people in the midst of crisis, whether it's childlessness, alienation, or oppression. Now Abram has a vision of a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passing among the pieces of the animal sacrifices. The furnace represents an oven used for baking ([Leviticus 2:4](#)), and the burning lamp is God (cf. [Exodus 3:2](#)), who passes through the sacrifices while Abram sleeps, indicating His presence with him. The sacrifices are a visual representation of the covenant that will serve as a reminder to Abram and the Israelites who will base their faith and trust in God on this ancestral narrative.

18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, 20 And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, 21 And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

The phrase in Hebrew, "made a covenant," is literally to "cut" or "carve" (Heb. *karat*, kah-ROT) a covenant. This expression is used both for the covenants God makes with His people and for political agreements between nations and people ([Genesis 21:32](#)). The promise God makes to Abram is an official promise that He must keep, with God as Lord and Abram as an obedient servant. Not only will Abram, who has grieved his childlessness, have numerous offspring, but also his descendants will inherit the land from Egypt to the Euphrates. The land promised to Abram is Israel's land at the height of Solomon's reign ([1 Kings 4:21](#)).

The relationship of the peoples listed in verses 19–21 is unclear in the Hebrew, as the KJV and other translations indicate. The NLT suggests that these peoples were currently living in the land, but they would not always be there. The Common English Bible suggests that the Israelites will live in the land with these peoples, an accurate description of the situation in Joshua and Judges since the Israelites were not able to drive all the peoples out of the land ([Joshua 17:12–13](#); [Judges 1:21–36](#)). This reading is supported by the history of Joshua and Judges, as well as by the Hebrew at the beginning of verse 18.

In this case, God promises a land rich in diversity, with many peoples living together along with the Israelites. Scholar Randall Bailey points out that Genesis frequently talks about the Israelites living among other peoples, who are ancestrally related to the Israelites since all are descendants of Noah (Bailey 111). The apostle Paul's fondness for this chapter may rest not only the fact that circumcision is unnecessary for righteousness, but also that God's promise to Abram includes a family of his own, a secure place to live, and an opportunity to live with people of other families and cultures free from oppression and abounding in prosperity.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Lord's Words Become Actions

([Psalm 33:1-9](#))

TUESDAY

Abram Called and Blessed

([Genesis 12:1-3](#))

WEDNESDAY

God Promises Abram Land and Descendants ([Genesis 13:14-17](#))

THURSDAY

Angel Will Lead Conquest of Canaan

([Exodus 23:23-27](#))

FRIDAY

Promises of Land and Posterity Fulfilled

([1 Kings 4:20-25](#))

SATURDAY

Abram an Example of Righteous Faith

([Romans 4:1-4](#))

SUNDAY

Abram Enters into Covenant With God

([Genesis 15:1-6](#), [17-21](#))